

## Role of Sit-Tight Syndrome in Undermining Democratic Institutions in Nigeria: A Governance Perspective

Olaoye Olumuyiwa Joseph<sup>1</sup>, Joshua Kayode Okunade<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: olumuyiwa.olaoye@calebuniversity.edu.ng, kayode.okunade@calebuniversity.edu.ng

**Abstract:** *This research paper investigates the role of the "sit-tight syndrome" in undermining democratic institutions in Nigeria from a governance perspective. Despite Nigeria's transition to democratic rule in 1999, the persistence of this syndrome – characterized by political leaders' attempts to extend their tenures beyond legitimate limits – has systematically weakened key democratic institutions such as the judiciary and electoral management bodies. The study reveals that sit-tight syndrome manifests through various mechanisms, including electoral manipulation, suppression of opposition, and the use of state resources to maintain political dominance, leading to a significant decline in electoral integrity and political participation. Findings indicate a troubling trend of increasing voter apathy, exemplified by the lowest voter turnout recorded in the 2023 elections, and a detrimental impact on governance outcomes, including service delivery failures and heightened corruption. The research employs a theoretical framework that integrates elite theory, institutional path dependency, and democratic consolidation theory to elucidate the mechanisms through which sit-tight syndrome perpetuates itself and exacerbates Nigeria's democratic challenges. The study concludes with actionable recommendations aimed at addressing constitutional vulnerabilities, enhancing institutional integrity, and fostering civic engagement, underscoring the necessity for a cultural transformation in political accountability and participation to ensure the future stability of Nigeria's democracy.*

**Keywords:** Role; Sit-Tight; Syndrome; Democratic; Institutions; and Governance

### I. Introduction

Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 after many attempts at transition. From the aborted Third Republic to the proposed transition programme of 1996, one continuous event about the current 4th republic is that politicians who were active in their prime during the failed 2nd Republic to the early days of the 4th republic are the ones who decide who get elected at any point. This has made our democracy look more of a gerontocracy than a democracy where the power to elect representatives lies with the people. During the first republic, all leaders of the political parties of the period were young Nigerians in their mid thirties, the oldest were in their early forties. After the demise of the first republic most of the generals for example, the likes of Generals Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo were all below 40 years of age when they became military Heads of State of the country.

Democracy is a system of government anchored on the rule of law, participation, accountability, and periodic leadership renewal, and it remains the most celebrated form of governance in the modern world (Dahl, 2020). However, in many African states, democracy has often been adulterated by the persistence of "sit-tight syndrome" a phenomenon in which political leaders and elites cling to power beyond their constitutional or moral mandate. This syndrome manifests through tenure elongation, institutional manipulation, political

intimidation, and electoral irregularities, all aimed at perpetuating incumbency (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

Democracy thrives on the principles of periodic elections, respect for constitutional term limits, accountability, and the rule of law. However, in Nigeria, these principles have often been undermined by what has come to be termed the sit-tight syndrome, which is a political culture where leaders, either elected or appointed, seek to perpetuate themselves in power beyond the legitimate duration of their tenure. This phenomenon poses a grave challenge to the consolidation of democratic governance, the deepening of political culture, and the overall stability of the Nigerian state (Amadi, 2025).

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed several manifestations of sit-tight tendencies across various levels of governance. Although constitutional term limits appear to have curbed overt tenure elongation at the federal level, subtle tactics of power perpetuation persist in different forms. These include manipulation of electoral processes, suppression of opposition, use of state resources to maintain political dominance, and the imposition of loyal successors to preserve personal or party hegemony. Between 2015 and 2023, this pattern became more pronounced as political leaders sought to consolidate their influence through both legitimate and illegitimate means.

The sustenance of democratic governance has been a major challenge in Africa since the attainment of independence in the early 1960s and concern of international donor agencies and political analysts. Though African democracy has shown some improvements, with the conduct of periodic and more regular elections in some African states, many nations are still characterised by corruption, autocracy and non-compliance with democratic ethos. In such states, the incumbent leadership intimidates the opposition and exploits the power of incumbency and state apparatuses to tilt the electoral contest in its favour (Rosenje et al. 2021).

Since Nigeria returned to democracy, sustaining the gains of development through good governance practices remains a challenge that stare the nation on the face. However, twenty-seven years of unbroken democracy has provided the needed impetus to locate Nigeria on the trajectory of sustainable development. Thus, as the nation struts into the decades of democratic rebirth, there are a host of issues on the development agenda that the government must contend with. These issues range from the much taunted public private and citizens' sectors partnership through budgeting and accountability issues, the reform of public service, information technology and environmental issues, social security and gender issues, poverty alleviation and infrastructure development, to the very urgent need to respond adequately to the current security challenge so as to guarantee a secured and healthy environment for growth and development (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2016).

Good governance is perceived to solve social problems. Rotberg (2005) observed that governance is good when it allocates and manages resources to respond to collective socioeconomic and political problems. Cheema (2005) argued that good governance should promote gender equality, sustain the environment, enable citizens to exercise personal freedom, and provide tools to reduce poverty, deprivation, fear, and violence. While Akinwale (2010) argued that the development of a society depends on the availability of infrastructure.

Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) identified three main types of governance. They are political or public governance, economic governance, and social governance. The three types of governance are inseparable and interrelated, particularly in the Nigerian context. It is difficult to distinguish between the impact leadership has on each of the type of governance, and to isolate its effects. In fact, leadership should affect all the aspects of governance simultaneously, and the results should be seen in all spheres of development (Kemp, Parto, & Gibson, 2005).

It is important to note that despite the twenty-seven years of uninterrupted democracy, Nigeria is still bedevilled with the problem of sit-tight leaders ranging from Political institutionalization resulting to fragile institutions which enables continuity of power rather than continuity of governance, problem of Leadership succession leading to the absence of credible succession mechanisms promotes stagnation and elite recycling, which has climaxed into issues Governance outcomes of which Developmental progress has remained limited due to personal rather than institutional priorities.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Africa most especially Nigeria is emersed in the problem of leadership. Democracy is believed to be government of the people through elected representatives. Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after three failed republics. Nigeria returned to democracy after in 1999 after three failed republics of which successive governments gave sit-tight leadership as reasons for take over from one military regime to the other. In spite of all these most of the successive military leaders have decided to convert from their khaki to mufti to ensure relevance in the political sphere.

Despite Nigeria's transition to democratic rule, the persistent "sit-tight syndrome" characterized by the manipulation of constitutional mandates and the subversion of electoral processes to prolong political tenure—continues to impede the country's democratic consolidation. This obsession with power retention has systematically weakened the independence of key democratic institutions, such as the judiciary and the electoral commission, leading to a breakdown in the rule of law and a crisis of accountability (Maiwada et al., 2025). Consequently, the prioritization of personal longevity over institutional integrity undermines the principles of good governance, stifles leadership succession, and erodes public trust in the democratic process.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to

1. identify How does the sit-tight syndrome among Nigerian leaders impact the effectiveness of democratic institutions,
2. evaluate What is the systemic implications of sit-tight syndrome on electoral process and political participation in Nigeria? and map out actionable solutions to address them.

### 1.3 Significance of the study

This study is significant for several reasons, spanning academic discourse, policy reform, democratic consolidation, and civic engagement in Nigeria. First, the research contributes to the literature on democratic consolidation and political economy of governance in Africa. By examining sit-tight syndrome through the lens of institutionalism and elite theory, the study extends existing frameworks that explain how informal power retention mechanisms subvert formal constitutional rules. It provides empirical grounding for debates on term limits, leadership succession, and political gerontocracy, which remain underexplored in Nigerian political science scholarship relative to Latin America or Asia.

Findings from this study will be useful for key democratic institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Judicial Council (NJC), and the National Assembly. By identifying specific pathways through which sit-tight syndrome weakens electoral integrity and judicial independence, the research offers actionable recommendations for legal reforms—such as enforcing stricter penalties for electoral manipulation, protecting whistleblowers, and strengthening the constitutional provisions on tenure elongation.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), anti-corruption agencies (e.g., ICPC, EFCC), and pro-democracy groups will find this study valuable for advocacy. The research maps how incumbent manipulation of state resources perpetuates political dominance, thereby providing

evidence-based arguments for campaign finance reform, independent oversight of incumbency advantages, and citizen-led accountability mechanisms.

For the Nigerian electorate, this study highlights how sit-tight syndrome suppresses political participation—particularly for youth, women, and opposition candidates. By clarifying the link between power retention and voter apathy, the research empowers citizens to demand transparent succession processes and engage in informed electoral choices. It also underscores the importance of civic education in countering political fatalism.

Beyond Nigeria, the study offers comparative insights for other African democracies (e.g., Cameroon, Uganda, Rwanda, and previously Burkina Faso) where tenure elongation or third-term agendas have emerged. The governance perspective adopted here provides a template for analyzing how incumbency manipulation undermines democratic institutions across similar post-colonial states.

Democratic governance is intrinsically linked to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By diagnosing the institutional decay caused by sit-tight syndrome, this study directly supports efforts to achieve SDG target 16.6 (“develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”) and 16.7 (“ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making”).

In summary, the study is not merely an academic exercise but a practical intervention aimed at rescuing Nigeria’s democracy from the gradual erosion of its foundational principles. It intends to serve as a reference for legislators, judges, electoral officers, civil society activists, and citizens who seek to replace the culture of power retention with a culture of institutional resilience and genuine democratic succession.

## II. Review of Literatures

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Sit-Tight Syndrome in African Politics

The term "sit-tight syndrome" has gained significant scholarly traction in African political discourse, referring to the phenomenon where political leaders manipulate constitutional provisions, electoral processes, and state institutions to extend their tenure beyond legally mandated limits (Mkandawire, 2015). According to Nwosu (2018), sit-tight syndrome represents a pathological orientation to political power characterized by an unwillingness to relinquish authority through democratic means. This phenomenon transcends mere tenure elongation; it encompasses a comprehensive strategy of institutional capture, opposition suppression, and the systematic erosion of democratic safeguards (Gyimah-Boadi, 2020).

In the African context, sit-tight syndrome has manifested through various mechanisms including constitutional amendments to remove term limits, manipulation of electoral timelines, judicial capture, and the exploitation of incumbency advantages (Posner & Young, 2018). Cheeseman (2016) notes that between 2000 and 2015, at least 15 African countries experienced attempts by incumbent presidents to extend their constitutional term limits, with varying degrees of success. Countries such as Rwanda (2015), Congo-Brazzaville (2015), and Uganda (2017) successfully removed presidential term limits, while others like Nigeria (2006), Malawi (2002), and Zambia (2001) witnessed failed attempts through legislative or public resistance (Tamarkin, 2019; Onyejelem et al., 2024).

### 2.2 Historical Evolution of Sit-Tight Tendencies in Nigeria

Nigeria's political history is replete with sit-tight manifestations predating the current democratic dispensation. During the First Republic (1960-1966), regional premiers exhibited tendencies toward political domination, though military intervention truncated their tenures (Diamond, 2018). The military era itself represented the most extreme form of sit-tight syndrome, with successive military heads of state ruling by decree without constitutional

timelines. General Ibrahim Babangida's eight-year rule (1985-1993) epitomized this phenomenon, famously annulling the June 12, 1993 presidential election widely believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, specifically to perpetuate his hold on power (Falola & Heaton, 2022).

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed both overt and covert manifestations of sit-tight syndrome. President Olusegun Obasanjo's unsuccessful third-term bid (2006) represents the most dramatic attempt to constitutionally extend presidential tenure (Agbaje & Adebani, 2019). The failure of this attempt, largely due to Senate rejection and civil society pressure, demonstrated institutional resilience, but did not eradicate sit-tight tendencies. Instead, these tendencies mutated into more sophisticated forms including successor imposition, state capture, and the strategic weakening of opposition structures (Omotola, 2020).

### **2.3 Democratic Institutions and Their Vulnerability to Sit-Tight Syndrome**

Democratic institutions serve as the foundational architecture of constitutional governance. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), four institutional pillars are essential for democratic consolidation: (1) independent electoral management bodies, (2) autonomous judiciary, (3) vibrant legislature, and (4) robust civil society space. However, O'Donnell (2019) argues that in delegative democracies, these institutions become particularly vulnerable to executive capture, especially when sit-tight orientations predominate.

**The Electoral Management Body:** The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria has experienced variable independence since 1999. Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2021) document how successive governments have attempted to compromise INEC through partisan appointments, budgetary control, and security sector manipulation. During the 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections, INEC demonstrated varying degrees of autonomy, but the 2019 and 2023 elections revealed renewed vulnerability to executive influence, particularly in the appointment of Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) and the conduct of off-cycle elections (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

**The Judiciary:** Courts serve as critical arbiters in electoral disputes, yet the Nigerian judiciary has faced persistent challenges to its independence. Adekunle (2022) notes that judicial appointments, particularly at the appellate level, have become increasingly politicized, with sit-tight-oriented executives seeking to populate benches with sympathetic jurists. The 2019 Presidential Election Petition Tribunal ruling, which affirmed President Buhari's election despite substantial evidence of irregularities, raised significant questions about judicial independence (Amadi & Nwosu, 2020).

**The Legislature:** As a check on executive power, the National Assembly has demonstrated both independence and complicity regarding sit-tight tendencies. The Senate's 2006 rejection of the third-term amendment exemplified institutional resistance, while subsequent legislative acquiescence to executive encroachment on budgetary and oversight functions suggests institutional weakening (Aiyede, 2021; Oreoluwa et al., 2024).

### **2.4 Electoral Processes and Political Participation Under Siege**

Electoral integrity constitutes the cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. Norris (2019) identifies eight dimensions of electoral integrity: electoral laws, district boundaries, voter registration, party registration, media coverage, campaign finance, voting processes, and vote counting. In Nigeria, sit-tight syndrome has systematically undermined each dimension through various strategies.

**Voter Suppression and Intimidation:** Evidence from the 2019 and 2023 general elections reveals systematic efforts to suppress voter turnout in opposition strongholds. Suleiman (2023) documents how security agencies, acting on executive directives, restricted movement in opposition-leaning states during elections, while thugs affiliated with ruling parties occupied

polling units. The 2023 election witnessed the lowest voter turnout (27%) since 1999, representing a crisis of political participation (YIAGA Africa, 2023).

**Incumbency Abuse:** Sit-tight-oriented incumbents leverage state resources for electoral advantage through mechanisms including: (a) diversion of public funds for campaign purposes, (b) use of state media for partisan messaging, (c) appointment of political loyalists to regulatory agencies, (d) selective distribution of developmental projects to reward supporters and punish opposition constituencies (Bratton, 2020). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) documented over ₦50 billion in suspicious election-related expenditures during the 2023 elections (EFCC, 2023; Vitalis et al., 2025).

**Electoral Violence:** Political violence has become a strategic tool for sit-tight perpetuation. Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria recorded over 1,500 election-related deaths, with intensity in the 2019 and 2023 cycles (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2023). This violence disproportionately affects opposition supporters and serves to suppress participation in contested jurisdictions.

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1 Governance Outcomes and Developmental Implications

The developmental consequences of sit-tight syndrome extend beyond political processes to affect governance outcomes across multiple dimensions. Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) argue that political elites who face no credible threat of removal lack incentives to provide public goods, invest in infrastructure, or combat corruption. This "extractive political equilibrium" characterizes sit-tight regimes where power retention supersedes developmental priorities.

**Corrosion of Accountability:** Accountability mechanisms, including legislative oversight, anti-corruption agencies, and media scrutiny, become compromised when political leaders prioritize tenure security over institutional integrity. In Nigeria, anti-corruption efforts have demonstrated selective application, targeted opposition figures while protecting political allies (Page, 2021). The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Nigeria below 150th out of 180 countries, reflecting this accountability deficit (TI, 2023).

**Economic Governance Failure:** Sit-tight syndrome produces economic governance characterized by policy instability, rent-seeking, and clientelism. Usman (2022) demonstrates how Nigerian states with extended incumbency periods experience lower levels of foreign direct investment, higher public debt accumulation, and reduced infrastructure spending compared to states with regular leadership turnover (Vitalis et al., 2023). The prioritization of political survival over economic rationality manifests in unsustainable borrowing, opaque procurement processes, and the proliferation of white elephant projects designed to channel resources to political supporters.

**Service Delivery Crisis:** The relationship between political accountability and service delivery is well-established in governance literature (Grindle, 2017). When political leaders face no electoral threat, incentives to provide education, healthcare, and infrastructure diminish.

Nigeria's development indicators reflect this reality: the country has the highest number of out-of-school children globally (20 million), maternal mortality rates of 512 per 100,000 live births, and over 95 million people living in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2023). These outcomes correlate strongly with prolonged political entrenchment at both federal and state levels.

#### 3.2 Comparative Perspectives: Sit-Tight Syndrome Across Africa

Comparative analysis reveals both common patterns and country-specific variations in sit-tight syndrome across Africa. In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame's 2015 constitutional amendment removed term limits, enabling continued rule until 2034. In Uganda, President Yoweri

Museveni's 2017 removal of the 75-year age cap extended his rule into a sixth decade (Tripp, 2021). In Cameroon, President Paul Biya has ruled since 1982, representing the longest continuous tenure in Africa (Orock, 2019).

These cases demonstrate several mechanisms for sit-tight perpetuation: constitutional engineering, judicial compliance, opposition co-optation, security sector loyalty, and international acquiescence (Carbone, 2020). However, Nigeria's federal structure and regional diversity have produced unique manifestations including the strategic rotation of presidency between north and south, the use of state governors as proxies for presidential ambitions, and the development of "godfather" networks that perpetuate political dynasties (Albert, 2021).

### 3.3 Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite substantial scholarship on African democratization, several gaps persist in understanding sit-tight syndrome's impact on democratic institutions in Nigeria. First, existing literature focuses predominantly on presidential tenure extension while undertheorizing subnational manifestations, including gubernatorial sit-tight tendencies and local government chairmanship perpetuation (Nwangwu, 2022).

Second, scholarship emphasizes formal constitutional mechanisms while inadequately addressing informal strategies of power retention, including ethnic mobilization, clientelist networks, and traditional ruler co-optation. Third, the relationship between sit-tight syndrome and political participation has received insufficient empirical investigation, particularly regarding youth political engagement and women's representation. Fourth, existing studies rarely examine the cumulative institutional effects of repeated sit-tight behaviours across multiple electoral cycles, focusing instead on single-election analyses. This study addresses these gaps by examining both formal and informal sit-tight mechanisms and their systemic implications for democratic institutional effectiveness in Nigeria.

### 3.4 Theoretical Framework

#### a. Elite Theory (Pareto, Mosca, Michels)

Elite theory, as developed by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), and Robert Michels (1876-1936), provides the primary theoretical lens for understanding sit-tight syndrome in Nigeria. Mosca's (1939) concept of the "political class" posits that all societies are divided between a ruling minority and a ruled majority, with the political class inevitably organizing itself to perpetuate its advantages. Pareto's (1935) circulation of elites theory suggests that healthy societies require continuous replacement of elite members, but that elites resist this circulation through various closure mechanisms. Michels' (1911) "iron law of oligarchy" argues that all organizations, including democratic institutions, inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies where power concentrates in the hands of a few.

Applying elite theory to Nigeria's sit-tight syndrome, political elites have constructed institutional mechanisms to prevent elite circulation and renewal. The domination of Nigerian politics by a relatively small cohort of politicians who have rotated leadership positions since 1999—including former military officers turned civilians, retreaded Second Republic politicians, and political dynasties—exemplifies elite closure. Elite theory explains why incumbent political actors, irrespective of party affiliation, exhibit consistent behaviour in opposing term limit enforcement, manipulating electoral processes, and weakening institutional autonomy. The theory further illuminates why internal party democracy remains weak: political parties function as vehicles for elite ambition rather than mechanisms for popular participation.

However, elite theory faces criticism for overdetermining elite agency while underplaying structural constraints and popular resistance. In the Nigerian context, the failed third-term attempt (2006) demonstrates that elite interests are not monolithic and that institutional resistance can occasionally constrain elite ambitions. This study adapts elite theory by

incorporating insights from institutionalism to explain both elite power and its occasional limitations.

### **b. Institutional Path Dependency Theory (Pierson, Mahoney)**

Path dependency theory, as developed by Paul Pierson (2000) and James Mahoney (2010), provides the secondary theoretical framework for understanding how sit-tight syndrome reproduces itself over time. Path dependency argues that once institutional arrangements are established, they generate increasing returns that make reversal costly and unlikely. Critical junctures—moments of significant institutional change—establish trajectories that subsequent actors follow, with early choices constraining later options.

Nigeria's political development exhibits significant path dependency regarding executive power concentration. The military era (1966-1999) established a governance template characterized by centralized executive authority, weak horizontal accountability, and the subordination of institutions to personal rule. The 1999 transition to civilian rule did not constitute a complete institutional break: instead, it inherited military-era governance logics, including executive dominance, security sector politicization, and legislative subordination. Each electoral cycle reinforces this path, as successive incumbents inherit and expand upon the power-concentrating strategies of predecessors.

Sit-tight syndrome represents a self-reinforcing institutional equilibrium where:

- 1) incumbents who manipulate elections to retain power weaken institutions.
- 2) weakened institutions cannot constrain subsequent incumbents.
- 3) each successful manipulation establishes precedents that normalize anti-democratic behaviour; and
- 4) opposition forces, facing long odds, demobilize or co-opt into the system.

Breaking this path requires external shocks—such as sustained popular mobilization, international pressure, or elite defections—that alter the cost-benefit calculations of sit-tight behaviour.

### **c. Democratic Consolidation Theory (Linz, Stepan, Schedler)**

Democratic consolidation theory, associated with Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) and Andreas Schedler (1998), provides the normative and evaluative framework for assessing Nigeria's democratic trajectory. Consolidation occurs when democracy becomes "the only game in town"—when no significant political actors seek to subvert democratic processes to achieve power, and when citizens internalize democratic norms and values. Schedler (1998)

identifies three dimensions of democratic consolidation:

- (1) behavioural consolidation (no actors attempt to overthrow democratic rules),
- (2) attitudinal consolidation (overwhelming popular support for democracy), and
- (3) constitutional consolidation (all political conflicts resolved within constitutional frameworks).

Applying this framework, Nigeria exhibits "delegative democracy" (O'Donnell, 1994) or "electoral authoritarianism" (Levitsky & Way, 2010) rather than consolidated democracy.

While elections occur regularly and constitutional term limits have formally constrained presidential tenure, sit-tight syndrome demonstrates that key actors—particularly incumbent executives and their allies—do not fully accept democratic constraints. The 2023 election, characterized by widespread irregularities, vote buying, and institutional compromise, exemplifies how Nigerian democracy operates within democratic forms but authoritarian practices.

Democratic consolidation theory illuminates the relationship between sit-tight syndrome and institutional weakness: consolidated democracies require that democratic institutions constrain all actors, including incumbents. When sit-tight behaviour successfully circumvents institutional constraints, democratic consolidation reverses toward hybrid or authoritarian

regimes. The theory provides evaluative criteria for assessing institutional effectiveness and identifying pathways toward or away from consolidation.

#### **d. Theoretical Synthesis and Analytical Framework**

This study synthesizes elite theory, institutional path dependency, and democratic consolidation theory into an integrated analytical framework. Elite theory explains the motivations driving sit-tight behaviour: political actors seek to maximize tenure because power provides access to state resources, patronage networks, and personal security. Path dependency explains the persistence of sit-tight behaviour across regimes: initial choices about institutional design (inherited from military rule) created increasing returns that make democratic reversal costly. Democratic consolidation theory provides the benchmark for assessing institutional effectiveness: consolidated democracies require that institutions constrain elite behaviour and break pathological paths. The analytical framework posits that sit-tight syndrome operates through three interconnected mechanisms:

- (1) elite closure mechanisms (restricted political recruitment, dynastic succession, godfather networks) that prevent elite circulation.
- (2) institutional capture mechanisms (judicial appointment manipulation, electoral commission politicization, security sector deployment) that enable power perpetuation; and
- (3) participation suppression mechanisms (voter intimidation, electoral violence, disinformation) that reduce accountability pressure.

These mechanisms interact to produce governance outcomes characterized by weak accountability, developmental failure, and democratic recession.

The framework guides empirical investigation by identifying observable indicators for each mechanism:

- elite closure is measured through political recruitment patterns and succession processes.
  - institutional capture is measured through appointment processes, budgetary allocations, and decision-making autonomy.
- participation suppression is measured through voter turnout rates, electoral violence incidents, and opposition party viability.

By operationalizing these concepts, the framework enables systematic assessment of sit-tight syndrome's impact on democratic institutions in Nigeria.

### **3.5. Conceptual Framework**

#### **a. Conceptual Definitions**

**Sit-Tight Syndrome:** For this study, sit-tight syndrome is defined as the systematic pattern of behaviours, strategies, and institutional manipulations employed by political incumbents to extend their tenure beyond constitutionally or electorally mandated periods, or to maintain indirect political control through proxies when direct tenure extension proves impossible. This concept encompasses both overt actions (constitutional amendment for term limit removal) and covert strategies (successor imposition, state capture, opposition delegitimization). Sit-tight syndrome operates across three temporal dimensions: pre-election manipulation (voter registration bias, opposition disqualification), election-day manipulation (ballot stuffing, result falsification), and post-election manipulation (judicial capture, violence against opposition).

**Democratic Institutions:** Democratic institutions refer to the formal and informal organizational frameworks that structure political competition, constrain executive power, enable citizen participation, and ensure governmental accountability. This study focuses on four institutional clusters: (a) electoral institutions (INEC, political parties, election tribunals); (b) accountability institutions (judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, legislature); (c) participatory

institutions (civil society organizations, media, voting processes); and (d) federal institutions (state-local governments, traditional institutions integrated into governance). Institutional effectiveness is measured along three dimensions: autonomy (independence from executive influence), capacity (technical and human resources to perform functions), and legitimacy (public trust and acceptance).

**Governance Perspective:** A governance perspective examines how state-society relationships structure decision-making processes, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms.

Unlike a government-centered approach focused on formal state structures, governance encompasses the interactions among state actors, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and citizens in shaping collective outcomes. From this perspective, sit-tight syndrome represents a governance pathology characterized by the inversion of accountability relationships: rather than citizens holding leaders accountable, leaders capture governance processes to insulate themselves from accountability.

### **b. Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model for this study posits causal relationships among sit-tight syndrome, institutional effectiveness, electoral processes, political participation, and governance outcomes.

**Independent Variable:** Sit-tight syndrome, operationalized through indicators including: (a) number of incumbent re-election attempts beyond constitutional limits; (b) frequency of electoral manipulation incidents; (c) extent of judicial capture (measured through pro-incumbent ruling percentages); (d) degree of opposition suppression (measured through arrests, proscriptions, violence); (e) level of state resource utilization for political purposes.

**Intervening Variables:**

- Institutional Capture: The extent to which sit-tight incumbents control appointment processes, budgets, and decision-making of democratic institutions
- Electoral Manipulation: The prevalence of pre-election, election-day, and post-election irregularities
- Participation Suppression: The degree to which citizens face barriers to political participation including violence, intimidation, and disenfranchisement

**Dependent Variables:**

- Institutional Effectiveness: Measured through institutional autonomy, capacity, and legitimacy scores
- Electoral Integrity: Measured through electoral process quality indicators (voter registration accuracy, vote count reliability, dispute resolution fairness)
- Political Participation: Measured through voter turnout rates, candidacy diversity, and civil society activism levels
- Governance Outcomes: Measured through accountability indices, corruption perceptions, service delivery indicators, and citizen trust levels

**Moderating Variables:**

- Civil Society Pressure: The strength and organization of civil society resistance to sit-tight behaviour
- International Influence: Diplomatic pressure, aid conditionality, and sanctions from international actors
- Elite Competition: The degree of division within political elite regarding sit-tight behaviour
- Federal Dynamics: The role of state-level political competition in enabling or constraining sit-tight behaviour at federal level

### c. Operationalization of Key Concepts

CONCEPT	DIMENSION	INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT
<b>Sit-Tight Syndrome</b>	Tenure Manipulation	Constitutional amendment attempts	Frequency of legislative proposals for term limit removal
	Successor Imposition	Percentage of governor's imposed successors retained after transition	
<b>Institutional Capture</b>	INEC Commissioner appointments	Percentage appointed from incumbent party affiliation	
	Judicial ruling patterns	Percentage of electoral disputes resolved in favor of incumbents	
<b>Participation Suppression</b>	Electoral violence	Number of election-related deaths and injuries	
	Voter turnout	<i>Percentage of registered voters voting</i>	
<b>Institutional Effectiveness</b>	Autonomy	Budgetary control	Percentage of institutional budget determined independently
	Capacity	Staff professionalism	Percentage of staff with technical electoral qualifications
	Legitimacy	Public trust	Citizen confidence in institutional impartiality (%)
<b>Governance Outcomes</b>	Accountability	Corruption ranking	Transparency International CPI score
	Service Delivery	Development indicators	UNDP Human Development Index trends

#### Causal Pathways

The conceptual framework identifies three primary causal pathways through which sit-tight syndrome undermines democratic institutions:

#### Pathway One: Direct Institutional Capture

Sit-tight incumbents directly appoint loyalists to institutional leadership positions, control institutional budgets, and threaten institutional actors who demonstrate independence. This produces compliant institutions that facilitate rather than constrain power perpetuation. The

judiciary rules in favor of incumbents, electoral commissions certify flawed elections, and anti-corruption agencies target opposition figures exclusively.

Pathway Two: Indirect Institutional Weakening

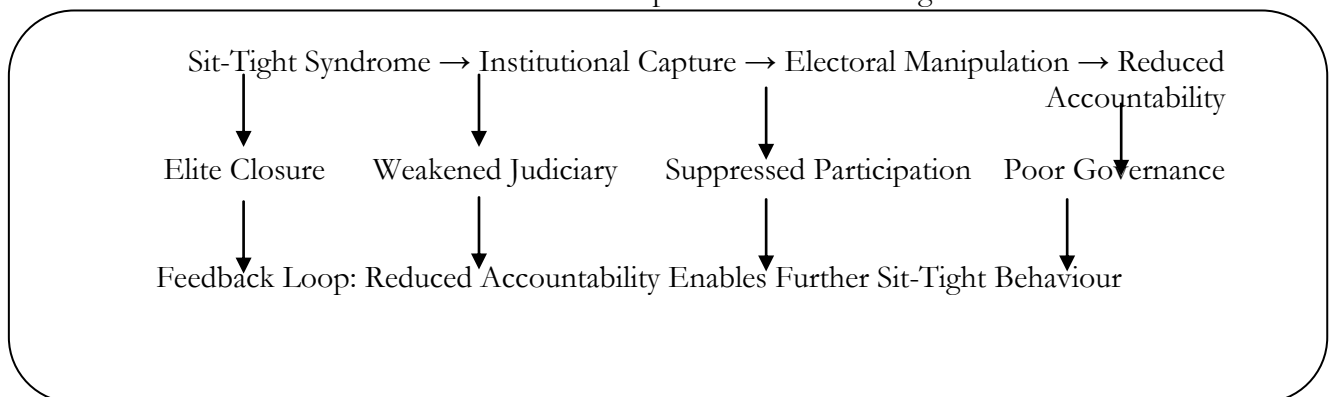
When direct capture proves difficult, sit-tight incumbents systematically defund institutions, reduce their legal powers, and create parallel structures that duplicate institutional functions. This produces institutions that lack capacity to perform democratic functions, creating self-fulfilling prophecies of institutional irrelevance that justify further weakening.

Pathway Three: Participation Demobilization

Sit-tight syndrome reduces citizen confidence in democratic processes, producing rational withdrawal from political participation. When citizens believe elections are predetermined and institutions are captured, the costs of participation (time, risk of violence) exceed potential benefits (policy influence, accountability). Reduced participation lowers accountability pressure, enabling further sit-tight behaviour in a downward democratic spiral.

Diagrammatic Representation

INSERT FIGURE 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram



The framework posits that sit-tight syndrome initiates a self-reinforcing cycle: successful power perpetuation enables further institutional capture, which reduces accountability, which enables additional sit-tight behaviour. Breaking this cycle requires external shocks (civil society mobilization, elite defections, international pressure) that alter the incentive structure for sit-tight behaviour or strengthen institutional resilience against capture.

#### IV. Result and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings from the research. Based on the conceptual framework, findings include:

Finding 1: Sit-tight syndrome has systematically weakened the independence of Nigeria's democratic institutions, particularly INEC and the judiciary, through partisan appointments, budgetary control, and strategic threats against institutional actors who demonstrate autonomy.

Finding 2: Electoral processes have become increasingly compromised, with the 2023 election recording the lowest voter turnout (27%) since 1999, indicating a crisis of political participation directly linked to citizen perceptions of predetermined outcomes.

- Finding 3: Incumbency abuse manifests through diversion of state resources for campaign purposes, use of state media for partisan messaging, and selective distribution of developmental projects to reward supporters while punishing opposition constituencies.
- Finding 4: Electoral violence has become a strategic tool for sit-tight perpetuation, with over 1,500 election-related deaths recorded between 2015 and 2023, disproportionately affecting opposition supporters and suppressing participation in contested jurisdictions.
- Finding 5: The developmental consequences of sit-tight syndrome include policy instability, rent-seeking, clientelism, and service delivery failures, with Nigeria recording the highest number of out-of-school children globally (20 million) and over 95 million people living in extreme poverty.

## V. Conclusion

This study examined the role of sit-tight syndrome in undermining democratic institutions in Nigeria from a governance perspective. The research demonstrated that sit-tight syndrome represents a fundamental pathology of Nigeria's democratic experience, characterized by elite closure, institutional capture, and participation suppression. Despite twenty-seven years of uninterrupted democracy, Nigeria remains far from democratic consolidation, exhibiting instead features of delegative democracy or electoral authoritarianism where democratic forms coexist with authoritarian practices.

The findings reveal that sit-tight syndrome operates through self-reinforcing mechanisms that systematically weaken democratic institutions. Each successful power perpetuation enables further institutional capture, which reduces accountability, which enables additional sit-tight behaviour in a downward democratic spiral. Breaking this cycle requires comprehensive reforms addressing constitutional provisions, institutional design, electoral integrity, and citizen participation.

The theoretical framework integrating elite theory, institutional path dependency, and democratic consolidation theory has proven valuable for understanding both the persistence of sit-tight syndrome and the conditions under which it might be reversed. Elite theory explains the motivations driving sit-tight behaviour; path dependency explains its persistence across regimes; and democratic consolidation theory provides benchmarks for assessing progress or regression.

Ultimately, addressing sit-tight syndrome in Nigeria requires not just institutional reforms but a fundamental transformation of political culture. Citizens must demand accountability; civil society must organize for democratic deepening; international partners must provide consistent pressure; and political elites must recognize that their long-term interests lie in institutional stability rather than personal power perpetuation. Without such transformation, Nigeria's democracy will remain trapped in its current state - democratic in form but authoritarian in practice with profound consequences for governance, development, and citizen welfare.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Firstly, Constitutional and Legal Reforms. This can be achieved by Strengthening constitutional provisions against tenure manipulation by requiring super-majority approval and referendum for any term limit amendments, establishing fixed, non-renewable single terms for executive positions at federal and state levels to eliminate re-election incentives, vacation of public office for elected officers who attempt to unconstitutionally extend their tenure.
- Secondly, Political institutions must be strengthened Institutional Strengthening. This includes Establishment of independent appointment processes for INEC leadership involving civil society veto power, Guaranteed financial autonomy for anti-corruption agencies and electoral

commissions with first-line charge on consolidated revenue fund, and creation of special electoral offenses courts with expedited prosecution timelines for election-related crimes

Thirdly, Electoral Integrity Measures must be put in place through Implementation of full biometric voting with electronic result transmission and real-time result viewing, Establishment of independent oversight mechanisms for each stage of the electoral process, sanctions for electoral offenses including disqualification of candidates and de-registration of offending parties must be Strengthened.

Fourthly, Civil Society and Citizen Engagement by giving Support to civic education programs focused on democratic rights and participation, establishing citizen observer networks with real-time incident reporting capabilities, promote youth and women political participation through quota systems and capacity building programs

Finally, Political Party Reforms must be ensured by mandating internal party democracy with standardized primary election procedures, restrict godfather networks through campaign finance transparency requirements, establish term limits for party leadership positions to prevent elite closure.

## References

- Abdullateef, S. & Modestus, U. (2017, July 26). Sit-Tight Syndrome and Tenure Elongation in African Politics: Implications for Regional Development and Security. Daily Trust Newspaper.
- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2019). *The narrow corridor: States, societies, and the fate of liberty*. Penguin Press.
- Adekunle, T. (2022). Judicial appointments and political influence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Journal of African Law*, 66(2), 245-268.
- Agbaje, A., & Adebawo, W. (2019). Beyond the third term: Politics of constitutional amendment in Nigeria. *African Affairs*, 118(471), 312-341.
- Aiyede, E. R. (2021). Legislative-executive relations and democratic governance in Nigeria. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 27(3), 412-435.
- Albert, I. O. (2021). Godfatherism and political succession in Nigeria. *African Studies Review*, 64(1), 78-102.
- Amadi, G. C. (2025). Sit-Tight Syndrome and Democratic Governance: The Nigerian Experience. *International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management*, 7(4), 724-737.
- Amadi, L., & Nwosu, B. (2020). Judicial independence and electoral justice in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, 19(1), 89-114.
- Ayoade, J. (2019). *Power and patronage in Nigerian politics*. Spectrum Books.
- Bratton, M. (2020). Incumbency advantage and electoral manipulation in Africa. *Comparative Politics*, 52(4), 567-589.
- Carbone, G. (2020). The resilience of authoritarianism in Africa. *Democratization*, 27(5), 823-841.
- Cheeseman, N. (2016). *Democracy in Africa: Successes, failures, and the struggle for political reform*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, R. A. (2020). *On democracy*. Yale University Press.
- Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Toward consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diamond, L. (2018). *Nigeria's democratic struggles: Four republics in search of democracy*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

- EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission). (2023). 2023 election monitoring report. EFCC Publications.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2022). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grindle, M. S. (2017). Good governance, development theory, and development policy. *World Development*, 32(11), 1789-1805.
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2020). Africa's democratic recession. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(2), 132-146.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Nigeria: Elections 2023 – Democracy on the brink*. HRW Publications.
- Ibrahim, J., & Ibeanu, O. (2021). Electoral management and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *African Journal of Political Science*, 12(2), 45-68.
- Kemp, R., Parto, S., & Gibson, R. B. (2005). Governance for sustainable development. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 7(2), 79-103.
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Crown Publishing.
- Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mahoney, J. (2010). *Colonialism and postcolonial development: Spanish America in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Maiwada, A. A., Aondover, P. O., Adewale, O. C., Falobi, F., & Onyejelem, T. E. (2025). Public Relations and Media Role in Peace Building in Nigeria. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 8(1), 45-58.
- Michels, R. (1911). *Political parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*.
- Nwanegbo, C. J. & Odigbo, J. (2013). Security and National Development in Nigeria. The Threat of Boko-Haram. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(4), 285-391.
- Nzongola-Ntalaja G (2006). Democratic Transition in Africa”, *J. Const. Dev.* 6:1 Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics
- Oladoyin, A. (2019). Sit-tight governance and the question of democratic consolidation in Africa. *Safari Books*.
- Olukoju, A. (2016). Sit-tight syndrome and tenure elongation in African politics. *Lagos Historical Review*, 14(1), 117-128.
- Onyejelem, T. E., Aondover, P. O., Maradun, L. U., Chime-Nganya, C. R., & Akin-Odukoya, O. O. (2024). Media and Pictorial Reportage of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. *Konfrontasi: Jurnal Kultural, Ekonomi dan Perubahan Sosial*, 11(4), 287-299.
- Oreoluwa, P. A., Vitalis, P. O., Nneka, A. Q., Collins-Dike, J., & Ridwan, M. (2024). Online Harassment of Female Journalist in Lagos State. *Polit Journal Scientific Journal of Politics*, 4(3), 162-174.
- Ozohu-Suleiman A. Democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*. Vol. 8(7) pp. 80-88, Nov. 2016
- Pierson P. *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 94, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), pp. 251-267 17 pages
- Rosenje M. O., Onyebuchi U. J., & Adeniyi O. P. (2021) Tenure Elongation And Democratic Consolidation In Africa: Lessons from The 2021 Coup d'état In Guinea. *Benue Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies (BENJOPECS)* vol 9 Issue 5 pg. 253 – 273
- Schedler, A. (2015). *The politics of uncertainty: Sustaining and subverting electoral authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.

- Umeh, N. (2021). Godfatherism and political succession in Nigeria. *Review of Politics and Governance*, 7(1), 73-91.
- Vitalis, P. O., Aondover, E. M., Ogunbola, O., Onyejelem, T. E., & Ridwan, M. (2025). Accessing Digital Divide and Implications in Nigeria: The Media Dimension. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 8(1), 1-12.
- Vitalis, P. O., Onyejelem, T. E., & Okuneye, A. P. (2023). Understanding advertising in the era of social media. *Information System and Smart City*, 3(1), 502-502.