



**DEMOCRACY IN PERIL: ANALYZING THE EROSION
OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND THE PROLIFERATION
OF COUP D'ÉTATS IN WEST AFRICA - A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF GUINEA, MALI, BURKINA FASO AND NIGER**

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Abstract:

The worrying decline in democratic institutions and the rise in coup d'états across West Africa constitute the issue that this thesis examines, and it is unquestionably one of the utmost importance. This problem necessitates thorough research since it poses a threat to regional stability and a grave threat to the very principles of democratic governance in a diverse and complicated region of the world. The study aims to delve into the underlying causes and effects of these trends, highlighting how crucial it is to improve our understanding of the many problems facing democracy in the region.

Keywords: coup d'états, proliferation, democracy, West Africa, institutions, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso

1. Background Overview

West Africa's democracy has faced significant obstacles in recent years, which paints a sombre image of crumbling democratic institutions and an unsettling rise in coup d'états. The purpose of this article is to do a thorough comparative examination of four important West African countries: Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Its main objective is to sort through the complex web of variables crucial in causing these democratic defeats while evaluating these changes' implications for the larger area.

First and foremost, it is imperative to acknowledge the gravity of the situation in West Africa. The erosion of democratic institutions signifies a dangerous decline in the checks and balances fundamental to a well-functioning democracy. It is an ominous sign

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of the weakening of civil society, the rule of law, and the principles of accountability. The proliferation of coup d'états, traditionally seen as a last resort in a democratic society, underscores the precariousness of political stability in the region.

Each of the four West African nations under consideration Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has its own distinct set of problems. For example, authoritarianism and political repression have long been problems in Guinea, preventing the development of democratic institutions. On the other hand, Mali has experienced a tumultuous combination of armed conflict, interethnic strife, and Islamist insurgencies, all of which have accelerated the decline of its democracy. While Niger has suffered from pervasive poverty and governance problems, Burkina Faso has experienced similar security challenges that a long history of political instability has exacerbated.

The involvement of outside actors in escalating or reducing these democratic defeats is a crucial feature that this thesis seeks to analyze. Examining the impact of regional and international actors is essential because of how much their interests, initiatives, and policies can affect the development of democracy in West Africa. External players have played a crucial, and perhaps contradictory, role in forming the democratic landscape of the area, whether through backing for authoritarian leaders or promoting good governance.

The effects of these democratic losses extend beyond the borders of these particular countries as well. West Africa is a connected region, and political unrest in one nation can have widespread effects. It can worsen local disputes, cause large-scale population shifts, and provide a haven for international criminal gangs and extremist organizations. Thus, the thesis should highlight the significance of a coordinated response from the international community while highlighting the broader regional implications of these difficulties.

The worrying decline in democratic institutions and the rise in coup d'états across West Africa constitute the issue that this thesis examines, and it is unquestionably one of the utmost importance. This problem necessitates thorough research since it poses a threat to regional stability and a grave threat to the very principles of democratic governance in a diverse and complicated region of the world. The study aims to delve into the underlying causes and effects of these trends, highlighting how crucial it is to improve our understanding of the many problems facing democracy in the region.

First and foremost, it is imperative to stress the gravity of the democratic decline in West Africa. Democratic institutions are the bedrock of accountable governance, civil liberties, and the rule of law. Their erosion signifies a corrosion of the principles upon which modern states are built. When democratic institutions falter, the consequences are far-reaching, affecting the immediate population and regional stability, economic development, and global peace.

A disturbing sign of West Africa's extreme political instability is the rise in coup d'états. In the evolution of democratic societies, coups are often seen as regressive moves since they signify a breakdown of the established democratic procedures and a return to

authoritarian control. They alter the constitutional order, erode trust in democratic governance, and have the potential to prolong violent and unstable cycles. Because it aims to identify the underlying causes of such anti-democratic activities, this study's dedication to analyzing the coups' causes is laudable.

I focus on examining the effects of these advancements is also essential. It is crucial to consider the repercussions of coups and democratic decline within individual countries and on a regional and global level. The effects might range from escalating regional wars and refugee crises to strengthening transnational criminal networks and extremist organizations. Because it clarifies the necessity of quickly resolving this problem, a detailed assessment of these effects is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders.

A comprehensive approach is essential to this investigation since democracy in West Africa faces several complicated problems. Given the complexity of the fundamental causes' socio-political, economic, and historical circumstances, careful examination is essential. Furthermore, it is critical to understand that these issues are not localized; they are frequently affected and aggravated by outside parties, such as powerful nations with vested interests in the area.

2. The Impact of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement on the Latest Coups in Africa

Commencing in 2020 in Mali, Africa has witnessed a wave of ceaseless coups. Ever since, it has spread to six countries in three years, an extraordinary amount of time. Some nations that have seen coups include Guinea (2021), Chad (2021), Sudan (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and most recently, Gabon (2023) in August 2023. The coup leaders toppled authorities who had ruled for more than 50 years, delayed elections, or even removed elected officials. In addition, it has led to a faction among African leaders, with militarized nations endorsing one another and defying regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (E.C.O.W.A.S.) to impose sanctions. This article explores the impact of the increasing political unrest in African nations on the African Union's (A.U.) endeavour to execute the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

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2.1 AfCFTA Stands for African Continental Free Trade Agreement

A trade pact known as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) unites 55 African Union nations to promote economic growth and development by establishing a unified market for products and services throughout Africa. In conjunction with local economic communities, the African Union seeks to advance industrialization, economic growth, and privileged trade in commodities and services. The AfCFTA trade zones will be the "*largest free trade area since the formation of the World Trade Organization.*" There have been 54 signatories to the Agreement since it went into effect on May 30, 2019. 46 of the 54 countries had ratified the Agreement as of February 2023. ratifying nations, including Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Niger, Chad, and Mali.

Reciprocity is one of the fundamental ideas that underpin the AfCFTA's implementation and operation. This idea forms the cornerstone of the ongoing negotiations to complete protocols on all areas of the Agreement, such as intellectual property rights, investment, and competition policy (phase II), trade in goods and services and dispute settlement (phase I), digital trade, and the participation of women and young people in trade (phase III). The negotiations will involve all A.U. members, including those who have not ratified the AfCFTA Agreement. The negotiations' conclusion must be approved by all members in unanimity. The free trade area becomes operational until all protocols have been completed and approved by at least 22 nations. The A.U. designated 2023 as the year for "Acceleration of AfCFTA Implementation" to expedite the process.

2.2 Impact of Political Unpredictability on AfCFTA Implementation

The political unrest in certain African Union member states may impede significant advancements in the trade and investment protocols. For instance, following the coup in Niger in 2023, E.C.O.W.A.S. imposed travel and economic sanctions on the country. As a result, E.C.O.W.A.S. members had to cut off financial ties with Niger, stop commercial flights, restrict crossings with Niger, freeze national assets, and stop providing help to Nigeria. In addition, E.C.O.W.A.S. threatened to use force within a week if the leaders of the coup failed to restore the president who was elected lawfully. Along with other countries whose democracy has been curtailed, namely Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Sudan, the A.U. endorsed these steps and suspended Niger.

E.C.O.W.A.S. was viewed with contempt by the coup leaders in Niger. Instead, it stopped trading with Togo and Nigeria as retaliation. With a warning that any military action in Niger would be a declaration of war against them, military chiefs from Mali and Burkina Faso also promised their solidarity with Niger. A regional bloc seems to be emerging among the countries governed by the military. Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali are combining to form a de facto anti-west Francophone faction within Ecowas due to their mutual distaste for France and its Western supporters and their increasing preference for Russian partnership. This will be felt in the E.C.O.W.A.S. and A.U. trade

connections since nations ruled by the military would be reluctant to establish trade ties with other countries because of ideological differences.

The A.U. needs to find a solution to the implementation and interpretational maze that the current political climate creates. Despite having signed and ratified the AfCFTA, Mali, Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Chad are unlikely to participate in or support AfCFTA negotiations due to the suspension by the A.U. Article 27 of the AfCFTA stipulates that a state party is only permitted to withdraw from the Agreement five years after joining. Additionally, a withdrawal notification has a two-year expiration date, according to Article 27(2). Regarding the AfCFTA, this clause begs whether nations who accepted and signed it under democratic governments can leave under military rule before the five-year period expires. The A.U.'s suspension of these nations also raises the question of whether these nations are immediately kicked out of the AfCFTA.

Removing democratically elected politicians may also impact political support for the AfCFTA. The AfCFTA was pushed for by former democratic leaders of some of these military governments, such as Niger's Issoufou Mahamadou and Moroccan Mohamed Bazoum. The African Union admitted that the AfCFTA attracted Member States' attention due to Mr Mahamadou's high-level lobbying. Whether Mr Mahamadou can maintain a prominent role in the AfCFTA is questionable given the political unrest in his home country and the uncertainties surrounding Niger's participation. African leaders must step up to take this position to ensure the AfCFTA is implemented. According to reports, "*the AfCFTA is on track.*" Political will, however, is entirely different from having a trade deal. Still, in this early phase, that's what the AfCFTA most needs.

It seems questionable that Mr Mahamadou can continue to take the lead, given the political unrest in his nation and the uncertainties surrounding Niger's membership in the AfCFTA. To gather the political will required to implement the AfCFTA, other African leaders must step up to fill this void. It's true that "the AfCFTA is on track," as stated. However, political will is entirely different from having a trade deal. That is, however, what the AfCFTA most urgently needs at this early time.

Economic sanctions preventing African nations in the Sahel from engaging in intra-African trade mean that the integration and liberalization of African markets will likely remain a pipe dream, notwithstanding the possibility of declining political support for the AfCFTA. Among Africa's largest aquifers, the Sahel region offers a wealth of solar energy capability and tremendous potential for renewable energy sources.

As per the statement, "*the Sahel is one of the world's richest regions in terms of natural resources; among many other assets, it is abundant with oil, natural gas, gold, phosphates, diamonds, copper, iron ore, bauxite, biological diversity, and precious woods.*" The resources of these nations are landlocked due to the economic restrictions imposed on them. A reduction in trade volume throughout Africa, the demise of hundreds of companies, a decline in locally produced income, and higher transaction costs for small firms would all be consequences of isolating the nations. The AfCFTA envisions "*an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa,*" which is incompatible with these.

The Sahel region's countries are strategically situated geographically. The area serves as a mediator between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, the issues in the Sahel have far wider ramifications, extending to nations to the north and south, such as Egypt, Algeria, and Libya. Africa and this area are inextricably intertwined through trade routes and economic initiatives. The trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, for instance, has been impacted by the recent closure of the Nigeria-Niger border. Anticipated to connect Warri, Nigeria, to Algeria's central Hassi R'Mel gas hub, the pipeline crosses through Niger. Parallel to this, one of Africa's busiest commercial routes runs from the port of Cotonou in Benin to Niamey.

Since Benin closed its borders to Niger due to the latest sanctions against the country, imports intended for Chad are now even more challenging to attain. Due to this standoff, many truck drivers are frustrated and feel stuck inside the boundaries. These changes regress the goals of the AfCFTA concerning industrial development and the free movement of persons. In Africa, intraregional commerce is still sluggish despite expecting the AfCFTA to boost it by at least 80% (U.N.C.T.A.D., 2023). African natural resources, or precious metals, are primarily exported to China, India, the United States, and Spain, according to the 2023 World Trade Statistics Review. Given what's going on in Africa, there's little chance that the numbers will alter in 2024.

Overall, the recent coups might have made the trade relations worse now than before the AfCFTA. The political squabbling and economic sanctions throughout Africa may cause African nations to keep looking for markets outside the continent, leaving them open to attack by countries in the Global North.

2.3 Next Steps

In the future, how well political stability and the rule of law are ingrained in African nations will determine how successfully the AfCFTA norms on investment and commerce are negotiated and implemented. Every person must abide by the law according to the rule of law. Create democratic institutions that uphold Africans' freedom to elect their leaders to foster a culture of law and order. A common normative understanding of the rule of law would improve cooperation and coordination between African nations. African nations can more easily pursue shared interests on issues about economic integration when they have this understanding.

Thus, the A.U. must comprehend how commerce and the rule of law connect. Poor leadership and anti-democratic behaviours that can call for military intervention in African nations must be aggressively addressed. A State Party's legitimate exercise of power or its democratic political, and institutional arrangements may be affected by circumstances, in which case the Peace and Security Council (P.S.C.) will exercise its responsibilities to uphold the constitutional order in compliance with applicable provisions of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, according to Article 24 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. This clause grants the A.U. the prerogative to step in before elected officials

refuse to step down from office at the end of their term or in the event of a constitutional coup. Babatunde Fagbayigbo correctly observed that "*the dismal state of political progress on the continent is effectively summed up by the potential for re-invention, either through fraudulent elections or retaining the president in the family.*"

A significant challenge facing the African Union is encouraging a joint African commitment to the rule of law. This is because the African Union's primary goal is to increase the solidarity, unity, and cohesion among African nations. To accomplish this goal while putting the AfCFTA into effect, the A.U. needs to start over. To achieve this, the A.U. must use a carrot-and-stick strategy to convince nations with military governments to abide by the fundamental elements of the rule of law, which calls for robust democratic institutions and practices.

Across Africa, robust democratic norms based on the rule of law are essential to the economic success of the AfCFTA. However, there are noticeable disparities in applying the law throughout the continent, especially in light of the emergence of military governments in Africa. A borderless system where Nigerian and Mali traders may conduct business without trade obstacles is what the AfCFTA aims to achieve. Still, the most recent wave of military coups jeopardizes that goal. To solidify the advancement of the AfCFTA over time, this development puts into question the A.U.'s role in bringing together African nations in terms of their commitment to the rule of law. For the AfCFTA to prevent subsequent failed attempts at African trade integration, the A.U. must collaborate with other regional organizations during its implementation.

2.4 Economic Growth and Democracy's Effects

G.D.P. declines are typically seen before a nation's transition from a non-democratic system to democracy, followed by unpredictable but long-term growth. Conversely, autocratic governments see notable expansion during their initial years and ultimately face a downturn. This is because authoritarian and other non-democratic regimes are better at enforcing decisive policies and decisions and resolving ethnic and sub-national conflicts, which is the root cause of this tendency. Nevertheless, they eventually become unsustainable because there is an increased motivation to take money from society, which reduces prosperity. Democratic regimes are centred around institutions and policies that establish the framework for creating and observing principles of liberty and equality. This directly or indirectly impacts businesses or individuals that gain from the regulations and experience growth, which is beneficial for the economy.

Compared to autocracy, the beneficial changes of democracy to economic growth, such as authority delegation and social conflict regulation, greatly exceed the detrimental and restricting impacts. The ability of society, or voters, to accept challenging compromises and adjustments without a clear alternative is one of the primaries in nations with higher levels of education; this is primarily true. Consequently, it links a nation's degree of growth to one of the key elements influencing favourable democratic changes and reforms. Hence, there is a greater likelihood that nations that begin the

democratization process at an advanced educational level will carry on with democratic development because of this.

As previously said, success is not ensured by these elements. There is a failure in every instance like this. Democracy never follows a set formula. Many theories and a consensus may arise from the incomplete understanding of the mechanisms associated with societal stability, peace, and rapid socioeconomic progress.

Economy growth is not directly impacted by democracy, according to a 2008 meta-analysis. Nevertheless, growth is aided by its robust and noteworthy secondary effects. Economic freedom reduces inflation, decreases political instability, and increases human capital accumulation, correlating with democracy. Economic growth drivers such as improved healthcare and educational institutions are intimately linked to democracy. Other indicators of growth include lifespan and education levels. More workers empowered by democracy in developing nations would probably demand better living conditions, access to clean water, health care, and other amenities, all raising life expectancy and boosting productivity. Some evidence also points to a correlation between it and more stringent international trade regulations and larger governments.

2.5 Advancements towards democracy

In many circumstances, the fall of another democratic regime, such as a dictatorship. Others fade away during economic downturns, others after protracted prosperity, some following the founding ruler's death, and others as a consequence of losing international conflicts. Nevertheless, while the circumstances create the framework for the potential for a democratic transition to occur, detecting them and forecasting one is exceptionally challenging. However, people's actions in these circumstances determine the result. Several dissertations have expressed two primary viewpoints about the history of various transitions. As one party declares, it almost comes to pass that it all comes down to establishing civil society. An evolution supported by changes in the social order. Some, on the other hand, assert that it is those who begin by playing the "strategic game" and come to an agreement under terms that are considered a datum. The literature opposes "sociological" and "strategic" viewpoints, but we can state that both are necessary for a transition and are not antagonistic.

2.6 Democracy's ability to survive

Even while it may be difficult to pinpoint their roots, it is simple to identify the elements necessary for their survival, which are closely related to economic growth, such as the degree of development expressed in per capita income. Education within the labour force would be another influence, particularly the years the typical citizen would have spent in school. This significantly increases the likelihood that a democracy will last. Though there is a considerable correlation between education and income, their effects appear independent, with per capita income having a far more significant impact. It's unclear whether democracy is more brittle in nations where per capita income is falling or

stagnating, based on empirical findings. Since democracies are more common in economically developed countries and less common in less developed ones, it is not surprising that there is a strong correlation between economic growth and democratic systems.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, West Africa's deteriorating democratic institutions and rise in coup d'états represent a severe problem that necessitates careful analysis. The study's dedication to identifying these trends' underlying causes and effects sets the way for knowledgeable interventions and solutions that will ultimately strive to restore and enhance democratic government in West Africa, a goal of the utmost importance for both the region and the larger global community, by putting light on the issues affecting democracy in the area. In the context of Sierra Leone, its crystal Clare that the deteriorating democratic institutions and the rise in state captured institutions by politicians has course a severe problem that necessitate a distrust between the people and the government officials/institutions which has hinder the smooth growth of political tolerance, peace, national unity and national development, in preventing what is happening in neighbouring countries like Guinea, Mali, Niger & others. in going further government most ensure that they distance themselves from the military supervision/security and crate a particular civil security unity (S.C.S.U.) which aim is to provide security service for government official especially the head of state and try to create a unique and everlasting relationship between political rivals who see themselves as political enemies through by allowing them to participate in governance issue in other to build a peaceful coexistence nation we call Sierra Leone and to uphold/respect the rules governing human right and the national constitution. Military rule can never be the solution to African problems. Africa needs honest politicians who can speak the truth to their people about issues affecting their lives and try to make life better.

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