

# Democratization and Unconstitutional Changes of Government in West Africa

Martial Dogou\*

*Faculty of Political Sciences: University of Belgrade, Jove Ilica 165, Belgrade 11000, Serbia*

*Email: dogoumaxwell@yahoo.fr*

*Email: dogou500522@student.fpn.bg.ac.rs*

## Abstract

The paper examines the various types of unconstitutional government changes in West Africa, including military coups, tenure extensions through constitutional amendments by sitting presidents, manipulation of the political system to enable father-to-son succession, and election rigging by incumbent governments or their refusal to concede defeat. It critically analyzes the challenges to democratic change and consolidation, focusing on institutional mechanisms designed to prevent unconstitutional changes, such as Article 30 of the AU's Constitutive Act, the Lomé Declaration, and the ECOWAS Democracy and Good Governance Protocols. The paper highlights the inherent limitations of these instruments, particularly in terms of implementation. It also reviews the responses of African governments and sub-regional bodies to these developments. Using empirical data, the study illustrates the patterns and trends of unconstitutional changes in government across the continent. It demonstrates how these fundamentally threaten democratic stability, development, and consolidation in Africa. The author emphasizes that certain threats to democracy are more likely to occur from the inherent nature and contradictions within the democratization processes in West Africa. The core of democratic politics is under threat due to the nature of its ownership, the marginalization of ordinary citizens, and the fragility of democratic institutions, which face challenges in establishing electoral rules and ensuring compliance by key political actors. This paper will appeal to anyone observing political trends in Africa and seeking an in-depth understanding of the foundations and possibilities for consolidating democracy in the region.

**Keywords:** Democratization; Unconstitutional change; Governance; Liberal and Elite Theories; West Africa.

---

*Received: 10/1/2024*

*Accepted: 12/10/2024*

*Published: 12/25/2024*

---

*\* Corresponding author.*

## **1. Introduction**

In West Africa, comprising 16 countries, democratic experiments continue to be fragile and contentious. This fragility stems from an escalating crisis in both electoral processes and the overall consolidation of democracy [1, 5]. Some believe that consistent elections will lead to democratic development, despite identifiable flaws, and that the process will improve over time [5]. The democratic trajectory of West Africa has been marked by significant challenges, particularly in navigating the complexities of electoral crises and unconstitutional changes of government. While elections have become a recurring feature across the region, the central issue extends beyond their frequency or legitimacy to the extent of political elites undermining democratic processes through power abuse and unconstitutional practices. Togo, as the first African country to experience a coup, exemplifies the contentious interplay between democratization and unconstitutional governance. At the dawn of the 21st century, Africa experienced a political transformation, transitioning from decades of military authoritarianism and political instability to an era increasingly defined by constitutional democracy. This period saw the dismantling of one-party states and military regimes as numerous countries embraced democratization and constitutional reforms. Constitutional democracy emerged as the predominant governance model, reinforced by African leaders' commitments to frameworks that condemned unconstitutional changes of government. Key to this shift were the efforts of regional and sub-regional organizations, notably the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which championed governance rooted in constitutionalism and democratic principles. Building on this foundation, the African Union (AU) introduced transformative initiatives, including the Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the AU Constitutive Act, to strengthen the continent's resolve against unconstitutional governance.

Despite these achievements, progress has been uneven. Some states have entrenched democratic gains, while others have regressed into unconstitutional practices. This dichotomy is particularly stark in West Africa, where approximately 45.2% of the continent's coups d'états have occurred [10]. To address these challenges, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This protocol, aligning with the AU's stance, explicitly prohibits disruptions to democratic processes and establishes a legal framework to safeguard democracy in the region [3]. However, the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya exposed vulnerabilities within Africa's democratic frameworks. These events tested the continent's capacity to uphold constitutional democracy, while the subsequent coups in West African nations such as Guinea Bissau, Mali, and Burkina Faso strained ECOWAS's ability to deter unconstitutional changes of government. The AU's response to the realities of these countries has sparked debates about the relevance of its framework, while the persistence of coups in West Africa raises questions about the efficacy of the ECOWAS Protocol in fostering democratic governance.

This study provides a critical analysis of the African Union's (AU) normative framework on unconstitutional changes of government, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Benin, Ghana, and the broader Spring context. It also examines the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, focusing on Article 1b, which mandates the acquisition of power through free, fair, and transparent elections, and Article 1c, which enforces zero tolerance for power seized through unconstitutional means. The research specifically analyzes the cases of Mali, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau, situating these instances of unconstitutional governance

within the ECOWAS framework. By offering historical context, delving into post-Arab Spring developments, and assessing West African coups, the study critiques the responses of both the AU and ECOWAS to these challenges. It concludes by highlighting key lessons learned and presenting actionable recommendations to prevent future instances of unconstitutional governance in the region.

### **1.1. Literature review**

The reception of democratization and unconstitutional changes in West Africa has led to many scholarly articles, essays, and other research papers discussing its democratic implications. The 1980s were characterized by democratic instability, a trend that continued into the 1990s until the third wave of democracy spread throughout Africa. A political system is considered unstable when it frequently encounters situations, activities, or behaviors in politics that pose a threat to its peaceful existence. Instability can manifest at different levels. In extreme cases, it has the potential to be sufficiently serious to cause the political system to falter or the state to collapse, leading to unconstitutional or violent overthrows of governments, this represents a type of systemic instability. To a lesser extent, instability could impede the smooth operation of the political system. Movements striving to alter or dismantle the current sociopolitical structure and redistribute power and resources within society may manifest in either peaceful or confrontational forms. For Boafo-Arthur, violent actions typically include political assassinations, kidnappings, coercion, labor strikes, public demonstrations, protests, and other acts of violence, such as communal and sectarian conflicts. The main features of political instability encompass frequent changes in the type of government and regular shifts in state personnel. Recurring violence, such as riots, coups and counter- coups, communal violence, and religious intolerance, also mark unstable political environments [5, 3]. This is also shared by Berthélemy and al by revealing that the traits stand in stark contrast for those in stable political systems, characterized by legitimacy, effective resolution of conflicts, and lasting system endurance. As a result, political instability is often viewed as a hindrance to the sustainability of democracy and development [4]. However, political constancy is not identical to democratic stability, even though both aim to maintain surely public order and civil realms. Osaghae emphasized again the distinction between the two concepts, pointing out that political stability emphasizes a state-centric method of maintaining order, while democratic stability depends on a societal approach. This distinction makes democratic stability more appealing, especially as most states now prioritize democracy over other political systems. Thus, it emphasizes a political system that is owned and driven by the people. As Osaghae states:

The real concept of democratic stability is preferred over political stability to highlight the crucial role of citizens in maintaining stability. Political stability views stability from a top-down perspective, focusing on an orderly government, which may not always be good or democratic. In contrast, democratic stability takes a bottom-up approach, considering stability as a core function of the government's level of consent from the people. [15].

According to Osaghae since governments universally assert varying degrees of democratic legitimacy, often with some degree of pretense, the preoccupation of democratic stability assumes heightened significance. As Osaghae posits, "The foundation of democratic stability lies in the voluntary endorsement or consent of citizenship rather than reliance on coercion." He elaborates, noting that "this does not imply that force stands in opposition to consent, since even well-supported governments may occasionally resort to coercion, such as

during protests or labor strikes." [16]. In ordinary circumstances, "democratic stability assumes that people have the government they choose at any point in time, rational individuals are inclined to back a government that aligns with and actively pursues their interests." Within such a political structure, citizens retain the right to peacefully withdraw their support from the government if it fails to adequately represent their interests, for instance, by voting out the administration in the upcoming general election. Anything that goes against these principles or obstructs their realization indicates democratic instability. It's worth noting that following the achievement of political independence in 1960, famously known as 'the chosen Year of African Independence', many African nations harbored optimistic expectations for consistent progress. However, Mbatu and Sexena argue that 50 years later, these hopes remain largely unfulfilled. For much of their post-independence history, most African nations have suffered under the oppression of various authoritarian regimes [9]. One-party systems during these decades spanning from the 1960s to the early 1990s, many African nations experienced periods dominated by authoritarian or military regimes. Adekanye explains that these eras were characterized by severe violations of democratic principles, including the basic human rights of citizens, adherence to the rule of law, and principles of equality. The continent faced profound challenges exacerbated by ineffective governance, overwhelming debt, and escalating poverty, which fueled cycles of ethnic strife, civil wars, and significant refugee migrations, among other critical crises [1, 7]. The study of Posner and Young shows that the euphoria of independence quickly diminished as its promise began to fade for instance, the republic of Benin, a small West African nation, saw at least 12 heads of state change within its initial decade of independence, each ousted in a coup d'état [17]. Only six years after gaining independence, Nigeria plunged into a relentless cycle of coups d'état and counter-coups, starting with the first on January 15, 1966. According to comparative research by Posner and Young, in a study involving 227 leaders across 46 sub-Saharan African countries, it was found that nearly 75% of African leaders who stepped down from power during the 1960s and 1970s did so involuntarily.

Leaders were ousted from power through coups, violent overthrows, or assassinations—signs of instability. In the 1980s, this trend decreased to just under 70 percent, with a shift towards leaders exiting due to natural causes, and by the 1990s, either voluntary resignation or electoral defeat became common outcomes.

Table 1 illustrates that many African nations have faced instability through military coups since gaining independence. These coups occurred throughout all regions but were most prevalent in West Africa, where they constituted 44.4 percent of African coup incidents. By 1985, military regimes governed 11 out of the number 16 West African countries [6]. The table exclusively lists successful coups, disregarding unsuccessful or aborted attempts, which also play a role in fostering political instability. For example, Nigeria faced multiple unsuccessful coup attempts that posed threats to its stability, with one of the most notable being led by Gideon Okar in April 1990, aiming to secede some northern states from Nigeria [12].

**Table 1:** Coups d'Etat in West Africa between 1958 and 2008

Region	Country	Year	Total
West Africa	Benin	1963, 1965 (2), 1967, 1969, 1972	6
	Burkina Faso	1980, 1982, 1983, 1987	4
	Cote-d'Ivoire	1999	1
	Gambia	1994	1
	Ghana	1966, 1972, 1998, 1981	4
	Guinea	1984, 2008	2
	Guinea-Bissau	1980, 2003	2
	Liberia	1980	1
	Mali	1968, 1991	2
	Niger	1976, 1996	2
	Nigeria	1966 (2), 1975, 1983, 1985, 1993	6
	Sierra Leone	1967, 1968, 1992, 1997	4
	Togo	1963, 1967, 2005	3

Adapted from Jeune Afrique 2516 (March 2009) and Souare (2006), as cited in Zounmenou (2009).

Table 2 includes both unsuccessful and successful coup attempts, each posing a threat to the stability of systems of politics. In addition to coups, civil wars have significantly contributed to instability levels in Africa. Countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Chad, Nigeria the Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, among others, have all experienced civil conflicts at various points. Nigeria, for example, faced a civil war from 1967 to 1970, sparked by the Igbo secessionist movement aiming to establish the independence of Biafra, which had devastating impacts on nation-building and development efforts [16]. In Sierra Leone, years of poor governance and corruption, coupled with a rebellion by marginalized groups, triggered a civil war that was exacerbated by the exploitation of natural resources [18, 9]. In the Republic of Liberia, the civil war resulted from poor governance and the ensuing power struggles among competing interests [14].

**Table 2:** The number of military coups in West Africa from 1955 to 2004

Rank	Countries	The Plots	A number of the Coups failed	The Successful Coup
1	Ghana	11	6	5
2	Sierra Leone	5	7	5
3	Benin	6	3	6
4	Nigeria	5	2	6
5	Burkina Faso	7	1	6
6	Togo	3	6	2
7	Mauritania	8	3	3
8	Liberia	11	3	1
9	Guinea	9	3	1
10	Niger	1	2	3
11	Guinea-Bissau	5	2	2
12	Cote-d'Ivoire	4	3	1
13	Mali	5	0	2
14	Gambia	2	2	1
15	Senegal	0	1	0

The source : [10].

West Africa's influence extended beyond coups to include leading the front in African civil wars. In 2000, it was not unexpected that over a third of African refugees and displaced individuals lived in West Africa, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2000:260, as cited in Edi 2006:18). In 1994, Côte d'Ivoire hosted 360,000 Liberian refugees, while Ghana and Sierra Leone each had 16,000, and Guinea had 398,000, with 1.1 million people internally displaced. That same year, Guinea hosted 155,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, Liberia had 120,000, and 700,000 were internally displaced. The US Committee for World Refugees noted in 2002 that nearly every West African nation was hosting refugees, mainly from neighboring countries [6]. West Africa has encountered multiple areas of conflict [19].

Africa has several institutional mechanisms in place to not allow unconstitutional changes of government.

However, what defines an unconstitutional change of government? According to the Declaration of Lomé, the framework for an OAU response to unconstitutional changes in government, adopted in July 2000, the assembly of heads of state and government outlined it as follows:

- i) Overthrow of a democratically elected government through a military coup;
- ii) A democratically elected government can be overthrown through the use of mercenaries;
- iii) Seizure of power from democratically elected governments by armed dissident groups and rebels;
- iv) Non-compliance of an incumbent government to transfer power to the winning party following free, fair, and scheduled elections [11, 10].

In January 2007, the scope was extended to encompass ACDEG, which is also known as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, which introduced the idea of manipulating constitutions and legal systems to prolong the tenure of current regimes (Article 25 of ACDEG 2007). This addition, addressing tenure prolongation, often referred to as the 3rd term agenda, responded to its growing popularity among African leaders. From 1990 to 2005, 18 African presidents completed two terms, becoming constitutionally ineligible for a 3rd term. Among them, nine resisted pursuing a third term, while the remaining nine attempted it. Of those, three succeeded and six failed [17]. Marshall and Cole explain that the repercussions of unconstitutional government changes are profound, undermining the progress of sustainable democracy and development across the continent. These changes signify a democratic shortfall and instability, which in turn obstruct foreign direct investment, economic expansion, and freedom [8]. Furthermore, Changes of government that are unconstitutional establish dictatorships, undermine democratic governance, prevent people from exercising their rights to form or bring change in their government and lead to severe human rights violations [11]. The African Union recognizes this situation, as outlined in the preamble of the Declaration of Lomé, highlighting that coup d'états have resulted in clear breaches of the fundamental principles of our Continental Organization and the United Nations. The AU emphasizes the importance of upholding principles of guiding effective governance, transparency, and human rights, while also advocating for the enhancement of democratic institutions (quoted in an AU report) [14]. Regional, sub-regional, and national instruments were devised to tackle these issues [7]. At the regional level, for instance, the Constitutive Act of the African Union lays down fundamental principles aimed at advancing democratic values, such as denouncing unconstitutional changes of government. Article 4 of the Act stipulates that the Union "shall operate by":

The sanctity of human life is respected, as are democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance; condemnation and rejection of impunity and political assassination, acts of terrorism, and subversive activities; and (p) Condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments. It has been quoted by Shola [14].

The Constitutive Act prohibits governments who gain power through unconstitutional means from participating in the Union's activities, as stipulated in Article 30. This principle is enforced by suspending any member-state that comes to power in a such manner, demonstrating the AU's steadfast commitment to it. Furthermore, the African Union establishes a deadline of six months maximum for reinstating an elected government after an unconstitutional change. The chairperson of the AU Commission also has the authority to activate the Eminent

Persons Contact Group (EPCG) to exert peer pressure as a mechanism. These measures are based on the principle of non-indifference, which contrasts with the traditional principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states. The legal foundation for non-indifference is outlined in the AU's Constitutive Act. While emphasizing member states' sovereign equality, respect for borders established at independence, and non-interference, Article 4(h) allows intervention in domestic affairs in cases of grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, or a real threat to restore peace and stability (AU 2003, emphasis added). Furthermore, Article 4(j) ensures member states' rights to request intervention to maintain peace and security. According to the Lomé Declaration, an unconstitutional change in government unequivocally represents a serious threat to legitimate order in all its forms.

## **1.2. Theoretical framework**

For a sound and thorough analysis of this great concept, two theories, 'Liberal Democratic Theory' and its sub-concepts and 'Elite Theory', will be used.

### **1.2.1 Liberal Democratic Theory**

This research is based on liberal democratic theory as the most appropriate framework for explaining elections and democratic consolidation. It interprets 'democratization' as the structural transition of government from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic political system, involving significant political changes towards greater democracy. The theory draws from the writings and works of scholars such as Francis Fukuyama, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Fareed Zakaria, and C.B. Macpherson, among others [5]. The development of liberal democracy was a result of the 18th century and the Enlightenment era in Europe. During the Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason)<sup>1</sup>, there was a significant struggle between the individuals and the Church, arguing that human interactions should be based on reason and the notions of equality and liberty rather than superstition or religious

---

<sup>1</sup> Tom Paine, one of the leading philosophers of the European Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, prioritized reason over revelation (Webb, 2006, p. 49, 50) .

orthodoxy [8, 19]. This period has undeniably shaped Western principles and philosophies since the 17th and 18th centuries [8]. The significance of this era is evident in how it embedded the principles of self-government, epitomizing individual rights and collective freedom [20]. Furthermore, the liberal ideals of the American Revolution, reflected in the writings of Mill and de Tocqueville, dealt with the importance of civil public and liberal institutions as the foundation for liberal democracy. De Tocqueville stated, "I hold it to be an impious and execrable maxim that, politically speaking, a people have a right to do whatsoever it pleases, and yet I have asserted that all authority originates in the will of the majority." Therefore, people are entitled to their liberties, as the essence of authority lies in the exercise of freedom is possible for both the majority and the minority. In the 19th century, the concept of liberal democracy expanded to include market ideology and trade liberalization. However, from a theoretical perspective, democracy focuses on the hegemony and the safeguarding of the rights of the people. Numerous studies have highlighted the necessity and legitimacy of liberal democracy as a



means for ensuring equal opportunities and as the most favored political system [18]. According to Plattner, liberal democracy is not about who holds power, but how that power is wielded. Essentially, it means that the government is limited in its use of power by the rule of law and/or the constitution, and ultimately by the rights and liberties of individuals. These rights, known as "fundamental human rights," originate from liberalism and are crucial to liberal democratic ideology [18]. Therefore, liberty is a key aspect of democracy. As Aristotle, cited in Mill, states, liberty is "the great end of every democracy," providing the right "to rule and to be ruled in turn." This liberty is typically manifested through fair, free, and competitive elections, ensuring that all adult men and women have the right and responsibility to vote and run for elective positions [17]. This suggests an inherent link between liberalism and democracy. Liberalism emphasizes individual rights, while democracy ensures their practice. Countries that regularly hold elections are more likely to be liberal than those that do not. Additionally, nations that safeguard their citizens' freedoms tend to hold elections and institutionalize other facets of liberal democracy, including the rule of law and constitutionalism, the separation of powers, political pluralism, a multiparty system, and political accountability, among others.

Cohen and Arato explain the relationship between politics and civil society, highlighting that while this relationship is defined, it is also receptive to the demands and contributions of civil society. They suggest that the polarization feared by many observers after 1989, which could result from an overly unified, overly mobilized, and 'anti-political' civil society, can be addressed by a 'turn to political society'. (Cohen & Arato, Linz, and Stepan 1996 and they put:

Such ties [between political and civil society, pb] would presuppose a programmatic openness of the political to the civil and a sufficient strengthening of the latter to allow it to function in institutionalized forms. What is needed, in other words, are programs that not only establish an ongoing process of political exchange with organizations and initiatives outside the party's political sphere but also strengthen civil society concerning the new economic society information. Only such a program could offer something genuinely new concerning the present models of Western politics, thereby transcending the bad choice of either economic liberalism and elite democracy or direct democratic fundamentalism [5].

This insight can be considered as a way to moderate the more radical concept of civil society, as articulated by dissidents like Havel, Konrad, and Michnik. Arato's dualistic interpretation itself represents a 'political turn' that alters the status of civil society and reinforces a liberal democratic view of modern polity. The risk is that civil society could be reduced to merely providing external support for liberal democratic politics, ultimately confined to the realm of representative, professional politics.

### ***1.2.2. Theory of Elite***

In addition to liberal democratic theory, this study employs democratic elite theory as a suitable framework for explaining the consolidation of democracy through elections. Elite theorists such as Pareto, Putnam, and Francis. have significantly contributed to this field [3]. The works of Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Francis mark a significant departure, leading to the development of a comprehensive theory on elites and democratic consolidation. This study diverges from the sociological perspective that views elite control and hegemony in

the political process through the perspective of the 'futility thesis' when conceptualizing "elites." This view considers elites as a relatively homogeneous and self-perpetuating social stratum that tends to dominate the political process [5, 3]. This study focuses on how this group exerts its control over power by marginalizing other groups and the resulting consequences. However, this dissertation will focus on political elites as individual actors with agency in the process of election. Political elites encompass the governing elites and other dominant and contending groups, including political, economic, ethnic, military, administrative, and religious groups, which play a paramount role in determining political and state control processes and outcomes. Thus, elites are not limited to the ruling elite but also include other groups vying for state and political control. In summary, elites consist of political leaders, industrialists, military officials, and religious leaders who fundamentally influence political outcomes [2]. The role played by these elite groups has significant implications for the institutionalization of democracy in many democratizing countries, especially in West Africa. Whether acting as individuals or in unison, elites, through their value systems and orientations, shape the way democracy is institutionalized. Consequently, I concentrate on elites as a group of political actors and examine how their attitudes, behaviors, and value systems influence democratic processes and outcomes. My understanding of elites is shaped by Burton, Gunther, and Higley, whose study on strengthening democratic institutions in Latin America and Southern Europe underscores the pivotal influence of political elites. According to these scholars, elites are defined as individuals capable of consistently and significantly impacting national political developments. The influence of elites on national political outcomes stems from their capacity to manipulate and impose their will, significantly shaping processes, outcomes, rewards, policy choices, and the value of the political process [8].

Thus, the theory of elites can be situated within the broader context of expanding research on elections and democratic values. In these studies, some scholars dealt with the role of elites in the consolidation of democracy, while also emphasizing that structural and institutional factors are more significant than the role of elites, in their comprehensive national study, emphasized the importance of institutions and socio-economic factors in explaining democratic consolidation [4, 2]. Although Przeworski discusses both structure and agency, asserting that democracy is "when all interests are subjected to fair political competition," a major flaw in these studies is that they downplay the role of elites. Elites are crucial actors whose behavior and value systems can significantly influence institutions and political outcomes. When political elites fail to adhere to institutional rules and procedures, institutions become vulnerable and cannot moderate political interactions.

Given this context, the role of elites in the strengthening of democracy should be a key factor among the indicators determining the meaningfulness and stability of democracy. Carothers supports this view, arguing that the institutionalization and consolidation of democracy rely heavily on the decisions, behaviors, and actions of political elites. However, a notable weakness in this argument is that elite decisions and behaviors do not always shape democracy. Additionally, evidence from many third-wave democracies indicates that political elites often undermine democratic consolidation rather than support it [1]. Bratton and Van de Walle stated that 'democracy is not possible without democrats,' emphasizing that the value system and attitudes of elites are fundamental to nurturing democracy. Similarly, Diamond argues that political elites play a serious role in the stability and consolidation of democracy, not necessarily because of their occasional negative behavior, but primarily due to their commitment to democratic principles. Francis also views elites as vital players in the

viability and maintenance of democracy, particularly when they can reach a consensus on issues of common democratic interest. Existing literature on elites presents two key, analogous arguments regarding how political elites either support or undermine democratic stability [5, 6]. These arguments focus on the structural integration and value consensus among political elites about democratic institutionalization and consolidation. Structural integration refers to the inclusiveness of formal and informal networks of communication and influence among elite individuals, groups, and factions. Value consensus refers to the agreement among elites on formal and informal rules, codes of political conduct, and the legitimacy of existing political institutions. Burton and Higley categorized these perspectives into three significant types of national elites.

This criticism is particularly relevant to the leadership issues in West Africa, where the elites often overlook the aftermath of coups. Theories addressing these issues have found validation in the West African experience, which highlights the challenges faced by the population. When viewed through the lenses of liberal democratic theory and elite theory, West Africa's situation lends credibility to these theories beyond mere criticism. This is a primary reason for adopting these theories as the theoretical framework for studying the influence of political systems in African countries. These theories resonate with the 'pessimist leaders' perspective. Until political transitions in West Africa are fully completed, an escape from current issues seems unlikely, indicating a persistent state of entrapment. Even after these transitions, the suffering of the population will not immediately stabilize due to inherent tendencies for population problems to escalate. These issues are worsened by the misuse of public funds, pervasive corruption, impunity as a governing strategy, and chaotic state administration. These factors have led countries such as Guinea into severe economic crises, tragically affecting the majority of its population. Additionally, the military has observed a lack of political representation commitment from the purportedly inclusive government to enact essential reforms that could address the profound and persistent crisis affecting all aspects of the nation [12, 16].

### ***1.3. Methodology***

This study utilized descriptive statistical analysis to compare variables between Africa and other regions and countries. Additionally, dynamic panel data models were employed for empirical analysis. The study includes data from various sources, such as the Freedom House Status of West African Countries, highlighting Political Freedom Scores and Civil Liberties Scores for 2006, the Polity Index Scores of West African Countries for 2006, and the Freedom House Status of West African Countries, detailing Political Rights Scores and Civil Liberties Scores for 2009.

#### ***1.3.1. Background and Political Context of West African Nations***

The map provided illustrates the geographic boundaries and positioning of West Africa within the African continent. The Atlantic Ocean borders this region to the south and west, and the Sahara Desert to the north. According to the United Nations, West Africa spans 5 million square kilometers and encompasses 16 countries [11]. With a population of approximately 300 million, the West African sub-region represents one-third of Africa's population, equating to around 4.6 percent of the global population.

## The map of West Africa



Figure 1

**Source:** <http://www.google.co.za> (Accessed 23 April 2015)-Abiodun Surajudeen Fatai in *Election and Democratic Consolidation in West Africa: Comparative Study of Nigeria and Senegal, 1999-2012* (p, 5).

### A-Data

The data utilized in this study were sourced from the World Development Indicators database, the World Report 2006 (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2006), and the African Elections Database Country Reports (<http://africanelection.tripod.com/>), accessed on May 10, 2014.

The table above shows that 5 out of 16 countries (Benin, Mali, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Senegal) made positive strides away from autocracy after their second and third sets of elections, being classified as 'free' due to their fair elections and the institutionalization of freedoms. The improvement in these countries' freedom scores indicates the democratic quality of their elections and the establishment of political and civil liberties. However, 7 of the 16 countries in the sub-region were classified as 'partly free,' and the remaining 4 as 'not free,' reflecting a decline in the quality of elections and a lack of institutionalization of civil and political liberties. As Freedom House concluded in 2006 regarding the democratic prospects of West Africa, "There are democratic improvements, but the negatives outweigh the positives" revealed in Freedom House [20]. The extent to which freedom is declining highlights the frequent violations of democratic principles and constitutionalism, which partly accounts for the resurgence of military involvement in politics in some West African countries. As Olagbayi argues, "the characteristics of military rule during the post-third wave democratization in Africa have included the impunity and recklessness of the emerging political elite, who govern as if the constitution does not exist." This attitude leads new incumbents to cling to power by staging sham elections that undermine the essence of democracy. Consequently, there has been an increasing frequency of military interventions in the democratization processes in West Africa following the Cold War [15].

**Table 4:** The Freedom House Status of West African Countries, Showing Political Freedom Scores and Civil Liberties Scores for 2006

Countries	Political Right	Civil Liberty	Freedom Status	Democratic Status
Benin	2	2	Free	Consolidating
Burkina Faso	5	3	Not Free	Hybrid
Cape-Verde	1	1	Free	Consolidating
Cote- d'Ivoire	6	6	Not Free	Autocracy
Gambia	5	4	Partially Free	Hybrid
Ghana	1	1	Free	Consolidating
Guinea	6	5	Not Free	Autocracy
Guinea-Bissau	3	4	Partially Free	Hybrid
Liberia	4	4	Partially Free	Hybrid
Mali	2	2	Free	Consolidating
Mauritania	6	6	Not Free	Autocracy
Niger	3	3	Partially Free	Hybrid
Nigeria	4	4	Partially Free	Hybrid
Senegal	2	3	Free	Consolidating
Sierra Leone	4	3	Partially Free	Hybrid
Togo	6	5	Not Free	Autocracy

Source: Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World Report', 2006 (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2006) and African Elections Database Country Reports (<http://africanelection.tripod.com/>) accessed on October 5, 2014.

#### *B – Results and Discussion*

The table presents the key results of the Difference panel data analysis, with outcomes shown for one-step, two-

step, and two-step with robust standard errors. The analysis indicates democratic improvements in the region, where seven countries are democratic, four are open anocracies, and five are closed anocracies. Anocratic characteristics arise when a regime rules with authoritarian tendencies or violates the constitution. In such regimes, incumbent executive presidents exercise unrestrained authority and deliberately undermine democracy through electoral authoritarianism. Consequently, elections are neither free nor fair, and the competitiveness of the process is often lost. This tendency can lead to military rule, justified by claims of restoring societal order and promising future democratization, despite military values being antithetical to democratic governance. This anti-democratic behavior by political elites has fostered frequent military interventions in politics since the post-1990 democratization period. The weak democratization processes in Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Niger highlight how the military has subverted democratization and hindered democratic consolidation in West Africa. Despite military disengagement from politics in the 1990s, the re-emergence of military coups in Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Niger, and Mali shows that military institutions have not fully withdrawn from the democratic arena. For example, the adoption of multiparty elections in Mauritania...

## **2. Conclusion and policy recommendations**

Various types of unconstitutional changes in governments pose significant threats to the stability and consolidation of democracy in Africa. Odinkalu contends that unconstitutional shifts of government foster dictatorships, undermine democratic governance, prevent people from exercising their rights to form or alter their government and result in human rights violations. When the international community and donors impose sanctions on an unconstitutional government, it is the ordinary people who suffer the most, rather than the power elites. In such situations, both strategic and non-strategic aspects of national security, especially human security, are compromised, creating conditions detrimental to the stability and consolidation of democracy [11]. In the final analysis, the internal dynamics within various African countries and the failure of sub-regional and regional governance structures to adequately respond by their norms and principles underscore the phenomenon of unconstitutional changes of government. However, one must also take into consideration the role or complicity of external hegemonic interests. This complicity is often caused by colonial and post-colonial history, particularly among former colonial powers who want to safeguard long-term economic or strategic interests. It may also result from economic, strategic, and energy security calculations by the world's established and emerging powers keen to maintain beneficial relations. Additionally, neighboring states with a stake in the outcome of elections or post-election violence can act as external actors. Adverse external interference in countries experiencing unconstitutional power changes, or the crises that follow, undermines the emergence of autonomous state structures and institutions that can foster indigenous democratic governance structures and processes. In other words, understanding the challenges of democracy in West Africa is greatly enhanced by carefully examining both internal and external factors and the interplay between them. Such an understanding is crucial as the continent and its people confront the complex challenges of democratic development and consolidation.

## **References**

- [1] Adejumobi, S. (2004). Conflict and peace building in West Africa : The role of civil society and the

- African Union: Analysis. Conflict, Security & Development, 4(1), 59-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1467880042000206868>
- [2] Adekanye, J. 'Bayo. (1995). Structural Adjustment, Democratization and Rising Ethnic Tensions in Africa. *Development and Change*, 26(2), 355-374. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1995.tb00556.x>
- [3] Bamidele, O., & Ayodele, B. (2018). In the Service of Democratic Governance : The African Union Normative Framework on Unconstitutional Change of Government and ECOWAS Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy in the Post-Arab Spring. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(1), 132-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909616666104>
- [4] Berthélemy, J.-C., Kauffmann, C., Renard, L., & Wegner, L. (2002). Political instability, political regimes and economic performance in African countries. Unpublished Paper Prepared for African Development Bank, African Economic Outlook, Paris. <https://www.academia.edu/download/37969432/Kauffmann-csae2002.pdf>
- [5] Diamond, L. (2003). Can the whole world become democratic? Democracy, development, and international policies. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bv4b2w1>
- [6] Edi, E. (2006). Pan West Africanism and Political Instability in West Africa. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1(3), 7-31. <http://jpanafrican.org/docs/vol1no1/PanWestAfricanismandPoliticalInstabilityinWestAfrica.pdf>
- [7] Gumedze, S. (2011). The Peace and Security Council of the African Union : Its relationship with the United Nations, African Union and sub-regional mechanisms [PhD Thesis, Åbo Akademis förlag-Åbo Akademi University Press]. <https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/72472>
- [8] Marshall, M. G., & Cole, B. R. (2017). State failure : The problem of complex societal-systems. In *States and Peoples in Conflict* (p. 184-207). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315623634-11/state-failure-monty-marshall-benjamin-cole>
- [9] Mbaku, J. M., & Saxena, S. C. (2004). Africa at the Crossroads : Between regionalism and globalization. (No Title). <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130282272597782400>
- [10] McGowan, P. J. (2003). African military coups d'état, 1956–2001 : Frequency, trends and distribution. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41(3), 339-370.
- [11] Odinkalu, C. A. (2008). Concerning Kenya : The current AU position on unconstitutional changes in government. Open Society Justice Initiative (January 2008) available at< [www. afrimap. org/english/images/paper/AU&UnconstitutionalChangesinGovt\\_Odinkalu\\_Jan08. pdf](http://www.afri-map.org/english/images/paper/AU&UnconstitutionalChangesinGovt_Odinkalu_Jan08.pdf). [https://www.academia.edu/download/65011924/AUUnconstitutionalChangesinGovt\\_Odinkalu\\_Jan08.p df](https://www.academia.edu/download/65011924/AUUnconstitutionalChangesinGovt_Odinkalu_Jan08.pdf)
- [12] Ojo, E. O. (2006). Taming the Monster : Demilitarization and Democratization in Nigeria. *Armed Forces & Society*, 32(2), 254-272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05277905>
- [13] Omotola, J. S. (2006). Post-election reconstruction in Liberia : The challenges of security sector reform. *conflict trends*, 2006(2), 42-46. <https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC15912>
- [14] Omotola, J. S. (2011). Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa. What Implications for Democratic Consolidation? Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. <https://www.diva->

portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:478511

- [15] Osaghae, E. E. (1995). Amoral politics and democratic instability in Africa : A theoretical exploration. *Nordic journal of African studies*, 4(1), 17-17. <https://njas.fi/njas/article/view/684>
- [16] Osaghae, E. E., Onwudiwe, E., & Suberu, R. T. (2002). *The Nigerian civil war and its aftermath*. John Archers (Publishers).
- [17] Posner, D. N., & Young, D. J. (2007). The institutionalization of political power in Africa. *Journal of democracy*, 18(3), 126-140. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/218819/summary>
- [18] Richards, P. (1998). *Fighting for the rain forest : War, youth & resources in Sierra Leone*.  
<https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/full/10.5555/19980606307>
- [19] Series, O. A. C. M. (s. d.). *West Africa's Trouble Spots and the Imperative for Peace-Building*. Consulté 4 juillet 2024, à l'adresse <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1365097/west-africas-trouble-spots-and-the-imperative-for-peace-building/1979223/>
- [20] Tollefson, J. W. (1981). Alternative paradigms in the sociology of language. *WORD*, 32(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1981.11435699>