

DEMOCRATIC DECAY IN AFRICA: REFLECTION ON THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE AND POOR LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a qualitative analysis of democratic decay in Africa with a specific focus on governance systems and leadership. The study combines an exploratory and a case study approach taking an in-depth analysis of drivers of democracy decline in, Gabon, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Four theories have been utilized to uncover factors, (political, economic, institutional, and international influences), that have played a role in strengthening authoritarian regimes in these countries. The study has obtained data from government websites and international organizations' reports, (United Nations and United States Department of States), Freedom House Index, Civil societies publications, Civic Society participation Index, world development indicators, and country-specific credited publications. This paper concludes that a complex combination of political, economic, institutional, and international factors bear responsibility for the decline of democracy. Authoritarianism has flourished politically due to the established dominance of ruling regimes, feeble opposition parties, and constrained democratic institutions. Moreover, democratic governance and accountability have been weakened by income disparity, corruption, and reliance on natural resources.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Africa's modern states are built on top of governance systems imposed by colonialism. Though the elites in some African countries tried to effectuate this throughout the independence era, all they managed to do was to solidify their interests. Today, the kind of leadership and the style of government in place in the African continent determine issues of constitutionalism, good governance, and democracy (Fye, 2015). leadership in Africa has struggled to advance pro-people policies that meet the needs of the masses despite the continent's colonial past and as a result, has contributed to the decline in democracy.

Regimes that have a weak and deteriorating rule of law are more likely to regress democratically, permitting ambitious leaders to stifle political competition (Fombad & Steytler, 2019). However, other external factors have also played a significant role, in creating shared economic and social strains, removing barriers, and lowering the risks that autocrats encounter when initiating and accelerating the transition to authoritarianism (Chikerema, 2013). In this regard, the Freedom House index has documented a notable decline in civil freedoms, political rights, and the general standard of democracy in Africa. The index report shows that the majority of the countries that were previously classified as "partly free" have fallen back to the "not free" category, underlining a key democratic pattern change. This is frequently the outcome of governments reacting to rising electoral competition by restricting opposition

parties and important civil society organizations, and hybrid regimes utilizing counterterrorism legislation to stifle democratic spaces (Anders, 2023).

In terms of progressive and visionary leadership, Africa's leadership deficit is a matter of concern. In Africa, beliefs on political leadership range from the legalization of the state to the distribution of patrimony, the resuscitation of elites, and the utilization of state resources and authority to fortify political and economic dominance. African nations and their leaders have monopolized organized violence and used domestic sovereignty as a means of gaining total authority, customizing state functions, and maintaining control over them (Sihanya, 2018).

1.1 Democratic Decline in Africa

There are currently fewer democracies in Africa than there were twenty years ago, an indication that the democratic decline is a reality. Notably, West Africa, which was formerly praised for being a pioneer region, has seen a significant regression owing to the military takeover of Mali and the significant controversy surrounding the reelection campaigns of the incumbent presidents of Guinea Conakry and Côte d'Ivoire (Akinyetun, 2022). With the three longest-serving presidents in the world—Equatorial Guinea (41 years), Cameroon (38 years), and Congo-Brazzaville (38 years)—the Central Africa subregion continues to have the largest concentration of autocratic regimes (Diamond, 2015). In addition, persistently suppressing political opposition and civil society activists in Zimbabwe and Tanzania since 2016, are concerning trends that have a negative impact on citizen involvement in politics and governance in Southern and East Africa and highlight the necessity of much-needed changes

Moreover, early hopes of expanding political space and rights in Ethiopia following the election of the current government in 2018 are now in jeopardy in the Horn of Africa as journalists and human rights activists face harassment and detention, and the nation finds it difficult to stay united and reach an agreement on the legal framework and the date of national elections (Fish et al., 2018).

Historically, after the third wave of democratization swept over Africa in the 1990s, many African states underwent a democratic transition. Democratic doctrines like; Multiparty elections, acceptance of opposition, freedom of the media, human rights protection, and adherence to the law have all come to define these democratic states (Lancaster, 1995). However, current trends indicate that democratic gains are short-term in many countries. This is demonstrated by the increase in cyber authoritarianism, military takeovers, constitutional coups, and acts of terrorism on the continent, which point to a wave of autocracy and democratic regression (Mattes, 2019). It is appropriate to inquire about the status of democracy in Africa as well as the patterns and behaviors that have contributed to a general downturn in the democratic model. This is not unrelated to the continent's general wave of poor governance, violent election contests, internet suppression, and human rights violations as is the argument of this paper (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008).

1.2 Systems of Government as a Cause

All types of political regimes identify themselves as democracies, especially in Africa, yet their actions and statements frequently diverge significantly from one another (Fish et al., 2018). Political leaders such as Mugabe and other deceased nationalistic leaders gave freedom to

Africa and were proud to be patriots and democratic leaders. By emphasizing the notions of sovereignty, independence, self-determination, and patriotism only for their benefit, they manipulated their citizens (Marinov & Goemans, 2013). During African states' brief era of independence, nearly all African states had at some point faced political bloodshed and authoritarianism and many continue to live under autocratic states. Moreover, Civil organizations in these countries have reported many claims of abuses of human rights against these states.

According to Shah (2016), there have been instances where government personnel have carried out horrifying assaults and killings of helpless and innocent individuals. The fact that competitive and open political systems have endured in several countries is astounding. In reality, the democratic failures of the past ten to fifteen years were a result of the deterioration of the authoritarian regimes that had existed from the start (Diamond, 2015). Marinov & Goemans, (2013) argue that even if European colonization is no longer in effect, the effects of it can still be seen today. For instance, Africans had little time to prepare for independence, and the new elite brought in foreign systems with them.

According to Fish et al. (2018), Africans inherited state bodies like; the army, police, and bureaucracy that were established through coercive techniques and centralized political and economic controls. This resulted in the establishment of a political culture based on ethnicity and authoritarian patterns of governance. Controlling the state and its resources became the primary purpose of political contestation. It is equally true that: Africa is, however, generally underdeveloped, where political violence, intolerance, repression, and dictatorships are common (Fukuyama, 2018).

1.4 Poor Leadership as A Cause

Political leadership styles greatly influence the course, character, and nature of electoral politics and democracy. Power-hungry leaders who have redefined followership behavior have ruled Africa for a long time. Consequently, there exists a disconnect between leadership and followership that has affected democracy negatively. As a result, African democracy functions contrary to its tenets. It has been noted that most elections in Africa are associated with a lack of integrity and subtle violence (Chikerema, 2013).

Moreover, African leaders have introduced repressive legislation much worse than that of colonial legislation, which robs the media, the judiciary, and civic society of professional and civilized independence (Gershman, 2015). The army, police, and secret services have become subservient institutions and members of the ruling political parties and turn a blind eye to the notorious transgressions by anyone from the establishment. The consequence is predictable and includes thugocracy, anarchy, rape, murder, disappearances, massive hunger, disease, and poverty among the masses who are not allowed to question any decision made by the ruling elite (Cheeseman & Smith, 2019).

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study considers four theories to understand the challenges faced by African Countries in their pursuit of democratic governance.

Political Culture Theory: This theory, which was developed by Gabriel and Sidney (1963), asserts that a society's common values, beliefs, and attitudes have a substantial impact on its political structures and procedures. It provides a prism through which to see the difficulties encountered by numerous countries in establishing democratic governance (Almond, 1983). Africa's diverse cultural landscapes have been shaped by centuries of colonialism, pre-colonial traditions, and post-independence experiences. These factors have combined to create a diverse tapestry of political cultures, some of which are less supportive of democratic ideals. In addition, imposing democratic institutions in the Western manner on nations with deeply ingrained traditional governing systems frequently resulted in a mismatch between the formal political structures and the underlying cultural norms.

It is argued that democratic norms and practices have eroded as a result of this incongruence (Ney & Molenaars, 2012). Additionally, there is a clientelism culture that promotes patronage networks and undermines democratic institutions by exchanging cash incentives for political support. Furthermore, political rivalry is frequently framed along ethnic and religious lines due to the predominance of these divisions. This results in a decline in cooperation and trust, which makes it challenging to forge the consensus and compromise that are necessary for democratic governance.

Institutional theory: The fundamental tenet of institutional theory is path dependency, which postulates that past decisions and institutional advancements limit available growth possibilities in the future. After being colonized, many African republics retained the weak and frequently exploitative institutions that had been established by their invaders and It has been challenging to abolish these legacy organizations because of their centralization, bureaucracy, and emphasis on resource extraction (Pillay & Kluvers, 2014).

Furthermore, the post-independence era witnessed the creation of political institutions that were frequently intended to consolidate power in the hands of a select few. Certain institutions, including presidential regimes, have facilitated corruption, reduced political participation, and undermined the system of checks and balances. Additionally, it is common for informal institutions like clientelism and patronage networks to coexist with formal institutions (Carolina, 2017). These unofficial agreements put personal ties and allegiance ahead of merit and the general good, undermining the rule of law and democratic ideals. Furthermore, institutions grow soiled, dishonest, and insensitive to the demands of the populace with time. This happens when the public's trust in the government is weakened by this degradation, which also provides room for authoritarian reversals.

Economic theory; Economic theory: According to this theory, the fall of democracy in Africa is mostly attributed to economic issues. An ongoing challenge in many African nations is economic inequality. Rich-poor disparities have the potential to weaken social cohesiveness, raise crime rates, and exacerbate political unrest. As a result, a large section of the populace may be more inclined to accept authoritarian or populist leaders who pledge to allay their complaints if they feel left out and excluded from the advantages of economic growth. Furthermore, there exists the notion of a "resource curse" in Africa (Blaug, 1997). Although these resources ought to be beneficial, they frequently result in rent-seeking behavior, corruption, and poor governance. Wealth concentration in a few hands has the potential to exacerbate social unrest and threaten democratic institutions. This theory acknowledges that

the economies of the continent are still dependent on the global North for raw material supplies, which prevents them from becoming more industrialized and diversified. Niehans (1994) argues that this economic reliance has encouraged autocratic and corrupt regimes that serve the interests of global capitalist elites.

International Influence Theory: This theory holds that external causes are contributing to the erosion of democratic principles. International influence theory states that certain actors continue to propagate beliefs hostile to democracy outside of Africa (Neill et al., 2004). Beginning with the Cold War era, when the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were the two superpowers, they frequently backed authoritarian governments that sided with their respective ideological blocs. These regimes were bolstered by this backing, which frequently took the form of financial and military help, undermining the growth of democratic institutions. Hast (2016) asserts that outside forces have maintained a substantial influence in African politics long after the end of the Cold War. There have been ongoing political and economic relations between former colonial countries and their former colonies, a part of which deals with foreign aid. While development aid can come from these relationships, they have opened doors for foreign countries to meddle in the domestic affairs of African countries. Political dynamics in Africa have also changed because of the emergence of regional powers like China and Russia. These nations have become more and more involved in the continent, offering financial support and ideological backing to administrations that lack a solid democratic foundation (O'Neill and colleagues, 2004).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

To explain the declining democracy in Africa using economic, institutional, international influence, and political culture theories, this study made use of explanatory and case study research designs.

3.1 Sources of data, method, and instruments of data analysis.

This study obtained data from secondary sources. The researcher scrutinized government websites and international organizations' reports, (United Nations and United States Department of States), Freedom House Index, Civil societies publications, Civic society participation Index, world development indicators, and country-specific credited publications. The case study thematic areas of focus have been drawn from the study theories and their measures have been determined as used in past research studies.

3.2 Scope of the study and its justification

This study's case study approach examines 3 countries; Niger, Gabon, and Burkin-Faso to explore the democratic decay that has been experienced in Africa. Given that Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso have different but related political decline histories, using them as case examples for this research makes strategic significance. Together, these countries represent the variety of difficulties that threaten democratic government throughout the continent. A classic case of dynastic control with electoral manipulation accelerating the decline of democracy is Gabon. Long-term Bongo family domination combined with disputed election results has steadily undermined democratic institutions and suppressed political opposition. Moreover, the perils of unbridled presidential power and the deterioration of democratic standards are brought

to light by this scenario. Conversely, Niger is an excellent example of how vulnerable emerging democracies are to threats to their security.

The recent coup was the result of military involvement made possible by the nation's struggle with the Islamist insurgency. This example highlights the intricate relationship between security concerns and democratic reversals. Finally, Burkina Faso provides a striking example of the domino effects of poor government. The current climate has been favorable for military takeovers due to a confluence of factors including political instability, security challenges, and economic hardship.

This instance highlights how crucial it is to solve underlying socioeconomic issues to keep democracies from collapsing. Through the analysis of these three nations, the research provides important new understandings of the various elements causing democratic decline in Africa. By comparing and contrasting their experiences, it is possible to gain a more nuanced view of the obstacles that democratic consolidation on the continent faces.

Table 1.1 Comparative Analysis of Niger, Gabon, and Burkina Faso,

Theories	Theory variables	Measures	Niger	Gabon	Burkina-Faso
Political Culture Theory	Ethnic and religious divisions	Ethnic and Religious conflicts	There is a presence of religious extremism and ethnic tensions (Mueller, 2016),	Presence of ethnic tensions during the election period (United States Department of State, 2021)	There is rise of extremist violence (Huon, 2020)
	Number of Coups in the last 10 years		2 Coups	1 coup	3 coups
Institutional Theory	State of Society	Freedom House Index (2023)	4	5	5
	Check and Balances	Separation of power	The unconstitutional takeover of power has put in question the separation of power and its effectiveness	The executive arm of the government has significant control over the judicial branch(United Nations, 2023b)	The executive arm of the government has significant control over other branches

<p>Rule of law</p> <p>Economic Theory</p> <p>Corruption</p> <p>Unemployment</p>	<p>Freedom statuses (Freedom House Index)</p> <p>Order and Security</p> <p>Control of corruption estimate (World Bank data 2022)</p> <p>% of the total Labour force (2023)</p>	<p>Partly Free</p> <p>There are ongoing battles against Islamist armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2023)</p> <p>-0.586</p> <p>0.6%</p>	<p>Not Free</p> <p>There have been credible reports of abuse by security forces; including unlawful killings and torture (United States Department of State, 2023b)</p> <p>-1.048</p> <p>20.4%</p>	<p>Not Free</p> <p>The country has experienced numerous attacks by groups like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.(United States Department of State, 2023a)</p> <p>-0.084</p> <p>5.3%</p>
<p>International Influence Theory</p> <p>Geopolitical Military occupation</p>	<p>Countries with military bases</p>	<p>United States, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, and Russia (Bailie, 2018)</p>	<p>France</p>	<p>France and the United States (Anyadike, 2017)</p>
<p>Global economic relations</p>	<p>Economic sanctions</p>	<p>ECOWAS(Economic Community of West African States) Imposed Travel and economic sanctions (Asadu, 2024)</p>	<p>African Development Bank imposed financial sanctions United States suspended Gabon's participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act Trade Program</p>	<p>ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States)Imposed Travel and economic sanctions European Union imposed restrictive measures in response to political instability</p>

(Orufa, 2023)

3.3 Political Culture and Democracy

African democratic systems have been infiltrated by a military mindset that has opened the door for coup plotters. Specifically, in recent years, the coup d'état has emerged as the default method for removing elderly presidents from office as shown in Table 1.1, that Niger has had two coups, Gabon has had one, and Burkina Faso has had three coups (Mueller, 2016). Mahdi et al. (2023) contend that among Africa's nascent democracies, coups have been a flattering default political approach. This is in line with Edwards (2012) who described these strategies as "politics as the continuation of war."

African politics has been shaped partly by the colonial nature of most states in Africa. Young (2004) noted that in certain instances, liberation fighters placed their trust in the same colonial-era government institutions, which have continued to politically destabilize African nations. These institutions flourish by fomenting conflict between various interest groups and having access to natural resources (Thies, 2004). Even while democracy has been seen as a global trend, particularly in the post-Cold War era (Munroe, 1997), coups have been the most popular method of political change in Africa due to the continent's political actors' unwavering thirst for power. Numerous factors have impacted the rise in coup attempts, including the adoption of democracies in unstable environments and the growing use of pseudo-elections as a means of transferring power. First off, Marinov & Goemans (2013) contend that although coups occur primarily in authoritarian nations, there has been a rise in coup attempts in democracies since the year 2000.

According to Bennett et al. (2021), this demonstrates how the purpose of coups has changed from attempting to overthrow authoritarian regimes to overthrowing those who seek to consolidate power in "democracies" through constitutional coup de tat or those who seek to do away with tenure restrictions through constitutional amendments. Elamin & Elamin (2023) argue that the military's declaration of its position as the last arbiter of security and stability is what unites the coups in Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso. These interventions weaken the basis of the rule of law and the tenets of democratic governance by evading constitutional procedures and assuming power. This is so despite Mahdi et al.'s (2023) research that has demonstrated that a military coup frequently results in violations of human rights, corruption, and a reduction in public liberties.

Furthermore, research conducted by Hansen (2024) on countries in West Africa found that coups foster an atmosphere of unpredictability and instability that deters investment, impedes economic growth, and heightens social tensions. Malick, (2023) further observed that these coups cause democratic institutions to deteriorate and the military to hold a disproportionate amount of power, which fosters authoritarianism and the repression of opposition.

This notion is advanced by Opalo (2024) who asserts that political factors act to fuel a downward spiral of democratic collapse, with far-reaching effects on the impacted nations and the region at large.

3.4 International Influence and Democracy

Table 1.1 above provides a snapshot of how international influence has been exercised in Niger, Gabon, and Burkina Faso. The country of Niger hosts six foreign military bases, Gabon hosts one, and Burkina Faso two from France and the United States. According to Ryan, (2016) foreign military bases act as a key contributor to African countries' instability. It is crucial to look at these countries' historical backdrop, which is characterized by colonial legacies and times of relative stability, to fully comprehend the impact of these variables. Shah (2016) advances the view that the construction of foreign military bases in these nations has weakened national sovereignty and increased already-existing tensions. These bases, which are usually presented as counter-terrorism measures, have often been the source of local conflict. Their presence is most times seen as a kind of neocolonialism, fostering anti-Western beliefs and providing an environment that is conducive to the spread of radical ideologies. Additionally, these military bases have become targets for attacks, drawing these nations into conflicts that do not directly concern them.

According to Macmillan (2002), the effects of overseas bases extend beyond the realm of politics. The host countries bear substantial financial costs as a result of foreign military installations. Resources for the infrastructure needed to sustain these bases are taken away from vital public services like healthcare, education, and economic growth. Furthermore, because foreign troops are vying for labor and resources, their presence might negatively impact local economies. The nation becomes even more unstable as a result of the growing discontent among the populace brought on by this economic hardship.

The exercise of foreign influence has also been possible through sanctions imposed by regional institutions like the Africa Development Bank and ECOWAS, as well as international authorities. Peksen & Drury (2010) assert that these penalties exacerbate the impacted nations' economic conditions. Economic development and progress are hampered by these sanctions, which impose restrictions on financial, trade, and investment activities. The economic hardship that follows causes unemployment, poverty, and social unrest. Furthermore, Stephen (2009) shows that penalties usually have a disproportionately negative impact on the most disadvantaged people, aggravating inequality and setting the stage for extremist organizations to take advantage of them.

A humanitarian crisis has been brought on in these countries by the combined effects of foreign military outposts and Western economic sanctions. Along with economic hardship, the disruption of vital services has resulted in food shortages, displacement, and a reduction in public health. According to Weiss (2005), these circumstances foster the growth of illness, starvation, and conflict. A vicious cycle of deterioration is created when the hardship and instability that follow further undermine the state's ability to deliver essential services.

The legitimacy and efficacy of the administrations in Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso have been undermined by the difficulties presented by foreign military outposts and economic sanctions. Governance institutions deteriorate, corruption rises, and the rule of law erodes as these countries attempt to deal with the fallout from these external pressures. As a result, there is a power vacuum that is abused by radical and criminal groups, further dividing the nation.

3.5 Institutions and Democracy Decay

In Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso, weak and corrupt institutions have been instrumental in the decline of democracy. These institutions, including the judiciary, electoral commissions, and anti-corruption bodies, have often been manipulated by ruling elites to maintain power, leading to a loss of public trust and confidence in democratic processes (Cheeseman, 2018). Table 1.1 shows a comparison of the state of civil society, checks and balances, and Rule of law among the three countries. Utilizing the freedom house Index year 2023, Niger, Gabon, and Burkina Faso recorded 4, 5, and 5 points respectively. These scores suggest that civil freedoms are severely restricted. The rights of citizens to personal autonomy, association, and expression are severely restricted. This index's civil liberties score quantifies the degree of freedoms including association, expression, the rule of law, and individual liberty. Chart 1.1 below, which examines the last ten years, indicates that Niger and Gabon have consistently recorded the same results from 2014 to 2023, suggesting that the government has consistently restricted human rights. Conversely, Burkina Faso exhibits a consistent rise in the enforcement of civil liberties, rising from 3 in 2014 to 5 points in 2023.

Chart 1.1 Civic Liberties for the past 10 years

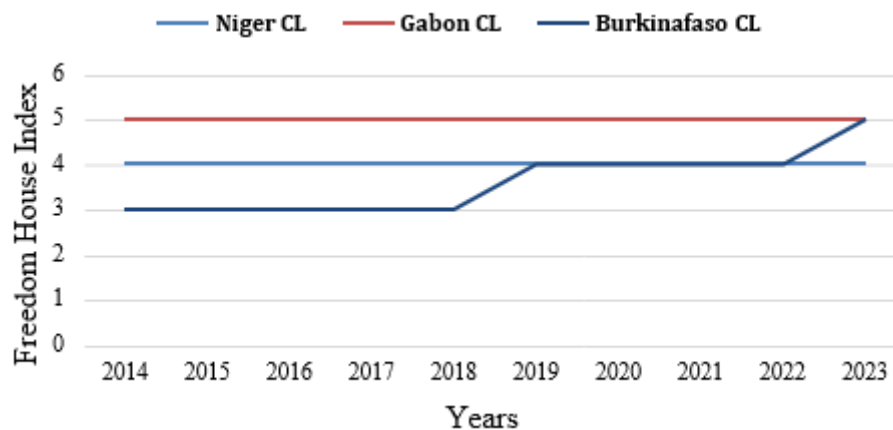
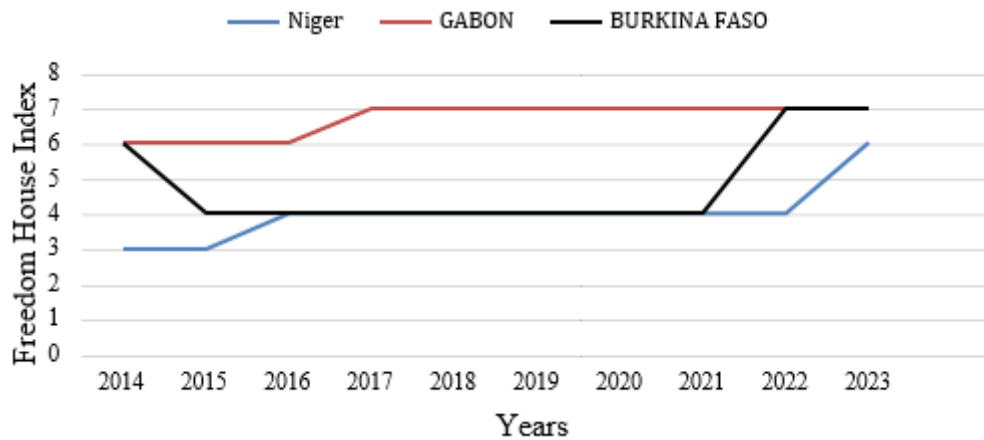


Chart 1.2 below illustrates examples that are very comparable to those that have been reported concerning political rights. Each of the three nations has recorded a decline in their adherence to preserving political rights. Over the years, Niger, Gabon, and Burkina Faso have struggled with severe restrictions on their political rights (Englebert, 2019). The consolidation of power in the hands of a select few, frequently by unscrupulous means, is a recurrent problem that has impeded political pluralism and limited citizens' capacity to engage in meaningful government. The three nations have all shown a decline in their adherence to protecting political rights. Notably, election procedures in Niger and Burkina Faso have been tainted by anomalies, and opposition parties have had difficulty gaining entrance to the political arena. In a similar vein, the Bongo family has controlled Gabon's politics for many years, suppressing dissent and limiting political competition. Even with regular elections, civil society organizations have faced severe restrictions on their ability to function, and the electoral process has come under fire for being opaque and unfair (Eizenga & Villalón, 2020).

Chart 1.2 political rights country rating for 10 years



Dahl (2005) asserts that democratic values have been undermined in these nations because of political elites seizing control of state institutions. By limiting rights and freedoms, allocating resources, shaping policies, and stifling dissent, these elites have created an unlevel playing field for political competition and reduced possibilities for individuals to effectively participate in governance. Furthermore, the lack of robust institutional checks and balances has made it possible for a small number of people to hold a disproportionate amount of power, eroding democratic accountability (Olsen, 2009). According to Dal Bó et al. (2010), there has been a decline in democratic norms and practices due to a lack of strength in legislatures, judiciaries that are in subordination, and restricted media freedom. Additionally, according to the work of Baldwin & Holzinger's (2019) analysis, many institutions in these nations are unable to carry out their mandates in an efficient manner, which impedes the consolidation of democracy.

Institutions that are understaffed, underfunded, and ill-equipped find it difficult to uphold the law, provide public services, and defend the rights of their constituents. This struggle causes annoyance and disenchantment with the democratic system.

Other researchers present divergent opinions. Aarts & Thomassen (2008), promote the argument that the erosion of democracy in Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso is more likely to be caused by symptoms than by structural factors. Poverty, inequality, and ethnic divisions are just a few of the serious socioeconomic issues these nations face. These issues have the potential to erode institutional credibility and foster political instability. Although Bruce et al. (2015) suggest that inadequate institutions may have played a role in the downfall of democracy, they also present a chance for improvement. Institutional reforms have the potential to fortify democratic government, augment accountability, and elevate the provision of public services. Reviving democratic processes can be aided by funding initiatives that assure independence, foster transparency, and increase capacity.

3.6 Economics of Democratic Decay

Table 1.1 presents records of Control of corruption estimate and unemployment data for Niger, Gabon and Burkina Faso. The Control of Corruption estimate measures the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain. All three countries have a negative record: Niger - 0.586, Gabon -1.048, and Burkina Faso -0.084. This record implies the countries' policies and institutions are ineffective in preventing and combating corruption. On the other hand,

unemployment as a percentage of the total labour force has revealed that Niger has a low unemployment rate (0.6%) while Gabon has the highest rate (20.4). Erdmann (2011) claims that economic problems in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon, such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty, provide an ideal environment for the deterioration of democracy. People lower their trust in elected officials when they experience declining prospects and growing living expenses. This might result in disillusionment and a possible rise in support for authoritarian alternatives that offer easy solutions. Moreover, according to Sauh (2021), power imbalances favoring the elites can exacerbate economic inequality, which can intensify social conflicts.

Nearly in all three countries, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people while the majority struggle can lead to feelings of unfairness and animosity. By promising to redistribute wealth or challenge the status quo, authoritarian leaders take advantage of public ire and undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Furthermore, these nations' limited policy space and reliance on foreign aid and certain commodities have made them susceptible to external shocks. For example, the economies of Gabon and Niger are vulnerable to price changes due to their respective reliance on oil revenue and uranium exports. However, governments use austerity measures in response to economic downturns. These policies further undermine public trust and foster an environment that is favorable for democratic backsliding (Deborah & Knack, 2004). Poor economic performance is another contributing factor to rent-seeking and corruption. Economic prospects might entice officials to engage in unethical practices in underdeveloped and impoverished nations. This weakens public confidence in the government, threatens the rule of law, and levels the playing field for political rivalry, all of which can lead to authoritarian takeovers (Oya, 2006).

4.0 CONCLUSION

Leadership-followership disconnect is the key determining factor accounting for the democratic decline in Africa. In addition, A complex combination of political, economic, institutional, and international factors bear responsibility for the decline of democracy in Gabon, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Authoritarianism has flourished politically due to the established dominance of ruling regimes, feeble opposition parties, and constrained democratic institutions. Economically, democratic governance and accountability have been weakened by income disparity, corruption, and reliance on natural resources. Institutionally, democratic norms and practices have been allowed to erode because of the fragility of democratic institutions and the absence of a robust rule of law. Globally, these nations' instability and democratic regression have been exacerbated by the geopolitical ambitions of outside powers as well as the lack of strong regional governance institutions. While the performance of democracy is failing to inspire, authoritarianism faces its' own steep challenges. There is hardly a dictatorship in Africa that looks stable in the long run. The only truly reliable source of regime stability is legitimacy, and the number of people in Africa who believe in the intrinsic legitimacy of any form of authoritarianism is rapidly diminishing. Values are changing, and while we should not assume any teleological path toward a global enlightenment, generally the movement is toward greater distrust of authority and more desire for accountability, freedom, and political choice.

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