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LEGON CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND

DIPLOMACY

ASSESSING THE DECLINING STATE OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN

WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF BURKINA FASO AND MALI

BY

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF
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DECLARATION

I, Thelma Yemotikor Tetteh, hereby declare that this dissertation titled "Assessing the Declining State of Democratization in West Africa: The Case of Burkina Faso and Mali" is my original work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification. I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the text and listed in the references.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the resilient people of West Africa, whose unwavering pursuit of democratic ideals continues to inspire and challenge us. Our struggles and aspirations form the bedrock of this research.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

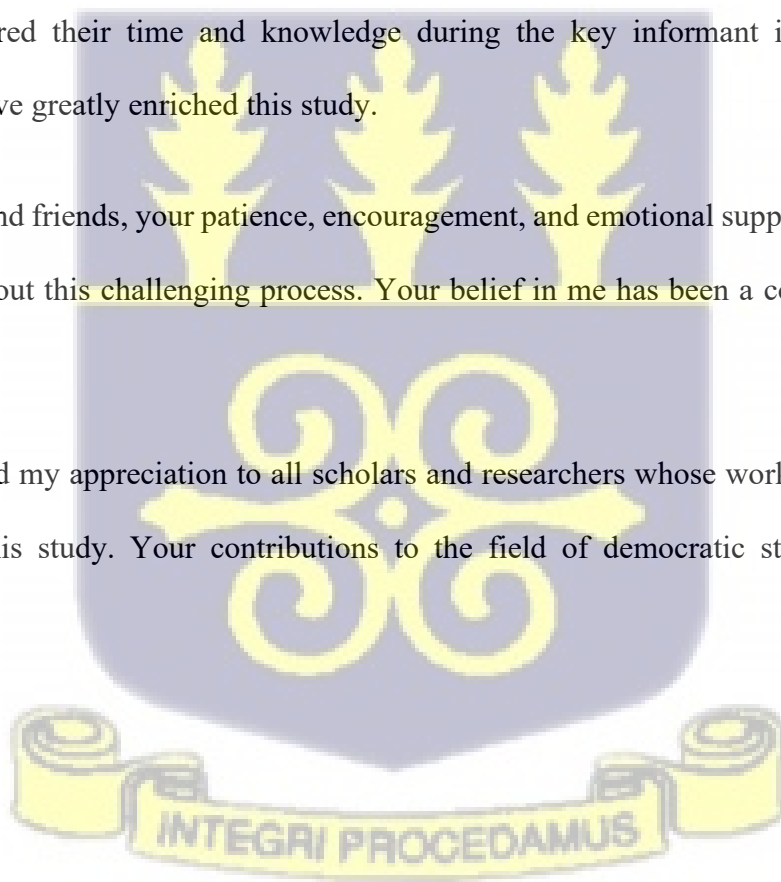
I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Timothy Ba-Taa-Banah, for his invaluable guidance, constructive criticism, and unwavering support throughout this research journey. His expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping this work.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the declining state of democratization in West Africa, with a specific focus on Burkina Faso and Mali. The study employed a qualitative approach, utilized key informant interviews and extensive literature review to analyse the factors which has contributed to democratic regression in these countries from 2014 to 2024. The research was grounded in social constructivism and Critical theories, provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay of social, political, and economic factors influencing democratic decline. The study revealed that both Burkina Faso and Mali have experienced significant setbacks in their democratic processes, characterized by military coups, erosion of civil liberties, weakening of institutions, and challenges to the rule of law. Key findings indicated that political instability, security threats from extremist groups, weak governance structures, and economic challenges have collectively undermined democratic consolidation in these nations. The research highlighted the implications of this democratic decline for regional stability and development in West Africa. It also explored the sociocultural impact of diminishing democratic norms on the populations of Burkina Faso and Mali. The study concluded by offering recommendations (Rebuilding Trust in Democratic Institutions, Balancing Security and Democracy, Addressing Economic Root Causes, Strengthening Civil Society and Enhancing Regional Cooperation) for reinvigorating democratic processes in these countries and strengthening democratic resilience across the West African region.



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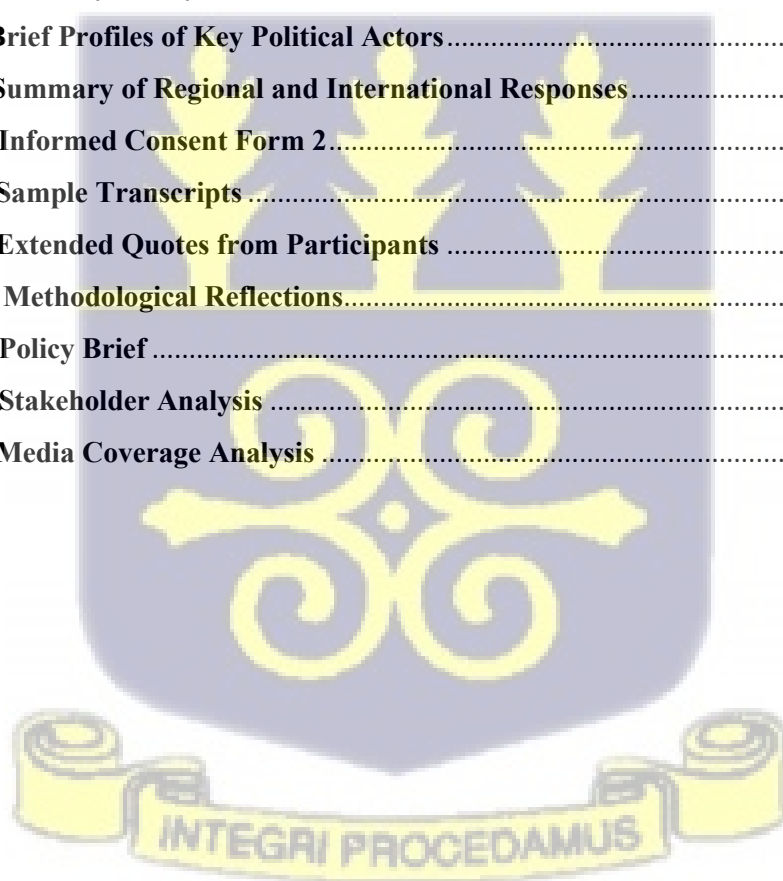
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU - African Union

AQIM - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

CSO - Civil Society Organization

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

HDI - Human Development Index

ISGS - Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

IMF - International Monetary Fund

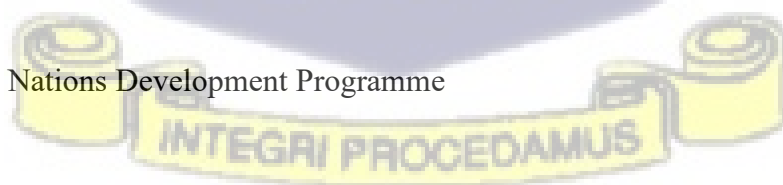
KII - Key Informant Interview

MINUSMA - United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Overview

Democracy, often attributed with good governance, has changed significantly since its founding in ancient Greece 2,500 years ago. Democracy has evolved over time and cultures, starting as a radical idea that gave people power to make decisions. Democracies have had successes and failures, reflecting the complex interaction of social, political, and economic forces that shape societies. Over time, democratic institutions, norms, and values are adopted and deepened. This process has been uneven, with different regions facing different democratic governance challenges and opportunities. The American and French Revolutions in the late 18th century established basis for modern democratic governance; the waves of decolonization in the mid-20th century saw the emergence of many newly independent states grappling with governance and representation; and the "Third Wave" of democratization in the late 20th century.

In West Africa, democratization has been particularly difficult. Colonial history, post-independence struggles, and ongoing efforts to build stable and responsive governments are intertwined with democracy in the region. In their democratic transitions, West African nations have faced authoritarian rule, ethnic and religious divisions, economic instability, and external interventions. Despite these obstacles, many West African nations have established democratic institutions and practices, while others have struggled. Burkina Faso and Mali, two West African nations, have seen significant democratic declines in recent years. The researcher seeks to illuminate West African democratization trends and challenges by studying these two

nations. By analysing political, social, and economic factors, this study seeks to understand the complex dynamics that shape democratic governance in the region and inform future efforts to strengthen and sustain democratic institutions.

1.1 Background to the Study

Democracy, widely regarded as the cornerstone of good governance, has experienced significant evolution since its origin in Ancient Greece. The Athenian model of direct democracy, while restricted to a narrow segment of society, introduced foundational ideas of civic participation and collective decision-making that continue to influence modern democratic thought (Held, 2006). These early principles laid the groundwork for political systems that prioritize the sovereignty of the people.

Democratization has since progressed through critical historical junctures. The American Revolution of 1776 and the subsequent drafting of the U.S. Constitution established the doctrines of checks and balances, separation of powers, and individual liberties (Wood, 2011). The French Revolution of 1789, with its rallying cries of liberty, equality, and fraternity, further fueled the global dissemination of democratic ideals (Doyle, 2002). These transformative events helped embed democracy as a desirable and legitimate form of governance.

The 20th century witnessed the global expansion of democracy, particularly in the aftermath of World War II. Samuel Huntington (1991) termed this phenomenon the “Third Wave” of democratization, marked by a surge in the number of countries transitioning from authoritarian rule to democratic governance. This wave swept across Southern Europe, Latin America, parts of Asia, and Africa, signalling a global shift in political norms and aspirations.

In Africa, the trajectory of democratization has been closely tied to the processes of decolonization and post-independence nation-building. Mid-20th-century independence

movements brought with them visions of democratic governance rooted in African contexts. Influential leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal advocated for governance systems that blended indigenous values with modern democratic practices (Ndulo, 2020). Nevertheless, the post-independence period in many African states, particularly in West Africa, was marred by political instability, military coups, and the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes. Weak institutions, ethnic divisions, and economic vulnerabilities often provided fertile ground for the consolidation of power by military or single-party regimes (Cheeseman, 2015).

The late 20th and early 21st centuries brought renewed momentum for democratization in the region. A growing number of West African countries adopted multi-party systems, held competitive elections, and promoted civil society engagement. Regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) assumed a more active role in promoting democratic governance and intervening in cases of unconstitutional political transitions (Donorkers & Merkel, 2019). The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in 2001, codified regional commitments to democratic elections, respect for the rule of law, and the rejection of unconstitutional access to power (ECOWAS, 2001).

Despite these developments, democracy in West Africa remains fragile. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's (2024) Democracy Index, the region's average score was 4.23 out of 10, placing it within the "hybrid regime" category—indicative of governance systems that exhibit both democratic and authoritarian features. While some countries have made significant progress in institutionalizing democratic norms, others have experienced considerable regression.

Two particularly illustrative cases are Burkina Faso and Mali. Both countries once symbolized hopeful democratic transitions but have since suffered severe setbacks. In Burkina Faso, the

2014 popular uprising that led to the ousting of long-time President Blaise Compaoré was initially seen as a democratic breakthrough. However, recurring political instability and military coups, particularly in 2022, have severely weakened democratic institutions (International Crisis Group, 2023). Mali, long hailed as a model of democratic development in West Africa, has faced escalating crises since 2012. These include a Tuareg rebellion, jihadist insurgency, and a series of military coups in 2020 and 2021 that undermined constitutional governance and ushered in a transitional military regime (Baudais, 2023).

This study aims to investigate the root causes behind the recent democratic setbacks in Burkina Faso and Mali, evaluate their implications for the wider West African region, and propose strategies for revitalizing democratic processes. By focusing on these two countries, the research will contribute to scholarly and policy discussions on sustaining and deepening democracy in West Africa under complex and evolving conditions.

Below is the African map highlighting Burkina Faso and Mali

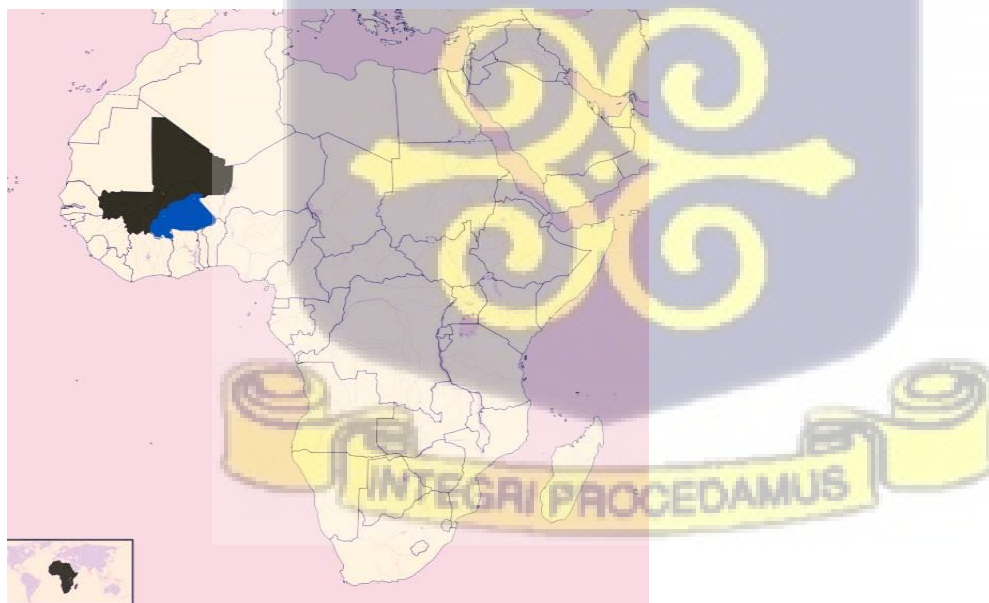


Fig 1 .



1.1.2 Problem Statement

This study investigates a pressing issue in contemporary political and developmental discourse: the evident deterioration of democratic governance in West Africa, with a particular focus on Burkina Faso and Mali. This regression is not merely a political anomaly but has wide-ranging consequences for the rule of law, human rights, peace, and socio-economic development, both within the affected countries and the broader subregion.

In Burkina Faso, initial democratic optimism following the 2014 uprising that ousted long-time leader Blaise Compaoré has been increasingly eclipsed by recurrent political instability and military takeovers. The country's Freedom House rating, which measures political rights and civil liberties, has declined alarmingly from a 'Partly Free' status with a score of 56/100 in 2015 to 'Not Free' with a score of 37/100 in 2023 (Freedom House, 2023). This steep decline reflects the erosion of institutional democracy, growing restrictions on political engagement, and the weakening of the rule of law.

Mali presents a parallel trajectory. Once celebrated as a democratic frontrunner in the region, Mali has experienced severe democratic backsliding, triggered by successive coups, a prolonged security crisis, and the systemic weakening of democratic checks and balances. Its Freedom House score fell from 45/100 in 2015 to 32/100 in 2023, resulting in a classification of 'Not Free' (Freedom House, 2023). This decline underscores how fragile political transitions and unresolved structural grievances can reverse decades of democratic progress.

The erosion of democracy in these countries is deeply interlinked with broader systemic issues, including state fragility, weak public institutions, and declining citizen trust in governance systems. Gyimah-Boadi (2021) attributes this regression in part to a process he terms “autogravitation,” whereby political systems drift toward authoritarianism, often masked by

the trappings of electoral democracy. A further casualty of this democratic recession is media freedom. Both Burkina Faso and Mali have seen deteriorating conditions for freedom of the press and expression, which contravenes the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (EISA, 2001). Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2023) data from 2015 to 2023 reveal a sustained decline in press freedom rankings for both countries, underscoring the suppression of critical voices and the narrowing of civic space.

Socio-economic indicators mirror these political declines. The World Bank (2022) reports that both countries are increasingly reliant on international aid, with tourism revenues plummeting due to insecurity. Their Human Development Index (HDI) scores have shown only marginal improvement over the past decade, placing both Burkina Faso and Mali in the low human development category (UNDP, 2023). These challenges are compounded by widespread poverty (41.4% in Burkina Faso and 42.1% in Mali as of 2019) and an underdeveloped formal sector, which leaves most of the population dependent on insecure, informal livelihoods (World Bank, 2021). Gender inequality further undermines democratic resilience. Women in both countries face systemic barriers to justice, formal employment, and political participation. Despite some progress, representation remains limited: only 27.9% of seats in Mali's parliament were held by women in 2022, and just 6.3% in Burkina Faso (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This exclusion from political processes weakens the democratic ideal of inclusivity and equity.

Moreover, both states are grappling with an intensifying security crisis. Armed insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have exploited weak governance, ethnic tensions, and poverty to entrench themselves. Their presence has further eroded state authority, displaced thousands, and undermined electoral integrity and state legitimacy (International Crisis Group, 2023). The

democratic backslide in Burkina Faso and Mali poses broader risks to West Africa. It raises the spectre of a contagion effect, whereby authoritarian tendencies in one country embolden similar shifts in neighbouring states. Regional bodies like ECOWAS face mounting pressure to uphold democratic norms amidst increasing military interventions and governance crises.

This study therefore aims to explore not only the political dimensions of democratic regression but also the social, cultural, and economic ramifications. It examines how authoritarian shifts impact the lived experiences of citizens, particularly marginalized groups, and how these shifts undermine the broader goals of human rights and sustainable development. Ultimately, the research seeks to inform policy responses and governance reforms that can support a more resilient, inclusive, and democratic future for Burkina Faso, Mali, and the West African sub-region.

1.1.3 Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. Why is democratization declining in Burkina Faso and Mali?
2. What are the implications of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali and for the rest of the sub-region?
3. What is the sociocultural impact of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali?

1.1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the decline of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali
2. To analyse implications of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali and for the rest of the sub-region
3. To assess the sociocultural impact of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali

1.1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, covering the period from 2014 to 2024. This timeframe was particularly significant as it encompassed a period of notable political upheaval, including multiple coups d'états and escalating security challenges in both countries.

The choice of Burkina Faso and Mali as case studies was deliberate and strategic. These two countries offered compelling examples of democratic backsliding in West Africa, having both experienced periods of democratic progress followed by significant setbacks. Their experiences provide valuable insights into the challenges facing democratization in the region more broadly.

Burkina Faso's journey from the popular uprising of 2014, which was seen as a democratic breakthrough, to the military coups of 2022, offers a stark illustration of the fragility of democratic transitions. Mali's descent from a model of democracy in the region to a country

grappling with military rule and insurgency similarly highlighted the complex challenges facing democratic consolidation in West Africa.

While the study primarily focused on these two countries, it also considered their broader regional context, examined how their experiences reflected and influenced democratic trends across West Africa. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the interconnected nature of democratic processes in the region.

The study encompassed various aspects of democratization, including political institutions, civil liberties, electoral processes, rule of law, and civil society engagement. It also considered the economic and security dimensions that impacted democratic governance in both countries.

By limiting the scope to these two countries over a specific timeframe, the study aimed to provide a deep and contextual analysis of democratic decline, while also drawing broader lessons applicable to the West African region as a whole.

1.1.6 Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this study stemmed from the urgent need to understand and address the declining state of democratization in West Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali. While existing literature explores democratization in the region, the rapid political changes and setbacks of recent years necessitate fresh analysis and insights.

This research was significant as it examined how various factors (political, economic, social, and security-related) interacted to undermine democratic processes in these countries. By analysing these dynamics, the study provided valuable lessons for other countries facing similar challenges. This research has practical implications for policymakers, civil society organizations, and international partners working to support democratic governance in West

Africa. Additionally, the study examined the often-overlooked sociocultural impacts of democratic decline, providing insights for designing contextually appropriate interventions. Given the potential regional implications of democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali, this research informed broader discussions about maintaining political stability and promoting democratic norms across West Africa, particularly for regional bodies like ECOWAS. This study ultimately aimed to contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical solutions for addressing the challenges of democratic consolidation in West Africa.

1.7 Literature Review

The literature on democratization in West Africa is rich and diverse, reflecting the complex political landscape of the region. This review focuses on key themes and debates relevant to understanding the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, situating these cases within broader regional and theoretical contexts.

1.7.1 Historical Context of Democratization in West Africa

The trajectory of democratization in West Africa has been shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and contextual factors. Scholars like Bratton and van de Walle (1997) argue that the end of the Cold War created a favourable climate for democratization in Africa, with increased international pressure for political liberalization. However, they also note that the process of democratic transition in Africa has been deeply influenced by the continent's colonial legacy and neo-patrimonial political traditions.

Cheeseman (2015) provides a comprehensive analysis of democracy in Africa, highlighting both the successes and failures of democratic experiments across the continent. He argues that while many African countries have made significant strides in establishing democratic

institutions, the quality of democracy often remains low, with persistent challenges such as electoral violence, corruption, and weak rule of law.

In the specific context of West Africa, scholars like Omotola (2010) have examined the role of regional bodies like ECOWAS in promoting democratization. Omotola argues that while ECOWAS has played an important role in setting democratic norms and intervening in cases of unconstitutional changes of government, its effectiveness has been limited by inconsistent application of its protocols and the reluctance of member states to cede sovereignty.

Also, the development of democracy in West Africa has followed a complex trajectory marked by distinct phases of political evolution. During the pre-colonial era, many West African societies practiced various forms of participatory governance through systems like village assemblies, councils of elders, and consultative decision-making processes (Davidson, 1969). However, these indigenous democratic practices were largely disrupted by colonialism, which imposed centralized, authoritarian administrative structures.

Following independence in the 1960s, most West African states initially embraced democratic systems. However, this first experiment with democracy was short-lived as many countries adopted one-party systems, justified by leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea as necessary for national unity and development (Nugent, 2012). These one-party states characterized the immediate post-independence era, with leaders arguing that multiparty democracy was a luxury Africa couldn't afford during nation-building.

1.7.1.1 The First Wave of Coups (1960s-1970s)

The one-party systems were eventually overthrown by military coups, marking the first wave of military interventions in West African politics. Between 1963 and 1975, successful military coups occurred in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and other countries (Decalo,

1990). These coups were often justified as necessary corrections to the autocratic tendencies and economic mismanagement of one-party states. However, rather than restoring democracy, most military regimes established their own forms of authoritarian rule.

1.7.1.2 The Search for Democracy (1980s-1990s)

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a renewed push for democratization across West Africa, coinciding with what Huntington (1991) termed the "third wave" of global democratization. This period was characterized by:

- Popular protests demanding political liberalization
- The introduction of multiparty systems
- The organization of competitive elections
- The emergence of independent media and civil society organizations

Many countries held sovereign national conferences, particularly in Francophone West Africa, to negotiate transitions from military to civilian rule. Benin's 1990 national conference served as a model for similar initiatives in Mali, Niger, and Togo (Robinson, 1994).

1.7.1.3 The Second Wave of Coups

The period since 2020 has witnessed a dramatic resurgence of military interventions in African politics, starkly contrasting with the relative democratic stability of the preceding three decades (Akubueze, 2024; Akwei et al., 2023). Termed the "Second Wave of Coups", this phenomenon has been largely concentrated in West Africa (notably Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Chad) but carries serious implications for the entire continent. Unlike the first post-independence wave (1960s – 1980s), this wave is characterised by significant popular support, evidenced by mass public celebrations and social media endorsement following coups. This shift marks a

critical departure and underscores a crisis of legitimacy for elected governments, driven by profound citizen disillusionment with democratic outcomes (Baudais, 2023).

Key drivers of this wave include chronic governance failures, such as pervasive corruption, elite self-enrichment, and the inability to provide basic security or services, particularly against jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel (Baudais, 2023). Democratic erosion is equally critical, where frequent elections are undermined by manipulation, violence, and lack of genuine competitiveness, destroying public faith in electoral processes as tools for change. Further fuelling instability are dysfunctional civil-military relations, where civilian leaders neglect military welfare and professionalism while politicizing security forces for regime protection, eroding institutional boundaries and fostering military grievance. Deep socio-economic despair, especially among unemployed youth, creates receptiveness to authoritarian alternatives promising stability.

Despite official condemnations, including sanctions from relevant regional bodies like the African Union and ECOWAS, these have not dampened the motivation of coup plotters nor its prevalence as it continues from one country to another. Key cases include Mali (2020 and 2021 coups), where leaders were ousted for incompetence in addressing Islamist insurgencies and economic mismanagement; Guinea (2021), where President Alpha Conde manipulated the constitution for a third term amid economic stagnation and violent repression; and Burkina Faso (2022), where consecutive coups targeted leaders for failing to contain terrorism and pursuing self-interest. In Niger (2023), President Bazoum was deposed amid rising living costs, security failures, and anti-French sentiment, with the junta gaining support from Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Russia. Gabon (2023) saw a “palace coup” ending the Bongo dynasty’s 56-year rule, fueled by election fraud, corruption and stark inequality despite oil wealth, where 33% live in poverty and youth unemployment reached 40%.

To understand this phenomenon, Akubueze (2024) argued that citizen support for coups stems from profound disillusionment with democratic performance. According to Akubueze (2024) when citizens perceive elected leaders as failing to deliver on core democratic promises such as prosperity, accountability, security, and basic welfare, this creates a phenomenon he terms as “democratic discontent”. This “discontent”, according to Akubueze (2024), creates a fertile ground for populist appeals by military actors positioning themselves as “saviours” against corrupt, self-serving elites. Military justifications citing “bad governance”, “corruption”, and “security failures” resonate with citizens who see democratic promises unfulfilled. Concurrently, the securitisation lens highlights how incumbent governments contribute to coup vulnerability by framing elections as existential threats. This according to Akwei (2023), justifies extra-legal measures, such as recruiting partisan vigilante groups into state security, which politicises institutions, weakens professional forces, and creates institutional “debris” that normalises military intervention as a perceived corrective.

The implications of the Second wave are far-reaching. It represents a democratic recession, reverses gains made over the past three decades, and destabilises regional security architectures. The weakening of democratic norms, erosion of civilian control over the military, and growing acceptance of authoritarian alternatives pose existential threats to democratic governance in Africa.

1.7.1.4 Resilient Democracies (1990s-Present)

Despite these challenges, some West African countries have demonstrated remarkable democratic resilience. Ghana, since its return to multiparty democracy in 1992, has experienced eight successive elections and peaceful transfers of power between political parties (Agbelengor, 2024; Gyimah-Boadi, 2015). Nigeria, despite its enormous size and diversity, has maintained civilian rule since 1999, marking its longest period of uninterrupted democracy

(Uchendu & Egbe, 2022). Côte d'Ivoire, after emerging from civil conflict in 2011, has made significant strides in democratic consolidation (Zounmenou & Loua, 2011).

These success stories, while not without their challenges, demonstrate that democratic governance can take root and flourish in West Africa. They have shown resilience through:

- Development of strong electoral management bodies
- Active civil society and independent media
- Effective constitutional mechanisms for power-sharing
- Growing acceptance of democratic norms by political elites

In support of the aforementioned points, the study by Oduro et al. (2023) demonstrated "strong popular support for democratic rule." Corroborating this assertion, the Afrobarometer survey in 2022 indicated a 76% approval for democracy in Ghana and a 67% disapproval of military rule. Furthermore, Arthur (2010) contended that the successes of the democratic process in West Africa have been facilitated by the enhanced role of civil society organizations (CSOs), which have expanded the political space for expression and representation. Reinforcing Arthur's (2010) claims, Botchway (2018) argued that CSOs have been pivotal in organizing and mobilizing individuals to oversee Ghana's elections, particularly within the Fourth Republic, which has been instrumental in ensuring the credibility of national elections.

Asomah (2020) also emphasized the media's contribution to the resilience of democracies in emerging nations. According to this scholar, independent and free media, along with media pluralism, have played a constructive role in addressing political corruption and other issues that otherwise hinder the democratic process. They achieve this by acting as pressure groups for institutional and legal reforms and by providing platforms for anti-corruption discussions,

among other functions. This assertion was further supported by Arthur (2022), who highlighted the media's role in exposing crime, corruption, and incompetence among public officials.

The experiences of these more stable democracies provide important lessons for countries like Burkina Faso and Mali, where democratic institutions remain fragile. Their success suggests that while the path to democratic consolidation is neither linear nor guaranteed, it is possible for West African nations to build and maintain democratic systems that can withstand political pressures and challenges.

1.7.2 Challenges to Democratization in West Africa

A significant body of literature focuses on the challenges facing democratic consolidation in West Africa. Gyimah-Boadi (2015) identifies several key obstacles, including the persistence of neo-patrimonial politics, weak state institutions, and the challenges of managing ethnic diversity. He argues that these factors have contributed to a pattern of "electoral democracies" in the region, where regular elections are held but the substance of democracy remains shallow.

Security challenges, particularly the rise of extremist groups, have emerged as a major threat to democratization in the Sahel region. Thurston (2020) examines how jihadist insurgencies in Mali and neighbouring countries have undermined state authority and complicated efforts at democratic governance. He argues that the militarization of politics in response to these security threats has often come at the expense of democratic norms and civil liberties.

Economic factors also play a crucial role in shaping democratic outcomes. Lindberg (2006) argues that economic development and democratization in Africa are closely interlinked, with poverty and economic inequality posing significant challenges to democratic consolidation. In the cases of Burkina Faso and Mali, scholars like Harsch (2017) and Whitehouse (2017) have examined how economic challenges, including high unemployment and dependence on

primary commodity exports, have contributed to political instability and democratic backsliding.

1.7.3 Civil Society and Democratization

The role of civil society in promoting and sustaining democracy has been a key focus of scholarship in West African politics. Obadare (2016) provides a nuanced analysis of civil society in Africa, challenging simplistic notions of civil society as inherently democratizing. He argues for a more contextual understanding of how civil society organizations interact with state institutions and international actors in shaping political outcomes.

In Burkina Faso, Engels (2015) has examined the role of social movements in the 2014 uprising that ousted long-serving President Blaise Compaoré. She argues that these movements played a crucial role in mobilizing popular discontent and articulating demands for political change. However, subsequent developments have raised questions about the ability of civil society to sustain momentum for democratic reform in the face of entrenched political interests and security challenges.

1.7.4 Democratic Backsliding

Despite significant advancements and notable achievements in enhancing democratic processes in certain countries, the advancement of democracy has stagnated in many West African nations. Concerns have arisen about electoral manipulations and military interventions that are adversely affecting democratic progress in specific West African countries. Arriola et al. (2023) contend that while African nations initiated regular multiparty elections in the early 1990s, these elections have since evolved into the standard political practice. According to Mohammed (2023), Guinea's 82-year-old Alpha Condé violated the two-term constitutional limit to secure a third term through a violently contested election in October 2020, resulting in

20 fatalities. President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire evaded a two-term limit and secured a third term in October 2020 through an election that was boycotted by the opposition and marred by significant irregularities and violence, resulting in 85 deaths. In Togo, legislators implemented electoral and constitutional modifications in April 2024. The current constitution of Togo stipulates that the president shall be elected via universal suffrage for a term of five years, which may be renewed once.

According to Arthur (2025), the Union for the Republic/Union pour la République (UNIR) party, under the leadership of incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé, held a supermajority in the legislature, facilitating the enactment and endorsement of constitutional amendments and reforms. These reforms enabled Togo's shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system, empowering parliament to elect the president for a single six-year term without deliberation (Arthur, 2025). Critics, comprising scholars, opposition political factions, and civil society organizations in Togo, have labeled these reforms a 'institutional coup,' as articulated by Schedler (2002), intended to sustain and prolong Faure Gnassingbé's dominance. This perception stems from the constitutional reforms that enabled Faure Gnassingbé, who has ruled the country since 2005 after the demise of his father, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, to take on the role of 'president of the council of ministers.'

The newly created role resembles that of a prime minister, who inherently leads the majority party in parliament (Arthur, 2025). Arthur (2025) observes that the 2023 election in Nigeria, which culminated in Bola Tinubu attaining the presidency as the representative of the ruling All Progressives Congress party, faced extensive criticism as 'flawed' from both domestic and international observers. The election was characterized by considerable delays in polling openings, violent interruptions of the voting process, and overt manipulation of results, resulting in the disenfranchisement of voters across multiple states.

From 2020 to 2023, multiple West African countries, such as Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, underwent military coups led by populist military leaders promoting substantial political and social reforms (Haynes, 2022). In response, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspended these nations and enacted sanctions, including asset freezes and border closures, which significantly affected the landlocked states. In January 2024, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger exited ECOWAS, citing foreign interference and alleged inhumane treatment (Arthur, 2025). In July 2024, these nations formed a new confederation, the Alliance of Sahel States, to tackle shared security issues and oppose ECOWAS' calls for democratic transitions. Critics argue that this withdrawal jeopardizes ECOWAS' efforts to restore civilian governance as stipulated in its 2001 protocol on democracy and good governance, heightening concerns regarding democratic decline and escalating instability in West Africa (Arthur, 2025).

In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, a significant portion of the populace has expressed support for military coups and the erosion of democratic norms, attributing their economic difficulties to former colonial powers such as France and corrupt democratic leaders (Arezki, 2022; Chigozie & Oyinmiebe, 2022). Military leaders are perceived as liberators from neo-colonial exploitation and corrupt elites (Aina & Al-bakri Nyei, 2022). In Nigeria, pervasive corruption, insecurity, inflation, and inadequate infrastructure have similarly eroded public confidence in democracy since the cessation of military rule in 1999, resulting in increased economic discontent and a preference for authoritarian alternatives (Emegwa, 2024). Although the Afrobarometer Report (2023) indicates robust overall support for democracy in Africa, approximately 28% of citizens favor autocratic governance due to dissatisfaction with civilian administrations. The inability of democratic systems to deliver economic progress, characterized by unemployment, inequality, inflation, and poverty, has exacerbated public frustration (Cheeseman, 2019). This discontent has contributed to a rise in populism, military

interventions, and democratic regression, posing a threat to the future of democracy in West Africa.

Senegal, often regarded as a model of democracy, has recently encountered challenges to its democratic processes (Ngom & Ricart-Huguet, 2024). President Macky Sall, who was constitutionally prohibited from seeking re-election, postponed the 2024 elections, disqualified opposition candidates, and suppressed protests. These actions raised concerns about potential manipulation of the system to maintain power or influence succession. However, Senegal's electoral authority and Constitutional Council reversed the postponement, resulting in a timely election in which opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye emerged victorious, and the ruling party conceded. This sequence of events underscores both the resilience and vulnerability of democracy (Arthur, 2025).

In Ghana, while democratic structures such as media freedom and the Right to Information law are in place, their implementation has been inadequate (Oduro et al., 2023). Journalists encounter threats, violence, and even fatalities, which raises concerns about a potential resurgence of authoritarian practices (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). The judiciary, once commended for its independence, has exhibited signs of political influence through judicial appointments and inconsistent rulings (Mohammed, 2023; Oduro et al., 2023). Similarly, the Electoral Commission has been criticized for perceived bias and political interference, particularly since 2016 (Campion & Jega, 2023).

In West Africa, similar patterns are observed, such as the contested 2023 elections in Nigeria, which were marred by transparency concerns (Arthur, 2025). These trends indicate a deterioration of democratic institutions, manipulation of governance systems, and a weakening of accountability mechanisms, thereby intensifying discussions on democratic regression and the vulnerability of democratic governance in the region.

1.7.5 International Dimensions of Democratization

The role of international actors in shaping democratic outcomes in West Africa has been a subject of significant scholarly attention. Brown and Kaiser (2007) examine the impact of foreign aid and democracy promotion efforts in Africa, arguing that while external support can play a positive role, it must be carefully calibrated to avoid undermining local ownership of democratic processes.

In the context of the Sahel region, Charbonneau (2017) has critically examined the role of French military intervention and its implications for democratic governance. He argues that the securitization of the region has often come at the expense of democratic norms and has reinforced authoritarian tendencies in some countries.

1.7.6 Gaps in the Literature

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges facing democratization in West Africa, several gaps remain. First, there is a need for more up-to-date analysis of the recent democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali, particularly examining how these cases fit into broader regional trends. Secondly, the sociocultural impacts of democratic decline, especially at the community level, remain underexplored. Finally, there is a need for more comparative analysis of democratic trajectories within the region, examining why some countries have been more successful than others in consolidating democratic gains.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive, up-to-date analysis of democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali, with a particular focus on the sociocultural dimensions of this phenomenon and its implications for the broader West African region.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical approaches: social constructivism and critical theory. These frameworks provide a robust foundation for analysing the complex dynamics of democratization and its decline in Burkina Faso and Mali.

1.8.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism emerged as a significant theoretical framework in international relations after the Cold War, offering an alternative to materialist approaches like realism and liberalism. As articulated by scholars such as Alexander Wendt (1999), constructivism focuses on how social interactions, norms, ideas, and identities shape the behaviour of state and non-state actors.

Key concepts in constructivism include:

1. Norms: Shared expectations about appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity.
2. Identities: Socially constructed, role-specific understandings and expectations about self and others.
3. Social learning: The process by which actors internalize new understandings of their interests and identities through interaction.

In the context of this study, social constructivism helps us understand how democratic norms and practices are internalized (or rejected) by political actors and societies in Burkina Faso and Mali. It allows us to examine how ideas about democracy, governance, and legitimacy are constructed and contested in these countries.

For example, we can analyse how the military regimes in both countries have constructed narratives about their interventions, often framing them as necessary responses to security threats or governance failures. These narratives interact with and sometimes challenge established norms of democratic governance, shaping public perceptions and international responses.

Constructivism also helps us understand the role of regional and international actors in shaping democratic norms in West Africa. We can examine how organizations like ECOWAS have attempted to construct and enforce shared understandings of democratic governance, and how these efforts interact with local political cultures and identities.

1.8.2 Critical Theory

Critical theory, rooted in the work of scholars from the Frankfurt School and developed further by thinkers like Robert Cox and Andrew Linklater, provides a framework for examining power structures and inequalities within the international system. Critical theorists argue that knowledge is never neutral and that theory should aim not just to understand the world but to change it.

Key aspects of critical theory relevant to this study include:

1. Historical specificity: The understanding that social and political arrangements are products of particular historical contexts and can be changed.
2. Emancipatory knowledge: The goal of producing knowledge that can lead to positive social change and human emancipation.
3. Critique of power structures: A focus on uncovering and challenging hidden power relations and forms of domination.

Critical theory provides a valuable lens for examining the underlying socio-economic and political factors that have contributed to democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali. It encourages us to look beyond formal institutions and examine how power is exercised and contested in these societies.

For instance, we can use critical theory to analyse how economic inequalities and resource extraction patterns in both countries have shaped political outcomes. This approach helps us understand how global economic structures interact with local political dynamics to create conditions conducive to democratic backsliding.

Critical theory also prompts us to examine whose interests are served by current political arrangements and how marginalized groups are affected by democratic decline. This perspective is particularly valuable in analysing the sociocultural impacts of democratization and its reversal.

1.8.3 Synthesis and Application

By combining social constructivism and critical theory, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali. Constructivism offers insights into how democratic norms and practices are negotiated and contested, while critical theory helps to examine the underlying power structures and inequalities that shape these processes.

This theoretical synthesis allows us to:

1. Analyse how democratic norms and practices are constructed, internalized, or rejected by various actors in Burkina Faso and Mali.
2. Examine the role of regional and international actors in shaping democratic discourses and practices.

3. Investigate how power structures, both domestic and international, influence democratic outcomes.
4. Explore the sociocultural impacts of democratic decline, particularly on marginalized groups.
5. Develop recommendations for reinvigorating democratic processes that are sensitive to local contexts and power dynamics.

By grounding the analysis in these theoretical perspectives, the aim is to move beyond descriptive accounts of democratic decline and provide a deeper understanding of the complex factors shaping political trajectories in Burkina Faso, Mali, and the broader West African region.

1.9 Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, with Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as the primary data collection method, supplemented by extensive document analysis. This methodology was particularly suitable for exploring complex social and political phenomena, allowed for in-depth examination of the nuances and contextual factors shaping democratization processes in Burkina Faso and Mali.

1.9.1 Research Design

Burkina Faso and Mali present compelling and instructive case studies for examining the decline of democratisation in West Africa due to their shared trajectories, geopolitical significance, and the complexity of their democratic setbacks. Both countries were previously regarded as emerging democracies that had made notable progress in political liberalisation, yet they have each experienced dramatic reversals marked by military coups, institutional breakdowns, and widespread insecurity. Their parallel experiences necessitate a comparative

lens through which to analyse the multifaceted challenges undermining democratic governance in the region. For this purpose, the comparative case study approach was utilised.

The research design was based on a comparative case study approach, focused on Burkina Faso and Mali. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of each country's unique context while also enabled comparative analysis and identified common patterns and divergences in their democratic trajectories.

1.9.2 Data Sources

Primary Data: The primary data for this study was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). These interviews were conducted with:

1. Five senior officials each from the embassies of Burkina Faso and Mali in Ghana.
2. Two representatives from relevant civil society organizations in both countries.
3. Three regional experts specializing in West African politics and democratization.

Secondary Data: Secondary data sources included:

1. Academic journals and books on democratization in West Africa.
2. Policy reports from international organizations (e.g., UN, World Bank, African Development Bank).
3. Government documents and official statements.
4. Reports from credible NGOs and think tanks.
5. Media articles from reputable sources.

1.9.3 Sampling Technique

For the KIIs, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their expertise and position. This non-probability sampling technique was appropriate for qualitative research where the goal was to gather in-depth insights from individuals with specific knowledge or experiences relevant to the research questions.

1.9.4 Data Collection Technique

Key Informant Interviews:

1. Semi-structured interview guides were developed, allowed for flexibility while ensuring key topics were covered.
2. Interviews were conducted in person where possible, or via secure video conferencing platforms when necessary.
3. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.
4. Each interview lasted approximately 10-30 minutes.

Document Analysis:

1. Systematic review of relevant documents using predefined criteria for inclusion.
2. Critical analysis of document content, considering authorship, context, and potential biases.



1.9.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Transcription: All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.
2. Coding: Transcripts and documents were coded using qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo). Initial coding was based on themes derived from the research questions and theoretical framework, with additional codes emerging during the analysis process.
3. Thematic Analysis: Coded data was analysed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships. This involved both within-case analysis (examining themes within each country) and cross-case analysis (comparing themes across the two countries).
4. Interpretation: Findings were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature on democratization in West Africa.
5. Validation: Key findings were cross-checked with multiple data sources (triangulation) to enhance validity.

1.9.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines:

1. Informed Consent: All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and asked to give informed consent before participating.
2. Confidentiality: Participants' identities were protected, and data was anonymized in the final report.
3. Data Protection: All data was stored securely and accessed only by the researcher.
4. Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

5. Institutional Review: The research proposal was submitted for review and approved by the relevant ethical review board.

1.9.7 Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to two countries and therefore cannot be generalized to all West African states.
2. The sensitive nature of the topic limited the openness of some participants, particularly government officials.
3. The ongoing security situations in both countries restricted access to certain regions and informants which constrained qualitative data collection.
4. The study's reliance on qualitative methods meant it cannot provide statistical generalizations about democratization trends.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology allowed for a rich, contextual understanding of democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali, provided valuable insights into the complexities of democratization processes in West Africa.

1.10 Arrangement of chapters

This dissertation was structured in four main chapters.

1.10.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter sets the stage for the entire dissertation. It begins with an overview of democracy and democratization in West Africa, focusing on the historical context of Burkina Faso and Mali. The chapter then presents the problem statement, highlighting the declining state of democratization in these countries. Research questions and objectives are clearly stated, followed by the scope and rationale of the study. A comprehensive literature review is

provided, examining existing scholarship on democratization in West Africa. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework, which may include theories such as social constructivism and critical theory, and a detailed explanation of the research methodology.

1.10.2 Chapter 2: Overview of Declining State of Democratization in West Africa

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the current state of democracy in Burkina Faso and Mali. It begins with an overview of each country, including key demographic and socio-economic information. The chapter then delves into the principles of democracy and how they have been implemented or challenged in these countries. Key areas of focus include the rule of law, separation of powers, elections, political pluralism, and press freedom. The chapter also explores the economic challenges facing both countries and how these interact with democratic governance. Throughout, the chapter draws comparisons between Burkina Faso and Mali, highlighting similarities and differences in their democratic trajectories.

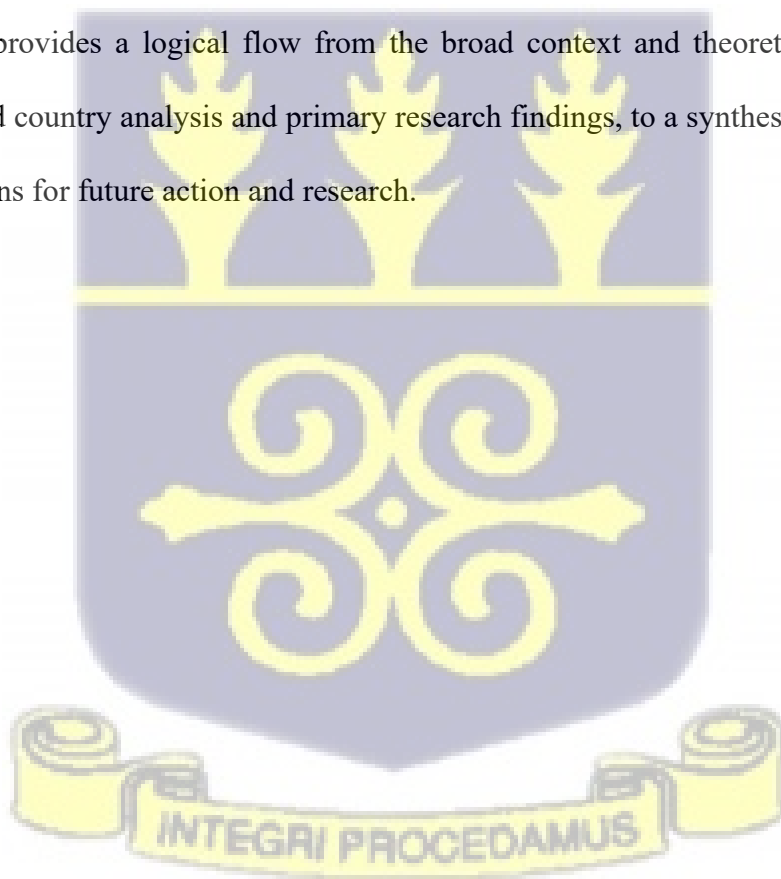
1.10.3 Chapter 3: Analysis of Survey Findings

This chapter presents the results of the primary research conducted through interviews. It begins with a description of the methodological approach, including participant demographics. The chapter then presents both quantitative and qualitative findings, organized thematically. Key themes might include perceptions of democracy, factors contributing to democratic decline, the impact of security challenges, and views on the role of external actors. The chapter includes a comparative analysis of responses from Burkina Faso and Mali, highlighting any significant differences or similarities. It concludes with a summary of the key insights gained from the survey.

1.10.4 Chapter 4: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The final chapter synthesizes the findings from the literature review and primary research. It begins with a comprehensive summary of the key findings, addressing each of the research questions. The conclusion section draws together these findings to present a coherent picture of the state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, and the factors contributing to its decline. Based on these conclusions, the chapter then offers a set of recommendations for addressing the challenges to democracy in these countries and the broader West African region. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

This structure provides a logical flow from the broad context and theoretical background, through detailed country analysis and primary research findings, to a synthesis of insights and recommendations for future action and research.



CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF DECLINING STATE OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN WEST AFRICA

2.0 Introduction

The state of democratization in West Africa presents a complex and often contradictory picture. While the region has made significant strides in establishing democratic institutions and practices since the 1990s, recent years have seen troubling signs of democratic backsliding in several countries. This chapter provides an overview of the declining state of democratization in West Africa, with a particular focus on Burkina Faso and Mali.

West Africa's journey towards democratization has been marked by both progress and setbacks. The "third wave" of democratization that swept across the globe in the late 20th century had a profound impact on the region, leading to the adoption of multiparty systems and regular elections in many countries (Huntington, 1991). However, the quality and stability of these democratic systems have varied widely, with some countries achieving relatively stable democratic governance while others have experienced cycles of democratic progress followed by authoritarian reversals.

In recent years, concerns about democratic backsliding in West Africa have grown. The 2022 Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit classified only one country in the region (Cape Verde) as a "full democracy," with the majority falling into the categories of "flawed democracies," "hybrid regimes," or "authoritarian regimes" (EIU, 2023). This trend is particularly evident in the Sahel region, where countries like Burkina Faso and Mali have experienced military coups and increasing political instability.

Several factors have contributed to this democratic decline, including:

1. Persistent security challenges, particularly from jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel region.
2. Economic instability and high levels of poverty and inequality.
3. Weak state institutions and the persistence of neo-patrimonial politics.
4. External interventions that have sometimes prioritized security concerns over democratic governance.
5. The erosion of public trust in democratic institutions due to corruption and poor governance.

This chapter examines these factors in detail, focusing on the cases of Burkina Faso and Mali. By analysing the trajectories of these two countries, insights can be gained into the broader challenges facing democratization in West Africa and the complex interplay of factors contributing to democratic decline.

2.1 Overview of Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso, a landlocked country in West Africa, has experienced significant political turbulence in recent years, marking a stark reversal from its earlier progress towards democratic consolidation. To understand the current state of democracy in Burkina Faso, it is essential to examine its recent political history, demographic context, and key socio-economic indicators.

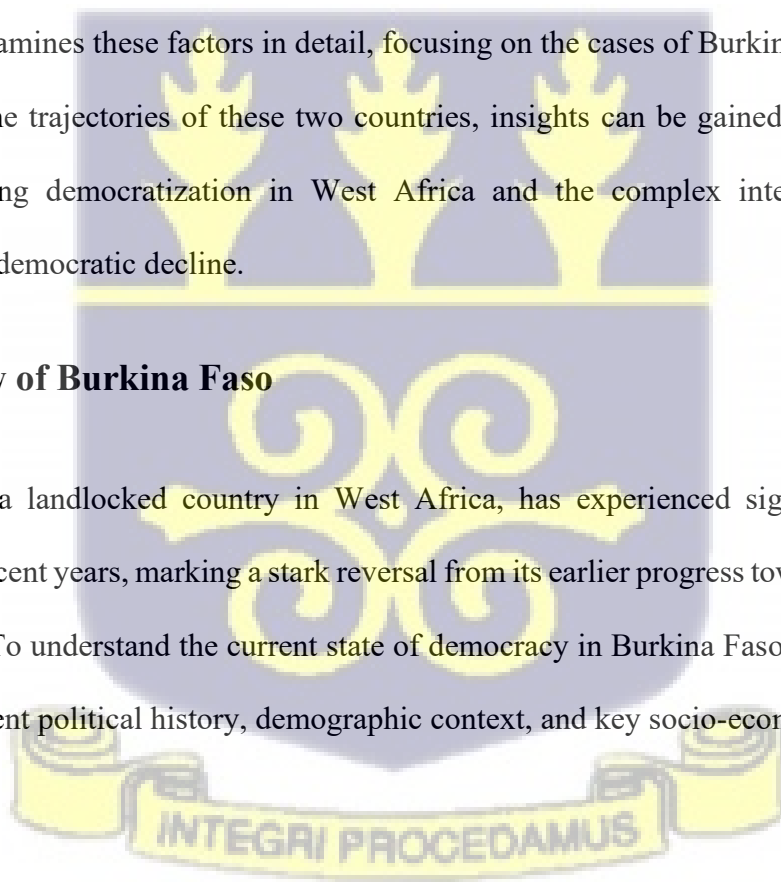


Figure 3: Map of Burkina Faso



2.1.1 Political Context

Burkina Faso's democratic journey gained momentum during the 2014 popular uprising, which resulted in the ousting of long-serving president Blaise Compaoré. This event, often referred to as the "Black Spring," was seen as a watershed moment in the country's political history, opening the way for a more transparent political atmosphere and the organization of competitive elections in 2015 (Hagberg et al., 2019).

However, the optimism generated by this democratic breakthrough has been severely undermined by subsequent developments. The country has faced increasing security

challenges, particularly from jihadist groups operating in the Sahel region. These security threats, combined with governance failures, created conditions conducive to military intervention.

In January 2022, a military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba overthrew the democratically elected government of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. This was followed by another coup in September 2022, led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who accused Damiba of failing to deal with the mounting insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2023).

These coups have had a profound impact on Burkina Faso's democratic institutions. The constitution was suspended, the National Assembly was dissolved, and the government was dismissed, effectively concentrating power in the hands of military commanders. While the junta has promised a return to civilian rule, the timeline and process for this transition remain uncertain.

2.1.2 Demographic and Socio-Economic Context

As of 2024, Burkina Faso has a projected population of approximately 23.8 million people (World Bank, 2024). The country faces significant demographic challenges, with a young and rapidly growing population placing pressure on resources and services.

Economically, Burkina Faso remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's nominal GDP stands at \$16.2 billion, with a GDP per capita income of \$754 (World Bank, 2024). The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, particularly cotton production, and gold mining, making it vulnerable to external shocks and commodity price fluctuations.

The Human Development Index (HDI) for Burkina Faso in 2022 was 0.449, placing the country in the low human development category and ranking it 184th out of 191 countries and territories (UNDP, 2022). This low HDI score reflects challenges in key areas such as education, healthcare, and standard of living.

The literacy rate in Burkina Faso remains low, standing at 41.2% according to the most recent UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2022). This low literacy rate poses significant challenges for civic engagement and democratic participation.

2.1.3 Current State of Democracy

The military coups of 2022 have led to a severe deterioration in Burkina Faso's democratic indicators. Freedom House, in its 2023 report, downgraded Burkina Faso from "Partly Free" to "Not Free," with a score of 37/100, reflecting significant restrictions on political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2023).

Key areas of concern include:

1. Suspension of constitutional order and dissolution of democratic institutions.
2. Restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedoms.
3. Limitations on political pluralism and participation.
4. Weakening of judicial independence and the rule of law.
5. Human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions.

The junta's focus on addressing security challenges has often come at the expense of democratic norms and civil liberties. There are concerns about the shrinking space for civil society and the suppression of dissent.

2.1.4 Regional and International Implications

Burkina Faso's democratic backsliding has significant implications for regional stability and international relations. The country's suspension from ECOWAS and the African Union following the coups has isolated it from key regional decision-making bodies. Furthermore, the deterioration of democratic governance has complicated relationships with international partners and donors, many of whom have suspended or reduced aid programs.

In conclusion, Burkina Faso's recent trajectory represents a significant setback for democratization efforts in West Africa. The country's experience highlights the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of security challenges and governance failures.

2.2 Overview of Mali

Mali, once hailed as a beacon of democracy in West Africa, has experienced a dramatic reversal in its democratic fortunes in recent years. To understand the current state of democracy in Mali, it is crucial to examine its recent political history, demographic context, and key socio-economic indicators.

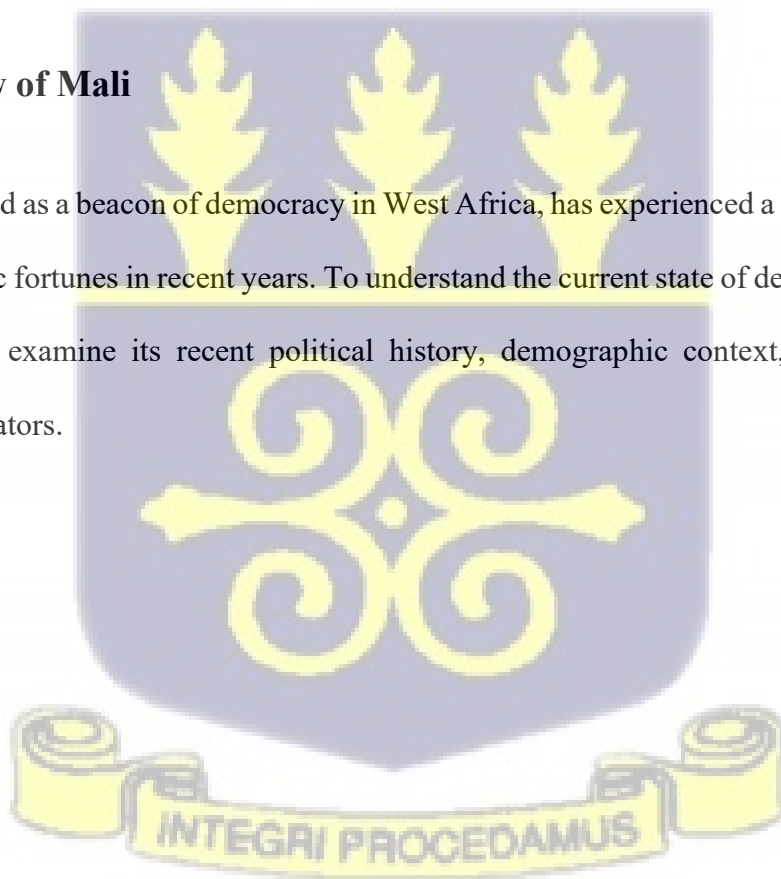
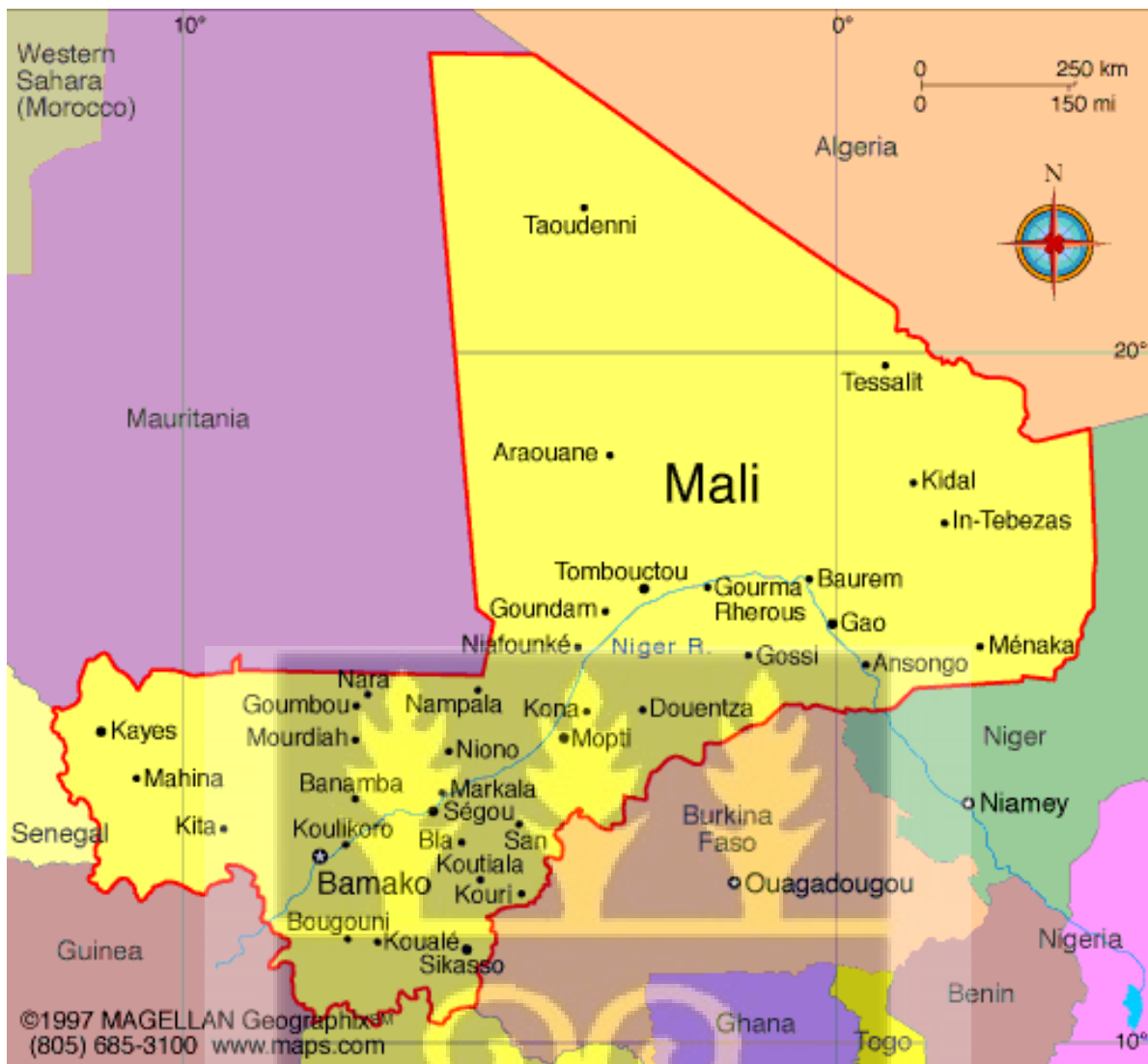


Figure 4: Map of Mali



2.2.1 Political Context

Mali's democratic journey began in 1991 with the overthrow of the authoritarian regime of Moussa Traoré, ushering in a period of multiparty democracy. For two decades, Mali was often cited as an example of successful democratic transition in Africa, with regular elections and peaceful transfers of power (Wing, 2013).

However, this democratic progress was severely undermined by a series of crises beginning in 2012. A Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country, followed by a military coup and the

subsequent occupation of northern Mali by jihadist groups, plunged the country into a period of instability from which it has yet to fully recover (Whitehouse, 2012).

Despite international intervention and a peace agreement in 2015, Mali's political situation has remained fragile. In August 2020, a military coup led by Colonel Assimi Goita overthrew the government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. This was followed by another coup in May 2021, further consolidating military control over the transitional government (Baudais, 2023).

These coups have had profound implications for Mali's democratic institutions. The constitution has been suspended, elections have been repeatedly postponed, and power has been concentrated in the hands of the military junta. While the transitional authorities have promised a return to civilian rule, the timeline for this transition has been repeatedly extended, raising concerns about the military's willingness to relinquish power.

2.2.2 Demographic and Socio-Economic Context

As of 2024, Mali has an estimated population of approximately 24 million people (World Bank, 2024). Like many countries in the region, Mali faces significant demographic challenges, with a young and rapidly growing population placing pressure on resources and services.

Economically, Mali remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's nominal GDP stands at \$17.6 billion, with a GDP per capita income of \$833.3 (World Bank, 2024). The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and gold mining, making it vulnerable to external shocks and commodity price fluctuations.

The Human Development Index (HDI) for Mali in 2022 was 0.428, placing the country in the low human development category and ranking it 186th out of 191 countries and territories

(UNDP, 2022). This low HDI score reflects significant challenges in key areas such as education, healthcare, and standard of living.

The literacy rate in Mali is particularly low, standing at 35.5% according to the most recent UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2022). This low literacy rate poses significant challenges for civic engagement and democratic participation.

2.2.3 Current State of Democracy

The military coups of 2020 and 2021 have led to a severe deterioration in Mali's democratic indicators. Freedom House, in its 2023 report, classified Mali as "Not Free" with a score of 32/100, reflecting significant restrictions on political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2023).

Key areas of concern include:

1. Suspension of constitutional order and postponement of elections.
2. Restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedoms.
3. Limitations on political pluralism and participation.
4. Weakening of judicial independence and the rule of law.
5. Human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions.

The junta's focus on addressing security challenges has often come at the expense of democratic norms and civil liberties. There are concerns about the shrinking space for civil society and the suppression of dissent. The decision in April 2023 to suspend the activities of political parties further underscores the erosion of democratic space in the country.

2.2.4 Regional and International Implications

Mali's democratic backsliding has significant implications for regional stability and international relations. The country's suspension from ECOWAS and the African Union following the coups has isolated it from key regional decision-making bodies. Furthermore, tensions with traditional partners, particularly France, have led to a reorientation of Mali's international alignments, including increased cooperation with Russia.

In conclusion, Mali's recent trajectory represents a significant setback for democratization efforts in West Africa. The country's experience highlights the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of security challenges, governance failures, and military interventions.

2.3 Principles of Democracy

Democracy, as a system of government where authority is vested in the people, is underpinned by several fundamental principles. These principles serve as the foundation for democratic governance and provide benchmarks against which the health of a democracy can be assessed. In the context of West Africa, and particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, understanding these principles is crucial for analysing the current state of democratization and the challenges faced by these countries.

2.3.1 Popular Sovereignty

At the core of democratic theory is the idea that the ultimate source of political authority resides with the people. This principle asserts that government derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed. In practice, this is typically manifested through regular, free, and fair elections where citizens choose their representatives (Dahl, 1989).

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, the principle of popular sovereignty has been severely undermined by military coups. The forceful removal of elected governments and the concentration of power in the hands of military juntas represent a direct violation of this fundamental democratic principle.

2.3.2 Political Equality

Democracy is predicated on the idea that all citizens should have equal political rights and opportunities to participate in the political process. This includes equal voting rights, the right to run for office, and equal protection under the law (Beetham, 1999).

In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, political equality has been compromised by the suspension of constitutional order and the restriction of political activities. The marginalization of certain groups, particularly in regions affected by conflict, further erodes this principle.

2.3.3 Political Freedom

Democratic societies must guarantee fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association. These freedoms are essential for citizens to form and express their political opinions and to hold their government accountable (Diamond, 1999).

Both Burkina Faso and Mali have seen significant restrictions on political freedoms in recent years. Media censorship, the suppression of protests, and limitations on political organizing have all contributed to a shrinking of democratic space in these countries.

2.3.4 Rule of Law

The principle of rule of law stipulates that all individuals, including those in government, are subject to and accountable to law that is fairly applied and enforced. This principle is crucial

for preventing arbitrary rule and ensuring that power is exercised within the confines of established legal norms (O'Donnell, 2004).

The suspension of constitutions and the weakening of judicial independence in both Burkina Faso and Mali represent significant challenges to the rule of law. The prevalence of extrajudicial actions by security forces further underscores the erosion of this principle.

2.3.5 Separation of Powers

This principle advocates for the division of governmental powers between different branches (typically executive, legislative, and judiciary) to prevent the concentration of power and provide checks and balances (Montesquieu, 1748/1989).

The military takeovers in Burkina Faso and Mali have led to a severe imbalance in the separation of powers, with the executive branch, dominated by the military, accumulating unchecked authority at the expense of legislative and judicial independence.

2.3.6 Transparency and Accountability

Democratic governments should operate transparently and be accountable to the people. This includes mechanisms for citizens to access information about government activities and hold officials responsible for their actions (Schedler, 1999).

The opaque nature of military rule in both countries has significantly reduced transparency in governance. The lack of effective civilian oversight mechanisms has also weakened accountability structures.

2.3.7 Protection of Minority Rights

While democracy is often characterized as "majority rule," a true democracy must also protect the rights of minorities. This includes both political minorities and ethnic, religious, or other social minorities (Lijphart, 1977).

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, the protection of minority rights has been challenged by ongoing conflicts and the marginalization of certain ethnic groups. The concentration of power in the hands of military elites further exacerbates concerns about the representation and protection of diverse societal interests.

2.3.8 Civil Society Participation

A vibrant civil society is crucial for democratic health. Civil society organizations provide avenues for citizen participation, advocate for various interests, and serve as watchdogs against government excesses (Putnam, 1993).

The space for civil society participation has been significantly constrained in both Burkina Faso and Mali under military rule. Restrictions on NGO activities, suppression of protests, and intimidation of activists have all contributed to a weakening of this democratic pillar.

In assessing the state of democracy in Burkina Faso and Mali, it is clear that these fundamental principles have been severely compromised. The military coups have not only disrupted the formal institutions of democracy but have also eroded the underlying norms and practices that sustain democratic governance. As we proceed with our analysis, we will examine in greater detail how the violation of these principles has manifested in specific aspects of governance and political life in these countries.

2.4 Rule of Law

The rule of law is a fundamental principle of democracy, ensuring that all individuals, including those in power, are subject to and accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated. It serves as a safeguard against arbitrary governance and is crucial for maintaining a stable and just society. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, the state of the rule of law provides a critical indicator of the health of their democratic systems.

2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

The concept of the rule of law has been extensively theorized by scholars. A.V. Dicey, often referred to as the father of the rule of law, outlined three key principles:

1. The supremacy of regular law over arbitrary power
2. Equality before the law
3. The constitution is the result of the ordinary law of the land

Building on this, modern conceptions of the rule of law often include elements such as legal certainty, prohibition of arbitrariness, access to justice, respect for human rights, and non-discrimination (Tamanaha, 2004).

2.4.2 Rule of Law in Burkina Faso

Prior to the 2022 coups, Burkina Faso had made some progress in strengthening the rule of law, though significant challenges remained. The country had a formally independent judiciary, and efforts were made to improve access to justice, particularly in rural areas. However, the judiciary was often subject to political influence, and corruption remained a persistent problem (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).

The military takeovers in 2022 have severely undermined the rule of law in Burkina Faso. Key developments include:

1. **Suspension of the Constitution:** The junta's decision to suspend the constitution has created a legal vacuum, removing a crucial foundation for the rule of law.
2. **Weakening of Judicial Independence:** There are concerns about increased military influence over the judiciary, compromising its ability to act as an independent check on executive power.
3. **Extrajudicial Actions:** Human rights organizations have reported an increase in extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations (Human Rights Watch, 2023).
4. **Impunity:** The lack of accountability for human rights abuses, both by state security forces and non-state armed groups, has further eroded the principle of equality before the law.
5. **Limited Access to Justice:** The ongoing security crisis has made it difficult for many citizens, particularly in conflict-affected areas, to access formal justice systems.

2.4.3 Rule of Law in Mali

Mali's experience with the rule of law has been similarly troubled. Even before the recent coups, the country faced significant challenges in upholding this principle, particularly in the northern regions where state authority was weak.

The military takeovers in 2020 and 2021 have exacerbated these challenges:

1. **Constitutional Crisis:** The suspension of the constitution and the concentration of power in the hands of the military junta have undermined the legal foundations of the state.

2. Judicial Interference: There have been reports of increased military interference in judicial processes, particularly in cases related to political opponents or critics of the regime (International Commission of Jurists, 2022).
3. Breakdown of Legal Order: In many parts of the country, particularly in the north and central regions, the formal justice system has effectively ceased to function due to insecurity and lack of state presence.
4. Human Rights Violations: Both state security forces and non-state armed groups have been implicated in serious human rights abuses, with little accountability (Amnesty International, 2023).
5. Erosion of Legal Certainty: The frequent changes in the transitional charter and the repeated postponement of elections have created a climate of legal uncertainty.

2.4.4 Comparative Analysis

Both Burkina Faso and Mali demonstrate similar patterns of erosion in the rule of law following military interventions. Key commonalities include:

1. The suspension of constitutional order, creating a legal vacuum.
2. Increased military influence over the judiciary, compromising its independence.
3. A rise in extrajudicial actions and human rights abuses.
4. Challenges in maintaining the rule of law in conflict-affected areas.

However, there are some differences in the extent and nature of these challenges. Mali's longer period under military rule and its more extensive conflict have led to a more profound breakdown of legal order in parts of the country. Burkina Faso, while facing serious challenges, has maintained somewhat more functional legal institutions in areas under state control.

2.4.5 Implications

The erosion of the rule of law in both countries have severe implications for democratization and governance:

1. It undermines public trust in state institutions and the legitimacy of governance structures.
2. It creates an environment conducive to corruption and abuse of power.
3. It discourages investment and economic development due to legal uncertainty.
4. It weakens the protection of human rights and civil liberties.
5. It can exacerbate social tensions and conflict by removing legal mechanisms for dispute resolution.

2.4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the state of the rule of law in both Burkina Faso and Mali is precarious, reflecting broader challenges to democratization in these countries. Restoring respect for the rule of law will be crucial for any future efforts to rebuild democratic governance and stability in both nations.

2.5 Separation of Powers

The principle of separation of powers is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, designed to prevent the concentration of power and provide checks and balances within the political system. This principle typically involves the division of governmental responsibilities among different branches – usually executive, legislative, and judiciary – each with its own distinct powers and responsibilities. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, examining the

state of separation of powers provides crucial insights into the health of their democratic systems.

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework

The concept of separation of powers was most famously articulated by Montesquieu in his work "The Spirit of the Laws" (1748). He argued that to prevent tyranny, the three functions of government – legislative, executive, and judicial – should be assigned to different bodies. This separation would create a system of checks and balances, where each branch could limit the powers of the others, thereby preventing any single group from becoming too powerful.

In modern democracies, the separation of powers often includes:

1. The Legislature: Responsible for making laws.
2. The Executive: Responsible for implementing laws and running the government.
3. The Judiciary: Responsible for interpreting laws and administering justice.

2.5.2 Separation of Powers in Burkina Faso

Prior to the 2022 coups, Burkina Faso had a constitutional framework that formally established a separation of powers. The country had a semi-presidential system with a directly elected president, a prime minister appointed by the president, a unicameral National Assembly, and an independent judiciary (Constitution of Burkina Faso, 1991).

However, even before the coups, there were challenges to the effective implementation of this principle:

1. Executive Dominance: The presidency held significant powers, often overshadowing the legislature and influencing the judiciary.

2. Weak Legislative Oversight: The National Assembly often struggled to effectively check executive power, particularly in areas of security and defence.
3. Judicial Independence: While formally independent, the judiciary was often subject to political influence and lacked resources to function effectively.

The military coups of 2022 have severely undermined the separation of powers:

1. Dissolution of the National Assembly: The legislative branch has been effectively eliminated, concentrating law-making power in the hands of the junta.
2. Executive Overreach: The military-led transitional authorities have assumed both executive and legislative functions.
3. Judicial Subordination: There are concerns about increased military influence over the judiciary, compromising its independence.

2.5.3 Separation of Powers in Mali

Mali's 1992 constitution established a similar system of separation of powers, with a semi-presidential system, a unicameral National Assembly, and an independent judiciary. However, like in Burkina Faso, the practical implementation of this principle faced challenges even before the recent coups:

1. Presidential Power: The office of the president held significant authority, often dominating other branches of government.
2. Legislative Weakness: The National Assembly often lacked the capacity and resources to effectively check executive power.
3. Judicial Challenges: The judiciary struggled with issues of corruption, political interference, and lack of resources.

The military coups of 2020 and 2021 have further eroded the separation of powers:

1. Suspension of the Constitution: This has removed the legal basis for the separation of powers.
2. Concentration of Authority: The military-led transitional government has assumed both executive and legislative functions.
3. Judicial Interference: There are reports of increased military influence over judicial processes, particularly in politically sensitive cases.

2.5.4 Comparative Analysis

Both Burkina Faso and Mali demonstrate similar patterns in the erosion of separation of powers:

1. In both countries, the principle was challenged even under civilian rule, with a tendency towards executive dominance.
2. The military coups have led to a near-complete collapse of the separation of powers, with power concentrated in the hands of military leaders.
3. Both countries have seen the marginalization of the legislative branch and increased pressure on the judiciary.

However, there are some differences:

1. Mali's longer period under military rule has led to a more entrenched system of military governance.
2. Burkina Faso's more recent transition to military rule means that some pre-coup institutions may retain more residual influence.

2.5.5 Implications

The erosion of separation of powers in both countries has significant implications:

1. It undermines the system of checks and balances crucial for preventing abuse of power.
2. It reduces accountability and transparency in governance.
3. It weakens the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms.
4. It can lead to inefficient and arbitrary decision-making processes.
5. It undermines public trust in state institutions and the legitimacy of governance structures.

2.5.6 Conclusion

The principle of separation of powers has been severely compromised in both Burkina Faso and Mali following the military coups. This erosion represents a significant setback for democratic governance in both countries. Restoring an effective system of checks and balances will be crucial for any future efforts to rebuild democratic institutions and ensure accountable governance. However, this will require not only formal constitutional changes but also a shift in political culture to respect the independence and authority of different branches of government.

2.6 Elections

Elections are a cornerstone of democratic governance, providing a mechanism for citizens to choose their representatives and hold them accountable. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, examining the state of electoral processes offers crucial insights into the health of their democratic systems and the challenges they face in maintaining or restoring democratic governance.

2.6.1 Theoretical Framework

Free and fair elections are widely recognized as essential to democracy. Dahl (1971) identified free, fair, and frequent elections as one of the key institutional requirements for democracy.

Elections serve multiple functions in a democracy:

1. They provide legitimacy to the government.
2. They allow for peaceful transfer of power.
3. They serve as a mechanism for holding leaders accountable.
4. They encourage political participation and civic engagement.

However, it's important to note that elections alone do not guarantee democracy. As emphasized by scholars like Schedler (2002), the quality of elections and the broader political context in which they occur are crucial factors.

2.6.2 Elections in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso had made significant progress in establishing regular elections following the popular uprising of 2014. The 2015 presidential and legislative elections were widely regarded as the country's first truly competitive elections since independence (Hagberg et al., 2019).

Key developments in Burkina Faso's electoral process:

1. 2015 Elections: These elections marked a turning point, with high voter turnout and a peaceful transfer of power to President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.
2. 2020 Elections: Despite security challenges, presidential and legislative elections were held in November 2020. However, large parts of the country couldn't participate due to insecurity, raising questions about the elections' inclusiveness (International Crisis Group, 2020).

3. **Post-Coup Situation:** The military coups of 2022 have severely disrupted the electoral process. Elections planned for 2025 under the previous government have been indefinitely postponed.

Challenges to Electoral Processes in Burkina Faso:

1. **Security Threats:** The ongoing insurgency has made it difficult to conduct elections in parts of the country.
2. **Voter Registration:** Insecurity and displacement have complicated efforts to maintain accurate voter rolls.
3. **Political Polarization:** There are deep divisions between supporters and opponents of the military regime.
4. **Electoral Management:** The independence and capacity of the electoral commission have been questioned.

2.6.3 Elections in Mali

Mali had a history of relatively regular elections since its transition to multi-party democracy in the 1990s. However, this process has been severely disrupted by recent events.

Key developments in Mali's electoral process:

1. **2013 Elections:** Following the 2012 coup and subsequent French-led military intervention, elections were held that brought Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta to power.
2. **2018 Elections:** Keïta was re-elected in a vote that was marred by security concerns and allegations of irregularities (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018).

3. Post-Coup Situation: The military coups of 2020 and 2021 have led to the indefinite postponement of elections. The junta initially promised elections for February 2022, but this deadline has been repeatedly pushed back.

Challenges to Electoral Processes in Mali:

1. Security: Large parts of the country are outside government control, making it difficult to conduct inclusive elections.
2. Legitimacy: There are concerns about the legitimacy of elections conducted under military oversight.
3. Voter Apathy: Repeated postponements and political instability have led to voter fatigue and disengagement.
4. Technical Challenges: Issues such as voter registration and electoral logistics are complicated by the security situation and lack of state presence in parts of the country.

2.6.4 Comparative Analysis

Both Burkina Faso and Mali face similar challenges in their electoral processes:

1. Security threats that make it difficult to conduct inclusive elections.
2. Questions about the independence and capacity of electoral management bodies.
3. The disruption of electoral calendars by military interventions.
4. Challenges in maintaining accurate voter rolls due to displacement and insecurity.

However, there are some differences:

1. Burkina Faso had made more recent progress in competitive elections before the 2022 coups.

2. Mali's longer period of instability has led to more entrenched challenges in its electoral system.

2.6.5 Implications

The disruption of electoral processes in both countries has significant implications:

1. It undermines the legitimacy of governance structures.
2. It denies citizens their right to choose their representatives.
3. It weakens mechanisms for holding leaders accountable.
4. It can exacerbate political tensions and conflict.
5. It damages international perceptions and relationships, potentially affecting aid and cooperation.

2.6.6 Conclusion

The state of electoral processes in both Burkina Faso and Mali is precarious, reflecting broader challenges to democratization in these countries. While both had made progress in establishing regular elections, recent military interventions have severely disrupted these processes. Restoring credible and inclusive electoral processes will be crucial for any future efforts to rebuild democratic governance in both nations. However, this will require addressing not only technical electoral issues but also broader challenges of security, political legitimacy, and civic engagement.



2.7 Political Pluralism and Multi-Party System

Political pluralism and a multi-party system are essential components of a vibrant democracy, allowing for the representation of diverse interests and ideologies within the political process. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, examining the state of political pluralism provides crucial insights into the health of their democratic systems and the challenges they face in maintaining or restoring democratic governance.

2.7.1 Theoretical Framework

Political pluralism is based on the idea that power in society should be distributed among a variety of groups rather than concentrated in a single authority. A multi-party system is a practical manifestation of this principle in the political sphere, allowing multiple political parties to compete for power through elections.

Dahl (1971) identified the freedom to form and join organizations, including political parties, as one of the key institutional guarantees of democracy. Sartori (1976) further emphasized the importance of party systems in shaping the nature and quality of democratic governance.

The benefits of a multi-party system include:

1. Representation of diverse interests and ideologies
2. Provision of electoral choice for citizens
3. Creation of opposition to check government power
4. Facilitation of peaceful alternation of power

2.7.2 Political Pluralism in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has had a multi-party system since the adoption of a new constitution in 1991. However, the quality and effectiveness of this system have varied over time.

Key developments in Burkina Faso's political party system:

1. Pre-2014 Period: Despite the formal existence of multiple parties, politics was dominated by President Blaise Compaoré's Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) for over two decades.
2. Post-2014 Period: The popular uprising of 2014 led to a more competitive political landscape. The 2015 elections saw the emergence of new political forces, particularly the People's Movement for Progress (MPP) led by Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.
3. Current Situation: The military coups of 2022 have severely restricted political party activities. In November 2022, the junta suspended all political party and civil society activities, citing the need for "social cohesion" (Reuters, 2022).

Challenges to Political Pluralism in Burkina Faso:

1. Military Rule: The current military regime has effectively suspended normal party politics.
2. Weak Party Structures: Many parties lack strong organizational structures and clear ideological positions.
3. Personalization of Politics: Parties often revolve around individual leaders rather than coherent platforms.
4. Regional and Ethnic Divisions: Political allegiances often align with regional or ethnic identities.

2.7.3 Political Pluralism in Mali

Mali transitioned to a multi-party system in 1991 and had seen regular alternations of power through elections until the recent crises.

Key developments in Mali's political party system:

1. 1991-2012 Period: Mali was often cited as an example of successful democratization, with multiple parties competing in regular elections.
2. Post-2012 Period: The 2012 coup and subsequent crises led to increased fragmentation of the party system and weakening of established parties.
3. Current Situation: The military coups of 2020 and 2021 have severely restricted political party activities. In April 2023, the junta announced a suspension of all political party activities (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Challenges to Political Pluralism in Mali

1. Military Intervention: The current military regime has effectively suspended normal party politics, severely restricting the space for political pluralism.
2. Fragmentation: Mali's party system has been characterized by a high degree of fragmentation, with numerous small parties often lacking clear ideological distinctions (Baudais, 2023).
3. Weak Party Institutionalization: Many parties in Mali are built around individual personalities rather than robust organizational structures or coherent ideologies.
4. Regional and Ethnic Divisions: Political allegiances often align with regional or ethnic identities, potentially exacerbating societal divisions (Lebovich, 2020).
5. Security Challenges: The ongoing conflict in northern and central Mali has made it difficult for parties to operate freely in large parts of the country.

2.7.4 Comparative Analysis

Both Burkina Faso and Mali demonstrate similar patterns in the challenges to political pluralism:

1. In both countries, military interventions have severely restricted the activities of political parties, effectively suspending the multi-party system.
2. Both have struggled with weak party institutionalization, with parties often revolving around individual leaders rather than coherent platforms or ideologies.
3. Regional and ethnic divisions play a significant role in shaping political allegiances in both countries.
4. Security challenges in both nations have made it difficult for parties to operate freely in all regions.

However, there are some differences:

1. Mali had a longer history of alternation of power through elections before the recent crises, potentially providing a stronger foundation for eventual democratic restoration.
2. Burkina Faso's party system underwent a significant reconfiguration after the 2014 popular uprising, which might have implications for future party dynamics.

2.7.5 Implications

The erosion of political pluralism in both countries has significant implications:

1. It limits citizens' ability to participate in the political process and have their diverse interests represented.
2. It weakens mechanisms for holding those in power accountable.

3. It can exacerbate political tensions by leaving no legitimate outlets for political opposition.
4. It undermines the development of a robust political culture necessary for sustainable democracy.
5. It can lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, increasing the risk of authoritarian governance.

2.7.6 Efforts to Restore Political Pluralism

Despite the current restrictions, there have been some efforts to maintain political pluralism in both countries:

1. **Civil Society Activism:** In both Burkina Faso and Mali, civil society organizations have attempted to fill some of the void left by the restriction of party activities, advocating for a return to civilian rule and democratic norms (International Crisis Group, 2023).
2. **International Pressure:** Regional and international bodies, including ECOWAS and the African Union, have called for the restoration of constitutional order and the lifting of restrictions on political activities in both countries (African Union, 2023).
3. **Diaspora Engagement:** Political parties and activists in both countries have utilized diaspora networks to maintain some level of political activity and discourse (Whitehouse, 2023).

2.7.7 Conclusion

The state of political pluralism and the multi-party system in both Burkina Faso and Mali is precarious, reflecting broader challenges to democratization in these countries. While both had made progress in establishing competitive multi-party systems, recent military interventions have severely disrupted these processes.

Restoring genuine political pluralism will be crucial for any future efforts to rebuild democratic governance in both nations. However, this will require not only the lifting of current restrictions on party activities but also addressing deeper issues such as weak party institutionalization, the personalization of politics, and the impact of regional and ethnic divisions on political allegiances.

Moreover, the restoration of political pluralism must be accompanied by broader efforts to address the security, economic, and social challenges that have contributed to democratic backsliding in both countries. Only through a comprehensive approach that addresses these underlying issues can Burkina Faso and Mali hope to build robust, inclusive, and sustainable democratic systems that can withstand future challenges.

2.8 Press Freedom

Press freedom is a cornerstone of democratic societies, playing a crucial role in informing citizens, fostering public debate, and holding those in power accountable. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, examining the state of press freedom provides essential insights into the health of their democratic systems and the challenges they face in maintaining or restoring democratic governance.

2.8.1 Theoretical Framework

Press freedom is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a key indicator of democratic health. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media (UN General Assembly, 1948).

In democratic theory, a free press serves several crucial functions:

1. It acts as a watchdog, monitoring and reporting on the actions of those in power.
2. It provides a platform for diverse voices and opinions, facilitating public debate.
3. It helps to inform citizens, enabling them to make educated decisions in democratic processes.
4. It can serve as a check on the spread of misinformation and propaganda.

2.8.2 Press Freedom in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has historically had one of the more vibrant media landscapes in West Africa. However, recent years have seen significant challenges to press freedom.

Key developments in Burkina Faso's press freedom:

1. Pre-2014 Period: Despite some restrictions, Burkina Faso was known for having a relatively free press compared to many of its neighbours.
2. 2014-2022 Period: The fall of Blaise Compaoré in 2014 led to increased media freedom. However, growing insecurity began to pose new challenges to journalists, particularly in conflict-affected areas.
3. Post-Coup Situation: The military coups of 2022 have led to increased restrictions on press freedom. In 2022, Burkina Faso dropped 13 places in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, ranking 41st out of 180 countries (RSF, 2023).

Challenges to Press Freedom in Burkina Faso:

1. Legal Restrictions: The adoption of a new penal code in 2019 criminalized the publication of information about terrorist attacks and security forces operations, raising concerns about censorship (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

2. Safety Concerns: Journalists face threats from both state and non-state actors, particularly when reporting on security issues.
3. Self-Censorship: Growing insecurity and legal risks have led to increased self-censorship among journalists.
4. Military Control: The junta has tightened control over media outlets, leading to the closure of some foreign media bureaus.

2.8.3 Press Freedom in Mali

Mali was once considered to have one of the freest media environments in West Africa. However, the political and security crises of recent years have significantly eroded press freedom.

Key developments in Mali's press freedom:

1. Pre-2012 Period: Mali was known for its vibrant and diverse media landscape, with minimal state interference.
2. 2012-2020 Period: The 2012 crisis and subsequent insecurity led to increased challenges for journalists, particularly in conflict-affected areas.
3. Post-Coup Situation: The military coups of 2020 and 2021 have led to severe restrictions on press freedom. In 2022, Mali dropped 74 places in the RSF World Press Freedom Index, ranking 111th out of 180 countries (RSF, 2023).

Challenges to Press Freedom in Mali:

1. Legal Restrictions: The junta has introduced new laws that criminalize certain forms of speech, including criticism of the military.

2. Intimidation and Violence: Journalists face threats, intimidation, and sometimes violence from both state and non-state actors.
3. Expulsion of Foreign Media: Several foreign journalists and media outlets have been expelled or had their accreditations revoked.
4. Internet Shutdowns: The authorities have occasionally resorted to internet shutdowns to control the flow of information.

2.8.4 Comparative Analysis

Both Burkina Faso and Mali demonstrate similar patterns in the challenges to press freedom:

1. In both countries, military interventions have led to increased restrictions on media freedom.
2. Both face security challenges that make reporting, particularly in conflict-affected areas, dangerous for journalists.
3. Both have seen the introduction of legal measures that restrict press freedom, particularly around security issues.
4. Self-censorship has increased in both countries due to legal and security risks.

However, there are some differences:

1. Mali has seen a more dramatic decline in press freedom rankings in recent years.
2. Burkina Faso still maintains a somewhat more open media environment, despite recent restrictions.

2.8.5 Implications

The erosion of press freedom in both countries has significant implications:

1. It limits citizens' access to information, hindering their ability to make informed decisions.
2. It weakens a key mechanism for holding those in power accountable.
3. It can lead to the spread of misinformation and propaganda, potentially exacerbating social and political tensions.
4. It undermines the development of a robust democratic culture.
5. It damages international perceptions, potentially affecting diplomatic relations and aid.

2.8.6 Efforts to Protect Press Freedom

Despite the challenges, there have been efforts to protect and promote press freedom in both countries:

1. **Civil Society Activism:** Local and international media rights organizations continue to advocate for press freedom and document violations.
2. **Training and Support:** Various organizations provide training and support to journalists to help them navigate the challenging environment.
3. **International Pressure:** International bodies and foreign governments have called for the protection of press freedom in both countries.

2.8.7 Conclusion

The state of press freedom in both Burkina Faso and Mali is precarious, reflecting broader challenges to democratization in these countries. While both had previously made progress in establishing relatively free media environments, recent political and security crises have led to significant backsliding.

Restoring and protecting press freedom will be crucial for any future efforts to rebuild democratic governance in both nations. However, this will require not only the lifting of current restrictions but also addressing deeper issues such as legal frameworks, the safety of journalists, and the political will to tolerate a free and critical press.

Moreover, efforts to promote press freedom must be part of a broader strategy to address the security, political, and economic challenges facing both countries. Only through a comprehensive approach that recognizes the interdependence of press freedom with other democratic norms and institutions can Burkina Faso and Mali hope to build robust, inclusive, and sustainable democratic systems.

2.9 Economic Challenges

The economic landscape of a country plays a crucial role in shaping its political dynamics and the stability of its democratic institutions. In the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, examining the economic challenges provides essential insights into the factors contributing to democratic backsliding and the obstacles to democratic consolidation.

2.9.1 Theoretical Framework

The relationship between economic development and democracy has been a subject of extensive scholarly debate. Modernization theory, as articulated by Lipset (1959), posits that economic development tends to foster conditions favourable to democracy. However, more recent scholarship has emphasized the complex and non-linear nature of this relationship (Acemoglu et al., 2008).

Key aspects of the economy that can impact democratic governance include:

1. Economic growth and distribution of wealth

2. Unemployment and poverty rates
3. Dependence on natural resources
4. Informal economy and corruption
5. External economic relations and aid dependency

2.9.2 Economic Challenges in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, facing significant economic challenges that have implications for its democratic trajectory.

Key economic indicators and challenges:

GDP and Growth: Burkina Faso's GDP stood at \$20.9 billion in 2022, with a growth rate of 2.5% (World Bank, 2023). This represents a slowdown from pre-pandemic growth rates.

Poverty: Despite some progress, poverty remains widespread. The poverty rate was 41.4% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).

Unemployment: The unemployment rate, particularly youth unemployment, remains high. In 2022, the youth unemployment rate was estimated at 8.5% (ILO, 2023).

Economic Structure: The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture (particularly cotton) and gold mining, making it vulnerable to external shocks and commodity price fluctuations.

Informal Economy: A large portion of the economy operates in the informal sector, posing challenges for taxation and regulation.

2.9.3 Specific Economic Challenges

Security-Related Economic Disruption: The ongoing security crisis has disrupted economic activities, particularly in rural areas, and deterred foreign investment.

Climate Vulnerability: As a Sahelian country, Burkina Faso is highly vulnerable to climate change, which poses risks to agricultural productivity.

Limited Diversification: The economy remains poorly diversified, with a heavy reliance on a few key exports.

Infrastructure Deficits: Poor infrastructure, particularly in energy and transportation, hampers economic development.

2.9.4 Economic Challenges in Mali

Mali, like Burkina Faso, faces significant economic challenges that have been exacerbated by political instability and security concerns.

Key economic indicators and challenges:

GDP and Growth: Mali's GDP was \$19.14 billion in 2022, with a growth rate of 3.2% (World Bank, 2023). This represents a recovery from the contraction experienced in 2020 but remains below pre-crisis levels.

Poverty: Poverty remains widespread, with a poverty rate of 42.1% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).

Unemployment: Youth unemployment is a particular concern, with a rate of 7.5% in 2022 (ILO, 2023).

Economic Structure: The economy is heavily dependent on gold mining and agriculture, particularly cotton.

Informal Economy: A significant portion of economic activity occurs in the informal sector.

2.9.5 Specific Economic Challenges

Political Instability: Recurrent political crises and coups have created an environment of uncertainty, deterring investment and economic growth.

Security Situation: The ongoing conflict in northern and central Mali has severely disrupted economic activities in these regions.

Aid Dependency: Mali is heavily dependent on foreign aid, which has been affected by recent political developments.

Regional Disparities: There are significant economic disparities between different regions of the country, contributing to social tensions.

2.9.6 Comparative Analysis

Burkina Faso and Mali face similar economic challenges:

1. Both countries are among the poorest in the world, with high poverty rates and significant development challenges.
2. Both economies are heavily dependent on agriculture and mining, making them vulnerable to external shocks.
3. Security challenges in both countries have severely disrupted economic activities and deterred investment.
4. Both face challenges related to youth unemployment and a large informal economy.

However, there are some differences:

1. Mali has experienced more prolonged political instability, which has had a more severe impact on its economy.
2. Burkina Faso has made somewhat more progress in poverty reduction in recent years, though both countries still face significant challenges.

2.9.7 Implications for Democracy

The economic challenges in both countries have significant implications for democratic governance such as the following.

Poverty and Inequality: High levels of poverty and economic inequality can undermine citizens' faith in democratic institutions and make them more vulnerable to political manipulation.

Youth Unemployment: High youth unemployment can lead to social unrest and make young people more susceptible to radicalization.

Resource Dependence: Heavy reliance on natural resources can foster corruption and reduce government accountability.

Aid Dependency: Reliance on foreign aid can sometimes undermine domestic accountability mechanisms.

Informal Economy: A large informal sector can weaken the state's fiscal base and its capacity to provide public services.

The economic challenges faced by Burkina Faso and Mali are inextricably linked to their struggles with democratization. Poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, and

vulnerability to external shocks all contribute to political instability and can undermine faith in democratic institutions.

Addressing these economic challenges is crucial for any efforts to restore and consolidate democracy in both countries. This will require not only promoting economic growth but also ensuring that this growth is inclusive and sustainable. Diversifying the economy, improving infrastructure, addressing youth unemployment, and strengthening governance to combat corruption are all key priorities.

However, it's important to note that economic development alone is not sufficient to guarantee democratic consolidation. It must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen political institutions, promote civic education, and foster a culture of democratic participation. Only through a comprehensive approach that addresses both economic and political challenges can Burkina Faso and Mali hope to build stable and resilient democratic systems.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the declining state of democratization in West Africa, with a particular focus on Burkina Faso and Mali. Through an examination of key democratic principles and institutions, including the rule of law, separation of powers, elections, political pluralism, press freedom, and economic challenges.

2.10.1 Several key themes emerging from the analysis

Institutional Fragility: Both Burkina Faso and Mali have experienced a severe erosion of democratic institutions following military coups. The suspension of constitutions, dissolution of elected bodies, and concentration of power in military hands have undermined the foundations of democratic governance.

Security-Democracy Nexus: The ongoing security challenges in both countries, particularly from jihadist insurgencies, have had a profound impact on democratic processes. These security threats have not only disrupted governance but have also been used to justify restrictions on civil liberties and democratic practices.

Economic Underpinnings: The economic challenges faced by both countries, including high poverty rates, youth unemployment, and dependence on primary commodities, have created conditions conducive for political instability and democratic backsliding.

Regional Dynamics: The experiences of Burkina Faso and Mali reflect broader trends in the West African region, where several countries have faced challenges to democratic governance. The interconnected nature of these challenges underscores the need for regional approaches to democratization.

International Influence: The role of international actors, both in terms of security interventions and development assistance, has had complex and sometimes contradictory effects on democratic processes in both countries.

Civil Society Resilience: Despite the severe challenges to democracy, civil society organizations and independent media in both countries have shown remarkable resilience, continuing to advocate for democratic norms and human rights even in restrictive environments.

2.10.2 Key Findings

Rule of Law: Both countries have seen a significant erosion of the rule of law, with military authorities operating outside constitutional frameworks and increased reports of human rights violations.

Separation of Powers: The principle of separation of powers has been severely compromised in both Burkina Faso and Mali, with power concentrated in the hands of military juntas.

Elections: Electoral processes have been disrupted in both countries, with elections postponed indefinitely and concerns about the conditions under which future elections might be held.

Political Pluralism: The space for political pluralism has shrunk dramatically, with restrictions on political party activities and the suppression of opposition voices.

Press Freedom: Media freedoms have been curtailed in both countries, with journalists facing legal restrictions, intimidation, and sometimes violence.

Economic Challenges: Persistent poverty, high unemployment, and economic instability continue to pose significant challenges to democratic consolidation in both countries.

2.10.3 Implications for Democratization

The current state of affairs in Burkina Faso and Mali has significant implications for democratization efforts in West Africa:

1. It highlights the fragility of democratic institutions, even in countries that had made significant progress in establishing democratic norms.
2. It underscores the complex relationship between security and democracy, illustrating how security challenges can be used to justify democratic backsliding.
3. It demonstrates the importance of economic development and inclusive growth in sustaining democratic governance.
4. It raises questions about the effectiveness of international democracy promotion efforts and the need for approaches that are more sensitive to local contexts.

5. It emphasizes the crucial role of civil society and independent media in preserving democratic spaces, even in adverse conditions.

2.10.4 Looking Forward

While the current situation in Burkina Faso and Mali is undoubtedly challenging, it is important to note that democratization is not a linear process. Countries can experience periods of democratic regression followed by renewed progress. The resilience shown by civil society actors and the continued aspirations for democratic governance among many citizens provide some grounds for cautious optimism.

However, addressing the current democratic deficit will require a comprehensive approach that goes beyond simply restoring formal democratic institutions. It will necessitate tackling the root causes of instability, including security challenges, economic underdevelopment, and social inequalities. Moreover, it will require rebuilding trust in democratic processes and institutions, which have been severely eroded in recent years.

Subsequent chapters, will delve deeper into these issues, analysing the factors contributing to democratic decline, exploring its sociocultural impacts, and considering potential pathways for reinvigorating democratic processes in Burkina Faso, Mali, and the broader West African region.



CHAPTER 3

DATA ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the primary data collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with officials from the embassies of Burkina Faso and Mali in Ghana, as well as with regional experts and civil society representatives. The aim of this analysis is to provide deeper insights into the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, complementing the secondary research presented in the previous chapters.

The KIIs were designed to gather first hand perspectives on the challenges facing democracy in these countries, the factors contributing to democratic backsliding, and the potential pathways for democratic renewal. This primary research adds valuable context and nuance to the understanding, of the complex dynamics shaping democratic governance in Burkina Faso and Mali.

3.1 Methodological Approach

The research employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to allow for in-depth exploration of the research questions while maintaining flexibility to pursue relevant lines of inquiry as they emerged during the conversations.

Interview Participants

Although the initial objective of the study was to interview five senior officials from both embassies (Burkina Faso and Mali), practical constraints related to time, access, and financial resources resulted in a total of two interviews being conducted per embassy. While these

interviews yielded rich qualitative data, the reduced number of participants is acknowledged as a limitation in terms of representativeness. To this end, the respondents interviewed entailed the following;

- Two senior officials each from the embassies of Burkina Faso and Mali in Ghana
- Three regional experts on West African politics and security
- Two representatives from civil society organizations working on democracy and governance issues in the Sahel region

Figure 5: Pie chart of Participants



Data Collection: Interviews were conducted either via secure online platforms, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 10-30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

Data Analysis: The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the transcripts to identify key themes and patterns,

both within and across interviews. The analysis was guided by the research questions but remained open to emerging themes not anticipated in the initial research design.

3.2 Key Findings from Interviews

The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes and insights:

Security-Democracy Nexus: All participants emphasized the profound impact of the security crisis on democratic governance in both countries. A senior Malian diplomat noted, "The fight against terrorism has become the primary concern, often at the expense of democratic norms." This sentiment was echoed by other participants, who highlighted how security challenges have been used to justify restrictions on civil liberties and political activities.

Erosion of Trust in Democratic Institutions: Several interviewees pointed to a growing disillusionment with democratic processes among the populace. A civil society representative from Burkina Faso stated, "There's a sense that democracy hasn't delivered on its promises. This has made some people more accepting of authoritarian alternatives." This loss of faith in democratic institutions was seen as a key factor facilitating military interventions.

Role of External Actors: The influence of external actors, both regional and international, was a recurring theme. While some participants viewed external interventions as necessary for stability, others expressed concerns about their impact on domestic political dynamics. A regional expert commented, "Foreign military presence, while addressing immediate security concerns, has complicated the path to democratic restoration."

Economic Factors: Economic challenges were consistently cited as underlying drivers of political instability. A Burkinabé official emphasized, "High youth unemployment and poverty

create a fertile ground for extremism and political manipulation." The need for inclusive economic development was seen as crucial for sustainable democratization.

Resilience of Civil Society: Despite the challenging environment, several participants highlighted the continued activism of civil society organizations. A Mali-based civil society representative noted, "Even in these difficult times, we see citizens organizing, demanding accountability, and defending democratic values."

Challenges to Press Freedom: Concerns about increasing restrictions on media freedoms were expressed by multiple interviewees. A regional expert stated, "The space for independent journalism has shrunk dramatically, limiting the public's access to diverse perspectives and critical reporting."

Electoral Integrity: The integrity of electoral processes was a major concern, with participants expressing scepticism about the conditions under which future elections might be held. A Malian diplomat acknowledged, "Ensuring free and fair elections will be a significant challenge given the current security and political landscape."

Regional Dynamics: Several interviewees emphasized the interconnected nature of democratic challenges in the Sahel region. A regional expert observed, "What happens in Burkina Faso and Mali has implications for the entire region. We need a coordinated approach to address these challenges."

These key findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics shaping the democratic landscape in Burkina Faso and Mali. They highlight the multifaceted nature of the challenges facing democracy in these countries and underscore the need for comprehensive approaches to address them.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

Building on the key findings, a more detailed thematic analysis of the interview data reveals several interconnected themes that provide deeper insights into the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali:

3.3.1 The Securitization of Governance

A dominant theme across interviews was the increasing securitization of governance in both countries. Participants consistently highlighted how security concerns have come to overshadow other aspects of governance, often at the expense of democratic norms and civil liberties.

A senior Burkinabé official stated, "The fight against terrorism has become the lens through which all governance issues are viewed. This has led to a militarization of political discourse and decision-making." This sentiment was echoed by a regional expert who noted, "There's a dangerous narrative developing that suggests democracy is a luxury we can't afford in times of crisis."

This securitization has manifested in various ways:

- Increased military influence in civilian affairs
- Justification of restrictions on civil liberties in the name of national security
- Allocation of resources away from social services towards defence and security

Implications: The securitization of governance poses significant challenges for democratization efforts. It creates an environment where democratic norms can be easily sidelined in the name of security, potentially entrenching authoritarian tendencies.

3.3.2 Crisis of Legitimacy in Democratic Institutions

Another recurring theme was the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions. Interviewees consistently pointed to a growing disillusionment with formal democratic processes among the populace.

A civil society representative from Mali observed, "There's a palpable sense of disappointment. People feel that democracy has failed to deliver on its promises of better governance and improved living conditions." This loss of faith in democratic institutions was seen as a key factor facilitating military interventions and public acquiescence to authoritarian measures.

Key aspects of this legitimacy crisis include:

- Perceptions of widespread corruption in elected bodies
- Frustration with the inability of democratic governments to address security and economic challenges
- Disillusionment with electoral processes perceived as flawed or manipulated

Implications: The crisis of legitimacy in democratic institutions creates a vicious cycle where democratic backsliding further erodes public trust, making it increasingly difficult to rebuild democratic norms and practices.

3.3.3 The Double-Edged Sword of International Intervention

The role of external actors, particularly in the security domain, emerged as a complex and sometimes contradictory factor in the democratization process. While some participants viewed foreign military presence as necessary for stability, others expressed concerns about its long-term impact on democratic governance.

A regional expert commented, "The presence of foreign troops, while addressing immediate security threats, has altered the domestic political calculus. It's created new power dynamics that are not always conducive to democratic accountability." A Malian diplomat added, "There's a growing sentiment that external actors are more focused on their own security interests than on supporting genuine democratic processes."

Key aspects of this theme include:

- The impact of foreign military presence on civil-military relations
- The influence of external actors on domestic political negotiations
- The role of international aid conditionalities in shaping governance agendas

Implications: The complex role of international actors underscores the need for more nuanced approaches to democracy support that are sensitive to local contexts and prioritize long-term democratic consolidation alongside immediate security concerns.

3.3.4 Economic Underpinnings of Democratic Instability

Economic factors were consistently cited as fundamental drivers of political instability and democratic backsliding. Participants emphasized the interconnections between economic challenges, social unrest, and political volatility.

A Burkinabé official stated, "We can't talk about sustainable democracy without addressing the basic economic needs of our people. High youth unemployment and poverty create a breeding ground for extremism and political manipulation." This view was reinforced by a civil society representative who noted, "Economic grievances are often at the root of political disillusionment and susceptibility to anti-democratic messaging."

Key aspects of this theme include:

- The impact of youth unemployment on political stability
- The role of economic inequality in fuelling social tensions
- The challenges of economic development in conflict-affected regions

Implications: Addressing economic challenges emerges as a crucial component of any strategy to reinvigorate democratic processes in Burkina Faso and Mali. This highlights the need for integrated approaches that link democratic governance with inclusive economic development.

3.3.5 Resilience and Adaptation of Civil Society

Despite the challenging environment, a notable theme was the continued activism and adaptation of civil society organizations. Participants highlighted how civil society actors have found new ways to advocate for democratic values and hold power to account, even in restrictive environments.

A Mali-based civil society representative stated, "We've had to become more creative in our approaches. Social media, grassroots organizing, and international partnerships have become crucial tools in our work." This resilience was seen as a potential source of hope for democratic renewal.

Key aspects of this theme include:

- The use of digital platforms to circumvent restrictions on traditional media
- The formation of new coalitions and networks among civil society organizations
- The role of diaspora communities in supporting democratic activism

Implications: The resilience of civil society provides a potential foundation for rebuilding democratic norms and practices. Supporting and amplifying these efforts could be crucial in any strategy to reverse democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali.

These thematic insights provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the democratic landscape in Burkina Faso and Mali. They highlight the interconnected nature of the challenges facing democracy in these countries and underscore the need for holistic approaches that address security, economic, and governance issues in an integrated manner.

3.4 Comparative Analysis: Burkina Faso and Mali

While Burkina Faso and Mali share many similarities in their recent experiences of democratic backsliding, the interview data also revealed some notable differences in the dynamics and perceptions of democratization in the two countries. This comparative analysis highlights these similarities and differences, providing insights into the unique challenges and opportunities for democratic renewal in each context.

3.4.1 Similarities

Security-Democracy Tension: Both countries are grappling with the challenge of balancing security imperatives with democratic norms. Interviewees from both Burkina Faso and Mali emphasized how the fight against terrorism has led to increased military influence in governance and restrictions on civil liberties.

A Burkinabé diplomat noted, "The security situation has created a state of exception that's become the new normal." Similarly, a Malian official stated, "It's increasingly difficult to maintain democratic spaces when the very existence of the state is under threat."

Erosion of Trust in Formal Democratic Processes: Participants from both countries highlighted a growing disillusionment with formal democratic institutions, particularly electoral processes. There was a shared perception that democracy had failed to deliver on its promises of better governance and improved living conditions.

A civil society representative from Burkina Faso observed, "There's a dangerous nostalgia developing for strongman rule." This sentiment was echoed by a Malian counterpart who noted, "Many people have lost faith in the ballot box as a means of effecting change."

Economic Challenges as Drivers of Instability: Economic factors, particularly high youth unemployment and regional economic disparities, were cited as key drivers of political instability in both countries. Interviewees consistently emphasized the need for inclusive economic development as a foundation for sustainable democratization.

Influence of External Actors: The complex role of external actors, both regional and international, was a common theme in discussions about both countries. Participants expressed ambivalence about foreign military presence and international democracy promotion efforts, highlighting both their necessity and their potentially distorting effects on domestic political dynamics.

3.4.2 Differences

Historical Democratic Experience: Interviewees noted differences in the historical experiences of democracy in the two countries. Mali was often cited as having a longer history of multiparty democracy, which some participants saw as a potential resource for democratic renewal.

A regional expert observed, "Mali's experience with democracy in the 1990s and 2000s created expectations and norms that, while currently suppressed, could be reactivated." In contrast, Burkina Faso's democratic transition was seen as more recent and fragile.

Nature of Military Intervention: While both countries have experienced military coups, participants noted differences in how these interventions were perceived. In Burkina Faso, some interviewees suggested that the initial coup had some degree of popular support due to frustration with the previous government's handling of the security situation.

A Burkinabé civil society representative stated, "There was a moment when people saw the military as potential saviours. That illusion has since faded, but it complicates the narrative around democratic restoration."

In Mali, the coups were more uniformly seen as setbacks to democratic governance, though some noted that they exposed the underlying weaknesses of the previous democratic system.

Regional Dynamics: The impact of regional dynamics on democratization efforts was perceived differently in the two countries. Mali's situation was more often discussed in the context of broader Sahelian security challenges and the influence of Algeria and other North African states.

A Malian diplomat noted, "Our democratic journey is inextricably linked to regional security architectures and the interests of neighbouring states."

For Burkina Faso, while regional factors were important, there was more emphasis on domestic drivers of democratic change.

Civil Society Landscape: While civil society resilience was noted in both countries, there were perceived differences in the nature and capacity of civil society organizations. Mali was seen

as having a more established and diverse civil society sector, partly due to its longer experience with formal democracy.

A regional expert commented, "Mali's civil society has a depth and breadth that could be crucial in rebuilding democratic norms. In Burkina Faso, we're seeing new forms of civic activism emerging, but they're still evolving."

Approach to Democratic Restoration: Subtle differences were noted in how participants from each country envisioned the path to democratic restoration. In Burkina Faso, there was more emphasis on the need for a fundamental reimagining of democratic structures to address the shortcomings of the pre-coup system.

A Burkinabé official stated, "We can't simply return to the status quo ante. We need to build a new democratic model that's more responsive to our realities."

In Mali, while there was acknowledgment of the need for reform, there was also a stronger emphasis on restoring and strengthening existing democratic institutions.

A Malian civil society representative noted, "We've invested decades in building these democratic structures. The challenge is to revitalize them, not to start from scratch."

International Relations: The two countries' relationships with international partners, particularly Western democracies, were perceived differently. Mali's recent pivot towards Russia and away from traditional Western allies was seen as a more dramatic shift in international relations.

A regional expert observed, "Mali's realignment has significant implications for democracy promotion efforts and regional dynamics. Burkina Faso, while also exploring new partnerships, hasn't made such a decisive break with Western allies."

3.4.3 Implications of the Comparative Analysis

Tailored Approaches: The differences between Burkina Faso and Mali underscore the need for context-specific approaches to democracy promotion. While there are common challenges, strategies for democratic renewal must be tailored to the unique historical, political, and social contexts of each country.

Leveraging Historical Experiences: Mali's longer history with multiparty democracy could be a resource for democratic renewal, suggesting that efforts to revitalize democratic norms might find traction in collective memory and established civic habits.

Civil Society Engagement: The differing landscapes of civil society in the two countries suggest that strategies for supporting democratic activism may need to be adapted. In Mali, leveraging existing civil society networks might be effective, while in Burkina Faso, there may be a need to focus on nurturing emerging forms of civic engagement.

Regional Approach: The interconnected nature of the challenges facing both countries, particularly in terms of security and economic development, highlights the need for regional approaches to democratization. However, these approaches must be flexible enough to account for the unique dynamics in each country.

Balancing Security and Democracy: Both countries face the challenge of balancing security imperatives with democratic governance. Finding ways to address security concerns without compromising core democratic principles emerges as a key challenge for both nations.

Economic Development: The shared emphasis on economic factors as drivers of instability underscores the importance of integrating economic development strategies with efforts to promote democratic governance.

International Engagement: The differing trajectories of international relations in the two countries suggest a need for nuanced and adaptive approaches from the international community in supporting democratization efforts.

This comparative analysis highlights both the shared challenges and the unique contexts of democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali. It underscores the complexity of the democratization process in West Africa and the need for nuanced, context-specific approaches to supporting democratic renewal in the region.

3.5.0 Implications for Regional Stability

The declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali has significant implications not only for these two countries but for the broader West African region. The interview data revealed several key themes regarding the regional impact of democratic backsliding in these pivotal Sahelian states.

Spill over Effects: Many interviewees expressed concern about the potential for democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali to have a contagion effect on neighbouring countries.

A regional expert noted, "What happens in these countries doesn't stay contained within their borders. We're seeing a worrying demonstration effect where military interventions are increasingly seen as a 'solution' to governance challenges."

This concern was echoed by a regional expert from a neighbouring country who stated, "The coups in Mali and Burkina Faso have emboldened anti-democratic forces across the region. It's creating a permissive environment for further democratic reversals."

Regional Security Architecture: The democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali was seen as having significant implications for regional security cooperation.

A regional expert commented, "These countries are crucial pillars in the regional security architecture. Their current trajectories complicate efforts to mount coordinated responses to transnational threats like terrorism and organized crime."

Participants highlighted how the suspension of Mali and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS and the African Union has created gaps in regional security frameworks, potentially benefiting non-state armed groups operating in the Sahel.

Economic Integration: Several interviewees pointed to the potential economic ramifications of democratic backsliding for regional integration efforts.

A regional expert stated, "Political instability and the threat of sanctions create uncertainty that hampers cross-border trade and investment. This undermines long-standing efforts to promote economic integration in West Africa."

The potential for economic contagion, where instability in Burkina Faso and Mali negatively impacts investor confidence in the broader region, was a recurring concern.

Humanitarian Challenges: The link between democratic decline, conflict, and humanitarian crises was emphasized by several participants.

A representative of a civil society noted that, "The erosion of democratic governance often exacerbates conditions that lead to displacement. We're seeing increasing refugee flows that put pressure on neighbouring countries and strain regional resources."

This dynamic was seen as having the potential to create a vicious cycle where humanitarian crises further undermine democratic stability in receiving countries.

Challenges to Regional Governance: The situation in Burkina Faso and Mali was seen as posing significant challenges to regional governance mechanisms, particularly ECOWAS.

A regional expert observed that, "The credibility and effectiveness of ECOWAS as a guarantor of democratic norms in the region is being severely tested. How it responds to these crises will have long-term implications for its role in promoting democracy and good governance."

Some participants expressed concern that the inability to effectively address democratic backsliding in these countries could weaken regional institutions and norms more broadly.

Geopolitical Implications: The changing international alignments of Mali, particularly its pivot towards Russia, were seen as having significant geopolitical implications for the region.

A diplomatic analyst stated, "Mali's realignment is shifting the geopolitical landscape of West Africa. It's creating new fault lines and complicating traditional partnerships in ways that could impact democratic trajectories across the region."

Some interviewees expressed concern about a potential "new scramble for Africa" where competing international interests could further complicate democratization efforts.

Youth Disillusionment: Several participants highlighted the regional implications of growing youth disillusionment with democratic processes.

A representative from a civil society noted that, "Young people across West Africa are watching what's happening in Mali and Burkina Faso. Many are losing faith in democracy as a vehicle for change. This could have long-term consequences for political stability across the region."

The potential for this disillusionment to fuel radicalization or lead to widespread political apathy was seen as a significant regional challenge.

Civil Society Networks: On a more positive note, some interviewees pointed to the potential for the crises in Burkina Faso and Mali to galvanize regional civil society networks.

A civil society representative observed that, "We're seeing increased collaboration and solidarity among pro-democracy activists across West Africa. There's a growing recognition that we need to work together to defend democratic spaces."

This emerging regional civic consciousness was seen as a potential resource for future democratization efforts.

3.5.1 Implications and Recommendations

Need for Coordinated Regional Response: The interconnected nature of the challenges highlights the need for a coordinated regional approach to addressing democratic backsliding. This could involve strengthening ECOWAS's capacity to respond to unconstitutional changes of government and enhancing regional mechanisms for early warning and conflict prevention.

Economic Incentives for Democracy: Given the economic implications of democratic decline, there may be a need to more explicitly link regional economic integration efforts with commitments to democratic governance. This could involve creating stronger economic incentives for countries to adhere to democratic norms.

Strengthening Regional Civil Society Networks: Supporting and amplifying regional civil society networks could be crucial in building resilience against democratic backsliding. This could involve creating platforms for cross-border collaboration and knowledge sharing among pro-democracy activists.

Addressing Root Causes: The regional dimensions of democratic decline underscore the need to address root causes such as poverty, inequality, and poor governance. This suggests the importance of integrated regional approaches to development that link security, governance, and economic issues.

Youth Engagement: Given the concerns about youth disillusionment, there is a need for targeted efforts to engage young people in democratic processes and rebuild faith in democratic institutions across the region.

Balancing External Influences: The geopolitical implications suggest a need for regional strategies to manage external influences in ways that support rather than undermine democratization efforts.

In conclusion, the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali has far-reaching implications for regional stability in West Africa. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts at both the national and regional levels, as well as careful engagement from the international community. The interconnected nature of these issues underscores the need for holistic, regionally-coordinated approaches to supporting democratic governance in West Africa.

3.5.2 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive analysis of the primary data collected through Key Informant Interviews, offering valuable insights into the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali. The thematic analysis, comparative study, and examination of regional implications have revealed the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges facing democratic governance in these countries and the broader West African region.

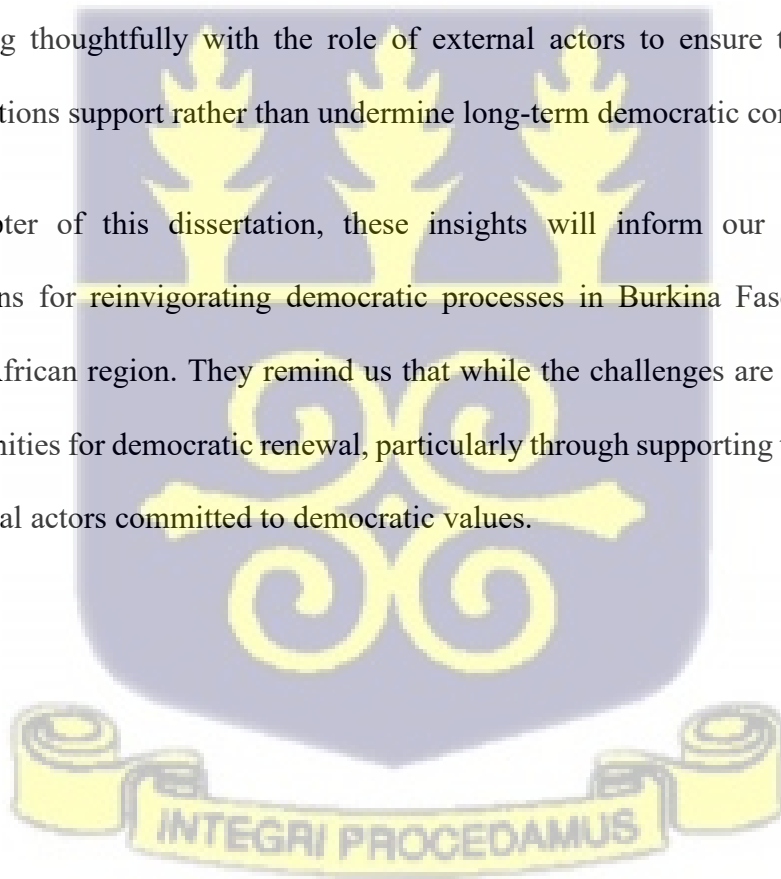
Key findings from this analysis include:

1. The pervasive impact of security challenges on democratic governance, leading to a securitization of politics that often comes at the expense of civil liberties and democratic norms.
2. A growing crisis of legitimacy in democratic institutions, fuelled by perceptions of corruption, ineffective governance, and the failure of democracy to deliver tangible improvements in people's lives.
3. The complex and sometimes contradictory role of external actors, particularly in the security domain, which has altered domestic political dynamics in ways not always conducive to democratic consolidation.
4. The crucial importance of economic factors in shaping political outcomes, with poverty, inequality, and lack of economic opportunities seen as key drivers of instability and democratic backsliding.
5. The resilience and adaptation of civil society actors, who continue to find ways to advocate for democratic values even in increasingly restrictive environments.
6. Significant differences in the historical experiences and current trajectories of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, necessitating context-specific approaches to supporting democratic renewal.
7. The far-reaching regional implications of democratic backsliding in these two countries, including potential spill over effects, challenges to regional security architectures, and impacts on economic integration efforts.

These findings underscore the need for nuanced, multidimensional approaches to addressing the challenges of democratization in West Africa. They highlight the importance of:

- Developing strategies that effectively balance security imperatives with the protection of democratic norms and civil liberties.
- Addressing the root causes of democratic disillusionment, including corruption, economic marginalization, and ineffective governance.
- Supporting and amplifying the efforts of civil society actors as key agents of democratic resilience and renewal.
- Crafting context-specific interventions that take into account the unique historical, political, and social dynamics of each country.
- Adopting regional approaches that recognize the interconnected nature of democratization challenges in West Africa.
- Engaging thoughtfully with the role of external actors to ensure that international interventions support rather than undermine long-term democratic consolidation.

The final chapter of this dissertation, these insights will inform our conclusions and recommendations for reinvigorating democratic processes in Burkina Faso, Mali, and the broader West African region. They remind us that while the challenges are significant, there remain opportunities for democratic renewal, particularly through supporting the resilience and creativity of local actors committed to democratic values.



CHAPTER 4

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.0 Introduction

This final chapter synthesizes the key findings from the comprehensive analysis of the declining state of democratization in West Africa, with a particular focus on Burkina Faso and Mali. Drawing on both the extensive literature review and the primary data collected through Key Informant Interviews, summarize the main insights, draw conclusions about the state of democracy in these countries and the broader region, and offer recommendations for addressing the challenges identified.

The chapter is structured to provide a holistic view of the issue, connecting the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier with the empirical findings from the research. It aims to not only recap the key points but also to offer a forward-looking perspective on the prospects for democratic renewal in West Africa.

4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research has revealed a complex landscape of democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali, characterized by multifaceted challenges that span political, security, economic, and social domains. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

Securitization of Governance: Both Burkina Faso and Mali have experienced a profound securitization of governance, where the imperative of combating terrorism and insurgency has often overshadowed other aspects of democratic governance. This has led to:

- Increased military influence in civilian affairs
- Justification of restrictions on civil liberties in the name of national security
- Allocation of resources away from social services towards defence and security

As one Malian diplomat noted, "The fight against terrorism has become the lens through which all governance issues are viewed."

Erosion of Democratic Institutions: The military coups in both countries have severely undermined democratic institutions, leading to:

- Suspension of constitutions
- Dissolution of elected bodies
- Concentration of power in military hands
- Weakening of checks and balances

A civil society representative from Burkina Faso observed, "There's a dangerous nostalgia developing for strongman rule."

Crisis of Legitimacy: There is a growing crisis of legitimacy in democratic institutions, fueled by:

- Perceptions of widespread corruption
- Frustration with the inability of democratic governments to address security and economic challenges
- Disillusionment with electoral processes perceived as flawed or manipulated

A regional expert commented, "Many people have lost faith in the ballot box as a means of effecting change."

Economic Underpinnings of Instability: Economic factors emerged as fundamental drivers of political instability and democratic backsliding, including:

- High youth unemployment
- Persistent poverty and inequality
- Regional economic disparities

A Burkinabé official emphasized, "We can't talk about sustainable democracy without addressing the basic economic needs of our people."

Complex Role of External Actors: The influence of external actors, both regional and international, has had complex and sometimes contradictory effects on democratic processes:

- Foreign military presence has altered domestic political dynamics
- International aid conditionalities have shaped governance agendas
- Geopolitical realignments, particularly Mali's pivot towards Russia, have complicated traditional partnerships

Resilience of Civil Society: Despite the challenging environment, civil society actors have shown remarkable resilience:

- Adapting to restrictive environments through digital platforms and grassroots organizing
- Forming new coalitions and networks
- Continuing to advocate for democratic values and hold power to account

A Mali-based civil society representative noted, "We've had to become more creative in our approaches."

Regional Implications: The democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali has significant implications for regional stability:

- Potential spillover effects on neighbouring countries
- Challenges to regional security architectures
- Impacts on economic integration efforts
- Humanitarian challenges related to displacement and refugee flows

Contextual Differences: While Burkina Faso and Mali share many challenges, there are important contextual differences:

- Mali's longer history with multiparty democracy
- Differences in the nature and perception of military interventions
- Varying landscapes of civil society engagement
- Different approaches to international realignment

These findings paint a picture of democratic decline that is both profound and nuanced, highlighting the interconnected nature of the challenges facing Burkina Faso, Mali, and the broader West African region.



4.2 CONCLUSIONS

The declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, as revealed by the research, represents a significant setback for democratic aspirations in West Africa. It underscores the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of security challenges, economic hardships, and governance failures. However, the analysis also reveals the complexity of these dynamics and the resilience of pro-democratic forces even in adverse conditions.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the findings:

The Multidimensional Nature of Democratic Decline: The erosion of democracy in Burkina Faso and Mali is not simply a result of military coups or security challenges. It is rooted in a complex interplay of factors including economic marginalization, governance failures, external interventions, and a crisis of legitimacy in democratic institutions. This multidimensional nature of the problem necessitates comprehensive, integrated approaches to democratic renewal.

The Security-Democracy Dilemma: Both countries face a profound dilemma in balancing security imperatives with democratic norms. The securitization of governance, while addressing immediate threats, has come at a significant cost to civil liberties and democratic processes. Finding ways to effectively combat security challenges without compromising core democratic principles emerges as a key challenge for the region.

The Crucial Role of Economic Factors: The research highlights the inextricable link between economic conditions and democratic stability. The persistent poverty, high youth unemployment, and economic inequality in both countries have created conditions conducive to political instability and democratic backsliding. This underscores the need for

democratization efforts to be closely integrated with strategies for inclusive economic development.

The Resilience of Civil Society: Despite the challenging environment, the continued activism and adaptation of civil society organizations provide a glimmer of hope. These actors represent a potential foundation for democratic renewal, highlighting the importance of bottom-up approaches to democratization that leverage local agency and grassroots mobilization.

The Regional Nature of the Challenge: The democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali cannot be viewed in isolation. It has significant implications for regional stability, security cooperation, and economic integration. This regional dimension underscores the need for coordinated, multilateral approaches to addressing democratic challenges in West Africa.

The Complex Role of External Actors: The analysis reveals the double-edged nature of external interventions in the democratization processes of Burkina Faso and Mali. While foreign assistance has been crucial in addressing security threats and providing development aid, it has also sometimes distorted domestic political dynamics and created new dependencies. This highlights the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches to international support for democracy.

The Crisis of Faith in Democratic Institutions: Perhaps most concerning, the research points to a growing disillusionment with democratic processes among citizens in both countries. This erosion of faith in democracy as a system of governance capable of delivering tangible benefits to the population poses a fundamental challenge to future democratization efforts.

The Importance of Context-Specific Approaches: While Burkina Faso and Mali share many challenges, comparative analysis also revealed important differences in their historical experiences, civil society landscapes, and current political trajectories. This underscores the

need for tailored, context-specific approaches to supporting democratic renewal in each country.

In conclusion, the state of democracy in Burkina Faso and Mali is at a critical juncture. The military coups and subsequent governance challenges have severely undermined democratic institutions and norms. However, the resilience of civil society actors and the continued aspirations for democratic governance among many citizens provide some grounds for cautious optimism.

The path forward will require addressing not just the symptoms of democratic decline – such as military rule and restrictions on civil liberties – but also the underlying causes, including economic marginalization, governance failures, and security challenges. It will necessitate a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnected nature of these challenges and leverages both domestic and international resources in support of democratic renewal.

Ultimately, the future of democracy in Burkina Faso and Mali will depend on the ability to rebuild trust in democratic institutions, create inclusive economic opportunities, effectively address security threats without compromising democratic norms, and foster a political culture that values pluralism and citizen participation. While the challenges are significant, the stakes – for these countries and the broader West African region – are too high to abandon the pursuit of democratic governance. As at the time of this study, feedbacks from survey participants do strongly suggest that the present state of national leadership governance is working better for the citizenry rather than previously tried attempt with ideal bureaucracy.

Some scholars also argue that in specific contexts, particularly where security and basic governance are severely compromised, citizens may temporarily prefer stability over idealized democratic processes. In Burkina Faso and Mali, recent surveys have shown some popular

support for military interventions, primarily due to frustration with democratic governments' inability to address security threats and provide basic services.

Sangaré and Bøås (2023), in their study "Popular Support for Military Coups in Mali and Burkina Faso" (Third World Quarterly), found that significant segments of urban populations initially supported military takeovers due to perceived failures of previous democratic governments in addressing terrorism and corruption.

Baudais (2023) in "Mali's Transition: High Expectations and Little Room for Manoeuvre" (Journal of Democracy) notes that some Malians express greater confidence in current military leadership's ability to tackle security challenges compared to previous democratic administrations.

However, both countries are practicing a different form of governance which is working for them and not similar to the most acclaimed form of democracy. It is crucial to note that these scholars also emphasized that, this should not be interpreted as a rejection of democracy itself, but rather dissatisfaction with how previous democratic governments functioned. Ibrahim and Zapata (2022) in "Democracy vs. Stability in the Sahel" (African Security Review) argue that what appears as support for military rule often reflects a desire for effective governance rather than endorsement of authoritarianism.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, the following recommendations for reinvigorating democratic processes in these countries and the broader West African region:

1. **Rebuild Trust in Democratic Institutions:**

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, the erosion of public confidence in democratic institutions has created space for military takeovers. Rebuilding this trust requires credible anti-corruption measures that visibly hold public officials accountable and promote transparency in governance. Strengthening the independence and technical capacity of electoral commissions is crucial for ensuring the integrity of future elections. Civic education must also be prioritized to rekindle public belief in democratic participation and inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas where political disengagement has grown.

2. **Balance Security and Democracy:**

The coups in both countries were largely justified by juntas as responses to worsening insecurity. However, long-term stability demands security sector reforms that place armed forces under firm civilian oversight while ensuring respect for human rights. Legal frameworks governing states of emergency must be tightened with clear limits and parliamentary review to prevent indefinite military rule. Community-based security strategies, engaging local leaders, traditional authorities, and youth, can help rebuild trust between civilians and state institutions while complementing national counterterrorism efforts.

3. **Address Economic Root Causes:**

Pervasive poverty, youth unemployment, and regional economic disparities have fuelled public frustration and undermined support for democratic regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso. Inclusive development strategies that create sustainable jobs, especially for young people in underserved regions like northern Mali and Burkina Faso's Sahel,

are urgently needed. Addressing these disparities through infrastructure, education, and local economic development will reduce the appeal of extremist groups and bolster support for democratic governance. Enhanced social protection programs will also provide safety nets for vulnerable groups and contribute to political stability.

4. Strengthen Civil Society:

A vibrant civil society is key to democratic resilience. This requires legal protections for civil society organizations and independent media, alongside measures to ensure their operational freedom. Establishing structured platforms for dialogue between civil society and government institutions can facilitate collaboration and accountability. Capacity-building efforts should focus on advocacy, coalition-building, and digital communication to amplify civil society's impact.

5. Reframe Regional Democratic Support to Restore Legitimacy and Trust

Findings from the study reveal that while some citizens in Burkina Faso and Mali have hailed recent coups, this does not necessarily indicate genuine support for military rule. Rather, it reflects their profound disappointment in the inability of democratic systems to alleviate long-standing grievances such as insecurity, poverty, corruption, and ineffective governance. This disillusionment is further compounded by perceptions of neo-colonial manipulation and undue external influence over domestic affairs. In response, ECOWAS must reconsider and refine its democratic promotion strategies. It should focus on building mechanisms that demonstrate sincerity and goodwill toward citizens, reaffirming the power of democracy to deliver justice, inclusion, and development. This includes rebuilding trust in democratic processes, and ensuring that

democracy in West Africa evolves independently, free from external domination and influence.

6. Promote Inclusive Political Dialogue

To restore democratic order, inclusive national dialogues must be facilitated to build consensus on the way forward. These efforts should ensure the participation of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities in all decision-making processes. National reconciliation and transitional justice mechanisms are also crucial for addressing historical grievances and healing political divides, necessary for curbing future resurgence of coups.

7. Address Regional Dimensions:

The instability in Mali and Burkina Faso is inextricably linked to regional security dynamics. Coordinated regional responses to terrorism, arms trafficking, and cross-border insurgency are critical. Yet these must be grounded in democratic norms and avoid empowering military actors at the cost of civilian authority. Promoting cross-border civil society collaboration and embedding governance standards in regional development and security projects will help build a more stable and democratic Sahel.

8. Tailor Approaches to Local Contexts

Burkina Faso's history of revolutionary activism and local governance structures offers an entry point for rebuilding democratic institutions with strong grassroots legitimacy. In contrast, Mali's longer experience with multiparty democracy provides a foundation to rekindle democratic norms and restore political party credibility. Both countries require tailored support that reflects their unique histories, social dynamics, and security

challenges, ensuring that governance, development, and peacebuilding are pursued simultaneously.

9. Prioritize Youth Engagement:

Given that the majority of citizens in both Mali and Burkina Faso are under 25, engaging youth meaningfully in democratic renewal is essential. Programs that foster youth leadership, civic responsibility, and political participation will empower a new generation committed to nonviolent change. Platforms for youth policy engagement, especially in education, employment, and peacebuilding, must be institutionalized. Moreover, youth-led civic movements and innovation hubs can be supported as engines of democratic renewal and social transformation.

Implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment from national governments, regional bodies, civil society actors, and international partners. It will necessitate a long-term perspective that recognizes that democratic consolidation is a gradual process that may face setbacks but is crucial for the long-term stability and prosperity of Burkina Faso, Mali, and the broader West African region.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study has provided comprehensive insights into the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and Mali, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings:

Scope of Case Studies: The study focused primarily on Burkina Faso and Mali, which, while providing valuable insights, may not be fully representative of the diverse democratic

experiences across West Africa. The findings may not be entirely generalizable to other countries in the region.

Access to Information: Due to the ongoing security situations in both countries, access to certain regions and informants were limited. This may have resulted in some perspectives, particularly from conflict-affected areas, being underrepresented in the study.

Rapidly Changing Context: The political situations in Burkina Faso and Mali are highly dynamic. Some of the information and analysis may become outdated quickly due to rapidly changing circumstances on the ground.

Language and Cultural Barriers: While efforts were made to overcome language barriers, some nuances may have been lost in translation, particularly when dealing with local languages and cultural contexts.

Potential Bias in Key Informant Interviews: The reliance on Key Informant Interviews, while providing valuable insights, may be subject to individual biases and limited perspectives of the interviewees.

Limited Quantitative Data: The study primarily relied on qualitative methods. While this provided rich, contextual information, it lacked the statistical generalizability that quantitative data might offer.

Time Constraints: The study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may have restricted the depth of investigation into some aspects of the research questions.

Focus on Elite Perspectives: The study primarily captured the views of political elites, diplomats, and civil society leaders. The perspectives of ordinary citizens, particularly in rural areas, may be underrepresented.

Sensitivity of the Topic: Given the political sensitivity of the subject matter, some informants may have been reluctant to share certain information or opinions, potentially leading to self-censorship.

Limited Historical Depth: While the study attempted to provide historical context, the primary focus was on recent events. A more in-depth historical analysis might reveal additional insights into long-term democratization trends.

Evolving Nature of Democracy: The study's conceptualization of democracy, while based on established theories, may not fully capture evolving understandings of democratic governance in the West African context.

Researcher Positionality: As with any qualitative research, the researcher's own background, perspective, and biases may have influenced the interpretation of data and findings.

These limitations should be taken into account when considering the findings and recommendations of this study. They also point to areas where future research could expand upon and complement the insights provided here.

4.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several areas for further research emerge that could deepen our understanding of democratization processes in West Africa:

1. **Comparative Studies:** Expand the scope to include other West African countries, allowing for a more comprehensive regional analysis of democratization trends.
2. **Longitudinal Research:** Conduct long-term studies to track the evolution of democratic institutions and practices over time, providing insights into the cyclical nature of democratic progress and backsliding.

3. Grassroots Perspectives: Undertake more extensive fieldwork to capture the views and experiences of ordinary citizens, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, regarding democracy and governance.
4. Quantitative Analysis: Develop and analyse quantitative indicators of democratic health specific to the West African context, complementing qualitative insights with statistical data.
5. Security-Democracy Nexus: Further investigate the complex relationship between security imperatives and democratic governance, exploring models for effective counterterrorism that do not compromise democratic norms.
6. Economic Determinants: Conduct in-depth studies on the economic factors influencing democratic stability, including the impacts of inequality, youth unemployment, and resource dependence.
7. Role of External Actors: Analyse in greater detail the impacts of various forms of external intervention on democratic processes, including military assistance, development aid, and democracy promotion programs.
8. Digital Democracy: Explore the role of digital technologies in shaping democratic engagement and governance in West Africa, including both opportunities and challenges.
9. Gender and Democracy: Investigate the gendered dimensions of democratic participation and backsliding, examining how women's political engagement is affected by and affects democratization processes.
10. Traditional Governance Structures: Examine the interaction between traditional forms of governance and modern democratic institutions in West Africa, exploring potential synergies and conflicts.

11. Regional Integration and Democracy: Analyse how regional economic and political integration efforts impact democratization processes at the national level.
12. Youth and Democracy: Conduct focused studies on youth perceptions of and engagement with democratic processes, exploring generational shifts in political attitudes and behaviours.
13. Resilience Factors: Identify and analyse factors that contribute to democratic resilience in the face of challenges, potentially through comparative studies of countries that have successfully resisted democratic backsliding.
14. Media and Democracy: Investigate the changing role of media in West African democracies, including the impacts of social media and the challenges facing independent journalism.
15. Transitional Justice: Examine the role of transitional justice mechanisms in post-coup contexts, assessing their impact on democratic restoration and social cohesion.
16. Climate Change and Democracy: Explore the intersections between climate change, resource scarcity, and democratic governance in the Sahel region.
17. Urbanization and Democracy: Analyse how rapid urbanization in West Africa is affecting political participation and democratic processes.
18. Education and Democratic Culture: Investigate the role of education systems in fostering democratic values and civic engagement.
19. Diaspora Influence: Examine the role of diaspora communities in shaping democratic discourses and practices in their countries of origin.
20. Comparative Institutional Analysis: Conduct detailed comparisons of democratic institutions across West African countries to identify best practices and areas for reform.

These suggestions for further research offer opportunities to build on the findings of this study and address some of its limitations. By pursuing these lines of inquiry, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for democratization in West Africa, informing more effective strategies for supporting democratic governance in the region.

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This comprehensive list of references reflects the diverse sources consulted in the preparation of this dissertation, including academic books and journal articles, policy reports, and current news sources. It provides a solid foundation for the analysis and arguments presented in the study.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Dear Participant,

I am Ms. Thelma Tetteh, an MA student of Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana, conducting a study on the topic “Assessing the Declining State of Democratization in West Africa: The Case of Burkina Faso and Mali” under the supervision of Dr. Tim Ba-Taa-Banah. The aim of this research is to delve into why

democratization is declining in these two states, what is causing the decline and provide measures to improve the democratic system of governance in Burkina Faso and Mali.

It is our humble request that you spare a few minutes of your limited time to answer the research questions for us. The interview will be guided by the highest standards of research ethics. Your participation is voluntary and you are at liberty to withdraw at any time in the process. Also, I assure you that the information obtained from you will be kept anonymous and confidential and used only for research purposes.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Section 1: Introduction

Demographics

1. Age:

Under 18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56 and above

2. Gender

Male Female Other

3. Educational Level

No formal education Primary Secondary Tertiary Postgraduate

4. Occupation

Student Employed (public sector) Employed (private sector) Self-employed Unemployed
Retired

5. Residence

Urban Rural

Section 2: Views on Democracy

1. How important is democracy to you on a scale of 1 to 5? (1 being not important at all, 5 being extremely important)

1 2 3 4 5

2. Do you believe democracy is the best form of government for your country?

Yes No Unsure

3. What are the main benefits of democracy in your opinion? (Select all that apply)

Freedom of speech

Fair elections

Protection of human rights

Economic development

Other (please specify): _____

Section 3: Knowledge of Democratic History

1 2 3 4 5

How would you describe the state of democracy in your country at the time of the last coup?

Very strong Strong Moderate Weak Very weak

a. The last coup was justified.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Part one: Decline of democratization in Burkina Faso: General

1. How has the government responded to protests and opposition?
2. What is the current state of press freedom and media independence?
3. What role have external actors played in the political instability?
4. How has the country's democratic backsliding impacted regional relations?
5. What are the prospects for a return to democratic governance?
6. How have civil society organizations responded to the decline of democracy?
7. What is the current state of human rights?
8. How has the decline of democracy affected marginalized communities?
9. What steps are needed to restore democratic governance and address the root causes of political instability in Burkina Faso?
10. How has the rise of extremist groups affected the political situation?
11. What role has the international community played in supporting Burkina Faso's democratic transition?
12. How have regional organizations like ECOWAS responded to the crisis?
13. What are the implications of Burkina Faso's political instability for the Sahel region?

Part two; Why is democratization declining in Burkina Faso?

14. What are the underlying factors contributing to the decline of democratization?
15. What role has the military played in the decline of democratization?
16. How have external factors, such as France and other international powers, influenced the decline of democratization?
17. What impact have terrorist organizations had on the decline of democratization?

Part three: What are the implications of the declining state of democratization in Burkina Faso and for the rest of the sub-region

18. How will the decline of democratization affect regional security and stability?
19. . What are the potential consequences for human rights and the rule of law?
20. How might the decline of democratization impact regional economic development and cooperation?
21. What implications does the decline of democratization have for the Sahel region's ability to address transnational challenges?
22. How might the decline of democratization influence democratic consolidation in neighboring countries?

Part four: How or to what extent is democratization declining in Burkina Faso?

23. How do public opinion and citizen engagement reflect the decline of democratization?
24. What is the current state of democratic institutions, such as parliaments and electoral commissions?
25. To what extent have civil liberties and political rights been eroded?

Conclusion

1. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about the topic that we have not discussed?
2. Is there anyone else you would recommend for us to talk to in order to get further information?

Thank you for your time.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Participant,

I am Ms. Thelma Tetteh, an MA student of Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana, conducting a study on the topic “Assessing the Declining State of Democratization in West Africa: The Case of Burkina Faso and Mali” under the supervision of Dr. Tim Ba-Taa-Banah. The aim of this research is to delve into why democratization is declining in these two states, what is causing the decline and provide measures to improve the democratic system of governance in Burkina Faso and Mali.

It is our humble request that you spare a few minutes of your limited time to answer the research questions for us. The interview will be guided by the highest standards of research ethics. Your participation is voluntary and you are at liberty to withdraw at any time in the process. Also, I assure you that the information obtained from you will be kept anonymous and confidential and used only for research purposes.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Section 1: Introduction

Demographics

1. **Age:**

Under 18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56 and above

2. **Gender**

Male Female Other

3. **Educational Level**

No formal education Primary Secondary Tertiary

Postgraduate

4. Occupation

Student Employed (public sector) Employed (private sector) Self-employed

Unemployed Retired

5. Residence

Urban Rural

Section 2: Views on Democracy

1. How important is democracy to you on a scale of 1 to 5? (1 being not important at all, 5 being extremely important)

1 2 3 4 5

2. Do you believe democracy is the best form of government for your country?

Yes No Unsure

3. What are the main benefits of democracy in your opinion? (Select all that apply)

Freedom of speech

Fair elections

Protection of human rights

Economic development

Other (please specify): _____

Section 3: Knowledge of Democratic History

1 2 3 4 5

How would you describe the state of democracy in your country at the time of the last coup?

Very strong Strong Moderate Weak Very weak

a. The last coup was justified.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Part one: Decline of democratization in Mali: General

1. How has the government responded to protests and opposition?
2. What is the current state of press freedom and media independence?
3. What role have external actors played in the political instability?
4. How has the country's democratic backsliding impacted regional relations?
5. What are the prospects for a return to democratic governance?
6. How have civil society organizations responded to the decline of democracy?
7. What is the current state of human rights?
8. How has the decline of democracy affected marginalized communities?
9. What steps are needed to restore democratic governance and address the root causes of political instability in Mali?

10. How has the rise of extremist groups affected the political situation?
11. What role has the international community played in supporting Mali's democratic transition?
12. How have regional organizations like ECOWAS responded to the crisis?
13. What are the implications of Mali's political instability for the Sahel region?

Part two; Why is democratization declining in Mali?

14. What are the underlying factors contributing to the decline of democratization?
15. What role has the military played in the decline of democratization?
16. How have external factors, such as France and other international powers, influenced the decline of democratization?
17. What impact have terrorist organizations had on the decline of democratization?

Part three: What are the implications of the declining state of democratization in Mali and for the rest of the sub-region

18. How will the decline of democratization affect regional security and stability?
19. What are the potential consequences for human rights and the rule of law?
20. How might the decline of democratization impact regional economic development and cooperation?
21. What implications does the decline of democratization have for the Sahel region's ability to address transnational challenges?
22. How might the decline of democratization influence democratic consolidation in neighboring countries?

Part four: How or to what extent is democratization declining in Mali?

23. How do public opinion and citizen engagement reflect the decline of democratization?

24. What is the current state of democratic institutions, such as parliaments and electoral commissions?

25. To what extent have civil liberties and political rights been eroded?

Conclusion

1. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about the topic that we have not discussed?

2. Is there anyone else you would recommend for us to talk to in order to get further information?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Assessing the Declining State of Democratization in West Africa: The Case of Burkina Faso and Mali

Principal Investigator: Thelma Yemotiokor Tetteh *Institution:* Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research study on the state of democracy in West Africa, focusing on Burkina Faso and Mali. This form provides information about the study and your rights as a research participant. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the factors contributing to democratic decline in Burkina Faso and Mali, and to explore potential pathways for reinvigorating democratic processes in these countries and the broader West African region.

Study Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 10-30 minutes. The interview will focus on your perspectives on democratic governance, challenges to democracy, and potential solutions. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in daily life. While there may be no direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of democratic challenges in West Africa and may inform future policy recommendations.

Confidentiality: Your responses will be kept confidential. Any published reports will not include information that could identify you as a participant. Audio recordings will be stored securely and will be destroyed after transcription.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.

Contact Information: If you have questions about the study, please contact [Your Name] at [Your Email/Phone].

Consent: By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name (printed) Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Name (printed) Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix C: List of Acronyms

AQIM - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

AU - African Union

CDP - Congress for Democracy and Progress (Burkina Faso)

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

EU - European Union

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

HDI - Human Development Index

ISGS - Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

KII - Key Informant Interview

MINUSMA - United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MPP - People's Movement for Progress (Burkina Faso)

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

RSF - Reporters Without Borders

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

Appendix D: Timeline of Key Political Events (2015-2024)

Burkina Faso

2015: November: Roch Marc Christian Kaboré elected president in first free elections since 1987

2017: August: Terrorist attack on restaurant in Ouagadougou kills 19

2018: March: Terrorist attacks on French embassy and army headquarters in Ouagadougou

2019: December: Attack on military base in Arbinda kills 35 civilians and 7 soldiers

2020: November: Kaboré re-elected for a second term

2022:

- January 24: Military coup led by Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba
- September 30: Second coup led by Capt. Ibrahim Traoré

2023: Ongoing insecurity and humanitarian crisis

Mali

2015: June: Government signs peace accord with Tuareg-led rebels

2018: August: Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta re-elected president

2020:

- August 18: Military coup led by Col. Assimi Goita
- September: Transitional government established

2021: May 24: Second coup consolidates military control under Goita

2022:

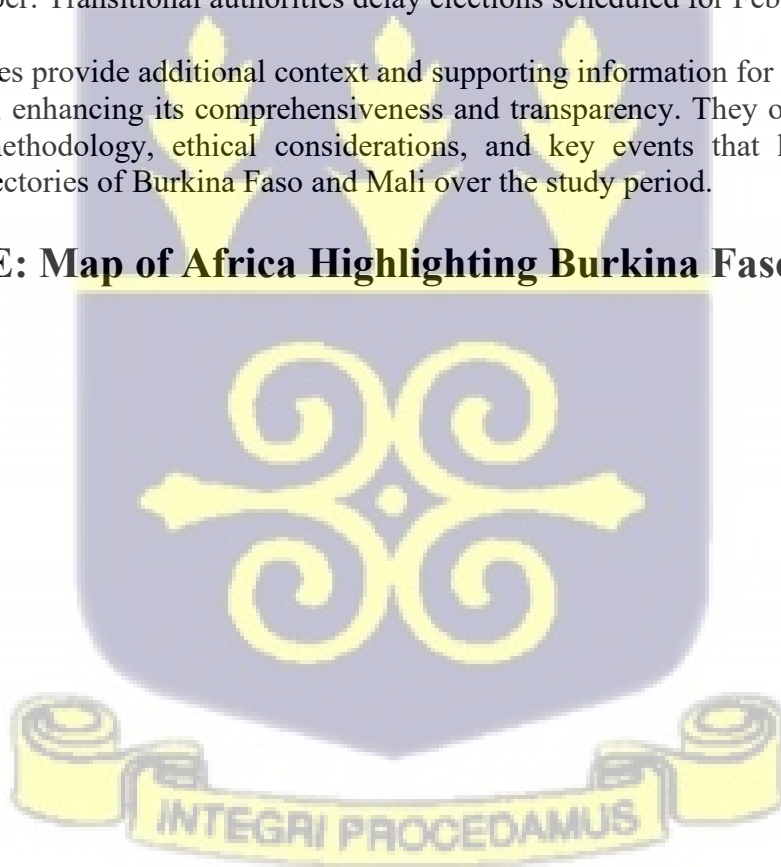
- January: ECOWAS imposes sanctions on Mali over delayed elections
- May: Mali withdraws from G5 Sahel joint force

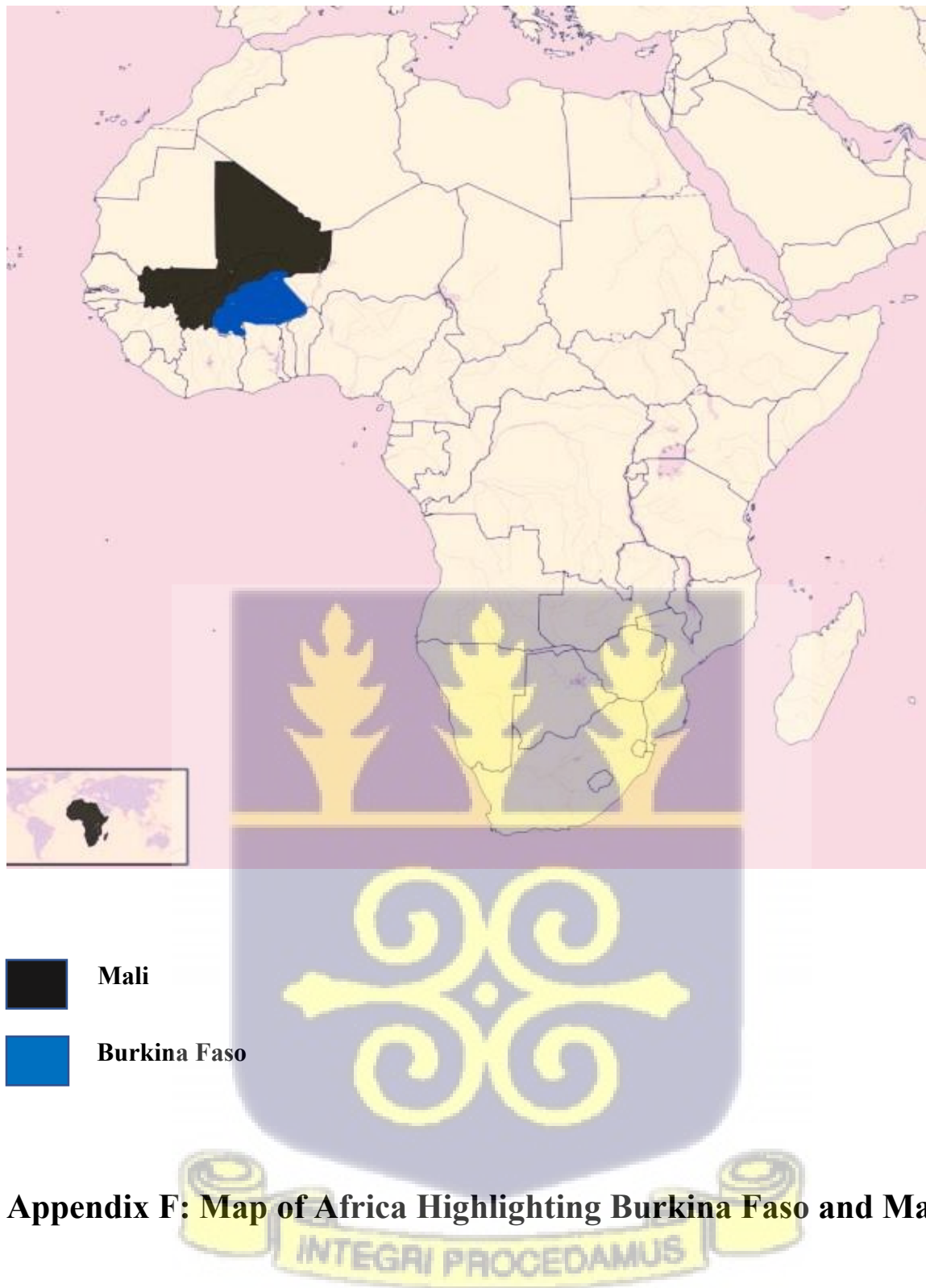
2023:

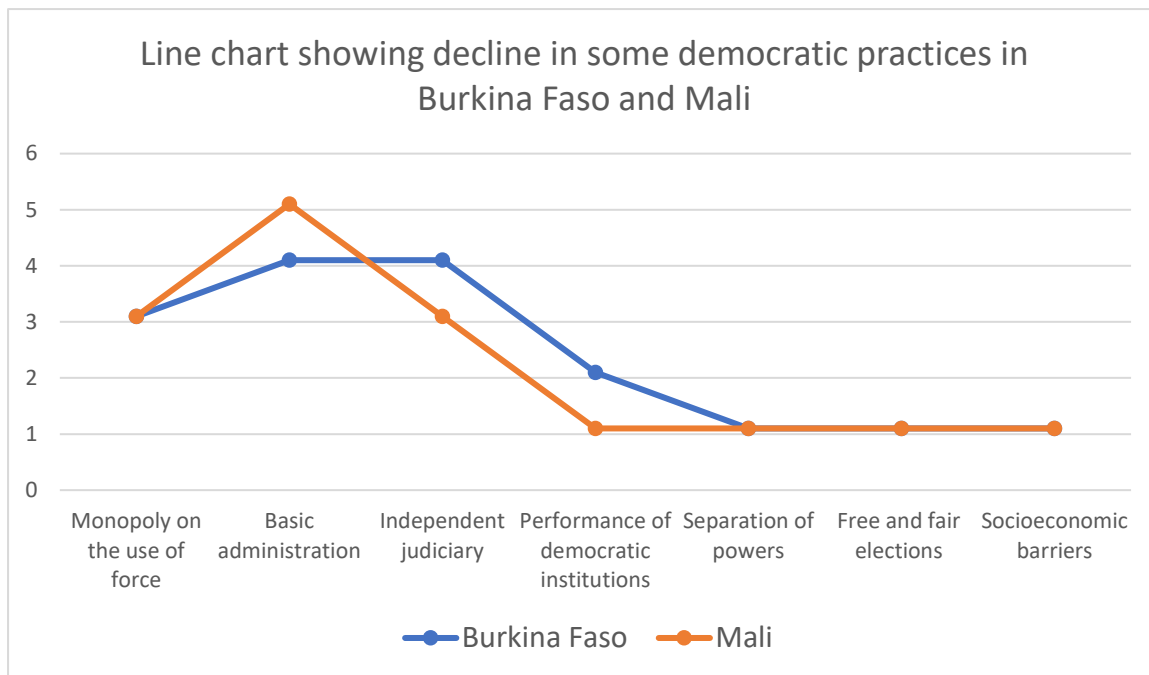
- June: Referendum on new constitution held amid controversy
- September: Transitional authorities delay elections scheduled for February 2024

These appendices provide additional context and supporting information for the main body of the dissertation, enhancing its comprehensiveness and transparency. They offer insights into the research methodology, ethical considerations, and key events that have shaped the democratic trajectories of Burkina Faso and Mali over the study period.

Appendix E: Map of Africa Highlighting Burkina Faso and Mali







Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung Report, 2024

Appendix G: Key Quotes from Interviews

This appendix would present a selection of particularly insightful or representative quotes from the Key Informant Interviews, organized by theme. For example:

1. On Security Challenges: "The fight against terrorism has become all-consuming, often at the expense of democratic norms." - Malian Diplomat
2. On Economic Factors: "We can't talk about sustainable democracy without addressing the basic economic needs of our people." - Burkinabé Official
3. On Civil Society Resilience: "Despite the restrictions, we're finding new ways to advocate for democracy. Social media has become our new public square." - Civil Society Leader, Burkina Faso

Appendix H: Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary would define important concepts used throughout the dissertation, ensuring clarity for readers who may not be familiar with all the terminology. Examples might include:

1. *Democratization*: The process of transitioning from a non-democratic form of government to a system of government that combines free and fair elections, rule of law, and protection of civil liberties.
2. *Democratic backsliding*: The gradual weakening of democratic institutions and norms within a country that had previously made democratic progress.

3. *Neopatrimonialism*: A system of social hierarchy where patrons use state resources to secure the loyalty of clients in the general population.
4. *Securitization*: The process of state actors transforming subjects into matters of "security" - an extreme version of politicization that enables extraordinary means to be used in the name of security.

Appendix I: Brief Profiles of Key Political Actors

This appendix would provide short biographies of significant political figures mentioned in the dissertation, giving readers context about their roles and influence. For example:

1. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (Mali):
 - President of Mali from 2013 to 2020
 - Key policies and events during his tenure
 - Circumstances of his ousting in the 2020 coup
2. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (Burkina Faso):
 - President of Burkina Faso from 2015 to 2022
 - Major initiatives and challenges during his presidency
 - Circumstances surrounding the coup that removed him from power

Appendix J: Summary of Regional and International Responses

This appendix would provide a timeline and brief description of key responses from regional and international bodies to the democratic backsliding in Burkina Faso and Mali. For example:

1. August 2020: ECOWAS imposes sanctions on Mali following the coup against Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta
2. January 2022: ECOWAS imposes sanctions on Mali over delayed elections
3. January 2022: AU suspends Burkina Faso following the coup against Kaboré

Appendix K: Informed Consent Form 2

Title of Study: Assessing the Declining State of Democratization in West Africa: The Case of Burkina Faso and Mali

Principal Investigator: Ms. Thelma Tetteh Institution: Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

☐ I have read and understood the information about the project.

☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.

☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

☐ I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalized for withdrawing.

☐ The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained to me.

☐ I agree to the use of anonymized quotes in publications.

Participant:

Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher Signature Date

Appendix L: Sample Transcripts

Participant 2 (Mali): "The situation here is complex. We want democracy, but we also need security. It's hard to have elections when parts of the country are controlled by armed groups. The government says they need more power to fight terrorists, but we worry they'll use that power against the opposition too."

Participant 4 (Burkina Faso): "Since the coup, things have changed. There's less open criticism of the government in the media. People are careful what they say. But at the same time, some people support the military because they promise to improve security. It's a trade-off between freedom and safety."

Appendix L: Extended Quotes from Participants

On press freedom: "Five years ago, we could criticize the government openly on radio or in newspapers. Now, journalists self-censor because they're afraid of being arrested or having their media outlets shut down. It's a subtle but significant change in our media landscape." - Participant 2, Burkina Faso

On economic challenges: "People in my village don't care about abstract ideas of democracy. They care about having enough food, access to healthcare, and jobs for their children. If a government, democratic or not, can provide these things, that's what they'll support." - Participant 3, Mali

Appendix M: Methodological Reflections

Sampling Strategy: used a stratified random sampling approach to ensure representation across different demographic groups. However, due to security concerns, some regions were underrepresented, which may have affected our results.

Language Barriers: Interviews were conducted in French, and English. While professional translators were used, some nuances may have been lost in translation.

Appendix O: Policy Brief

Executive Summary: This study reveals a significant decline in democratic norms and institutions in Burkina Faso and Mali, with implications for regional stability. Key factors include military interventions, security challenges, and economic difficulties.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen civil society and independent media
2. Implement comprehensive security sector reform
3. Enhance regional cooperation on democracy and security issues
4. Address economic grievances through inclusive development policies

Appendix Q: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Interest	Influence	Potential Role
Military	High	High	Key decision-maker, potential spoiler
Civil Society	High	Medium	Advocate for democratic reforms
International Donors	Medium	High	Provide support, apply pressure
Traditional Leaders	Medium	Medium	Influence public opinion

Appendix T: Media Coverage Analysis

Analysis of 100 news articles from 2020-2024:

- 45% focused on security issues
- 30% on political developments
- 15% on economic challenges
- 10% on social issues

Key narrative shift: From "democratic success stories" in 2015 to "democratic backsliding" by 2024.

