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Democratic Resilience in West Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Governance, Civil Society, and Public Participation in Nigeria and Burkina Faso

Ishaka Dele¹ & Shuaibu Umaru Yelwa²

Abstract

This study examined democratic resilience in West Africa through a comparative analysis of Nigeria and Burkina Faso, focusing on governance structures, civil society engagement, and public participation. Anchored on Conflict Transformation Theory, Democratic Theory, and Human Security Theory, the research explored how democratic institutions, civic actors, and participatory practices shaped each country's ability to withstand political disruptions. The study adopted a qualitative research design based solely on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, institutional reports, and datasets from international organizations. The analysis assessed institutional strength, civic engagement, and the inclusiveness of political processes between 2014 and 2024. The theoretical frameworks guided the understanding of how democratic systems can either adapt to or collapse under pressure from authoritarianism, insecurity, and governance failures. Through this lens, Nigeria was observed to maintain relative institutional continuity, driven by a decentralized federal system and a vibrant civil society despite prevalent corruption and electoral malpractice. Conversely, Burkina Faso displayed democratic fragility, with repeated military coups, weakened institutions, and repressive environments curtailing democratic consolidation. Civil society's ability to influence governance was more constrained in Burkina Faso, while public participation in Nigeria, though uneven, showed signs of growth, particularly among youth. The study concluded that democratic resilience depends on institutional depth, responsive governance, and active civic engagement. It recommended strengthening democratic institutions, safeguarding civil liberties, and enhancing inclusive governance mechanisms to reinforce resilience. This research contributes to the discourse on democratic sustainability in transitional African states facing internal and external pressures.

Keywords: *democratic resilience, governance, civil society, public participation, West Africa*

¹ National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, National Assembly, Abuja. +2348060507986 Email: d120064real@gmail.com
² University of Abuja Department of Political Science and International Relation Email: dumaryelwa@gmail.com

Introduction

Democratic resilience encompasses the ability of a political system to adapt, endure, and respond effectively to both internal and external challenges while safeguarding core democratic values such as accountability, the rule of law, political inclusiveness, and civic engagement. In recent years, democratic governance in West Africa has come under severe strain due to persistent insecurity, political instability, economic underperformance, and a resurgence of authoritarian tendencies. Particularly troubling has been the re-emergence of military coups in countries such as Mali (2020 and 2021), Guinea (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022 and 2023), which signal a regression in the region's democratic gains (International IDEA, 2023).

Nigeria and Burkina Faso represent two important case studies in examining the varying manifestations of democratic resilience in the West African sub-region. Nigeria, despite its numerous challenges including electoral irregularities, political violence, corruption, and declining public trust in institutions has managed to sustain a civilian democratic regime since 1999. The country's federal structure, active civil society organizations, and periodic elections have provided some buffers against authoritarian relapse (Agbibo, 2021; Omilusi, 2022).

In contrast, Burkina Faso has experienced repeated interruptions in its democratic evolution, with military takeovers interrupting elected governments. Although the 2014 popular uprising that ousted longtime President Blaise Compaoré was initially hailed as a victory for democratic accountability, the subsequent security crisis, coupled with weak institutions and governance deficits, facilitated a return to military rule (International Crisis Group, 2022; Nsaibia, 2023). Civil society and the general public have played pivotal roles in both resisting and facilitating political change in both countries, highlighting the complex interplay between governance structures, civic engagement, and state legitimacy.

This study explored and compared the democratic resilience of Nigeria and Burkina Faso through the lenses of governance effectiveness, the vibrancy of civil society, and the extent of public participation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for evaluating democratic consolidation in West Africa but also for proposing context-specific reforms that can strengthen institutional safeguards and foster inclusive, participatory governance in fragile democracies

Conceptual Review

Democratic Resilience

Democratic resilience has emerged as a critical lens for evaluating the quality and sustainability of democratic systems, particularly in fragile or transitional contexts such as those found in West Africa. It encompasses a system's capacity to endure and adapt amid crises whether political, social, or economic while safeguarding core democratic values such as accountability, rule of law, inclusivity, and citizen participation. While the concept broadly refers to the ability of democracies to resist erosion and recover from setbacks, scholars have provided deeper insights into the mechanisms, actors, and norms that underpin this resilience.

Larry Diamond (2019) emphasizes institutional integrity and normative commitment as foundational to democratic resilience. According to him, democracies survive not only through robust institutions like constitutional courts, independent media, and electoral bodies but also through the commitment of elites and citizens to uphold democratic norms. Civic education and a democratic political culture, he argues, play critical roles in fostering public vigilance and political accountability. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), offer a complementary perspective by focusing on the informal norms that act as the guardrails of democracy. They contend that mutual toleration among political actors and institutional forbearance are crucial to preventing democratic backsliding. When these unwritten rules are disregarded, especially in polarized societies, formal democratic structures can be manipulated for authoritarian ends. Their work underscores the fragility of democratic institutions when trust and restraint among political elites erode.

In contrast, Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg (2019) adopt a participatory approach, highlighting the role of bottom-up democratic engagement. Their research shows that democratic resilience is significantly enhanced when civil society is active, political opposition is strong, and citizens are meaningfully involved in governance. They argue that public participation not only strengthens institutional legitimacy but also provides a bulwark against authoritarian tendencies by empowering collective action and fostering accountability from below. Together, these perspectives present a multifaceted understanding of democratic resilience

one that balances institutional strength, normative behavior, and civic engagement as co-dependent pillars of democratic sustainability.

Governance

Governance plays a central role in shaping democratic resilience, as it encompasses the mechanisms, institutions, and practices through which public authority is exercised and state-society relations are managed. Good governance, defined by accountability, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, and inclusiveness, strengthens public trust and enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Conversely, governance failures such as corruption, impunity, and weak institutional capacity can accelerate democratic backsliding and state fragility. In this context, governance is examined through the lenses of institutional performance, leadership accountability, and state capacity in Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Fukuyama (2013) underscores that state capacity the ability of the state to implement decisions effectively is a key dimension of governance and a prerequisite for democratic resilience. He argues that even well-designed democratic systems can collapse without an effective bureaucracy, law enforcement, and service delivery mechanisms. In weak states, democratic forms may exist, but without substance or sustainability (Fukuyama, 2013). Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton (1999) developed the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and argue that governance is multidimensional, comprising voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Their work demonstrates empirically that countries with strong governance systems are more likely to maintain democratic stability and promote inclusive development. Poor governance, on the other hand, erodes state legitimacy and provokes discontent, often exploited by authoritarian actors.

Hyden, Court, and Mease (2004) focus on the quality of governance, arguing that the legitimacy of governance institutions depends not only on their technical capacity but also on the extent to which they are perceived as fair, inclusive, and responsive. In Africa, they note, governance challenges such as neopatrimonialism, ethnic favoritism, and weak institutional checks have hampered democratic

consolidation. Strengthening governance, therefore, requires reforms that promote institutional autonomy, citizen oversight, and leadership accountability. More so, these perspectives highlight that democratic resilience in contexts like Nigeria and Burkina Faso hinges not only on the presence of democratic structures but also on the effective, transparent, and accountable exercise of public authority.

Civil Society

Civil society plays a pivotal role in the sustainability and resilience of democratic systems. Broadly defined, civil society encompasses a range of non-governmental organizations, community groups, professional associations, media, and advocacy networks that operate independently of the state and engage actively in the public sphere. The vibrancy, autonomy, and effectiveness of civil society are critical in promoting accountability, advocating for democratic reforms, and safeguarding political freedoms, especially in fragile or transitioning democracies such as those in West Africa.

Gyimah-Boadi and Logan (2020) argue that civil society is a cornerstone of democratic resilience in Africa, acting as a watchdog over state power and a vehicle for citizen mobilization. They emphasize that civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in challenging abuses of power, demanding transparency, and promoting political inclusivity. Their research highlights how robust civil societies in certain African states have served as bulwarks against authoritarianism. Diamond (1994) views civil society as a crucial element of democratic consolidation. He asserts that a strong civil society not only checks the power of the state but also cultivates democratic values among citizens through civic education, public deliberation, and grassroots participation. According to Diamond, when civil society thrives, it fosters pluralism and restrains the centralization of authority, thereby increasing the resilience of democratic institutions.

Putnam (1993) provides a complementary perspective through his concept of social capital. He contends that networks of civic engagement, trust, and reciprocity embedded in civil society strengthen democratic governance. Putnam's empirical work in Italy shows that regions with dense civil society networks tend

to have more effective and accountable institutions, as civic participation enhances cooperation between the state and society. However, these scholars underscore that civil society is not merely a supplementary actor but a foundational pillar of democratic resilience. Its ability to inform, mobilize, and organize citizens serves as a counterweight to authoritarian excesses and a catalyst for democratic deepening in societies like Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Public Participation

Public participation is a fundamental component of democratic resilience, reflecting the extent to which citizens engage in political processes such as voting, civic activism, public consultations, and policymaking. It embodies the principle of popular sovereignty and serves as a critical measure of democratic health. When citizens actively participate in governance, they contribute to accountability, inclusivity, and the legitimacy of political institutions. Conversely, widespread apathy, disenfranchisement, or exclusion often signals democratic decay and institutional disconnection.

Bratton (2019) emphasizes that high levels of citizen participation, particularly through voting and political engagement, are essential for democratic consolidation in Africa. He notes that participation not only legitimizes democratic institutions but also empowers citizens to demand accountability and responsive governance. Bratton's research in sub-Saharan Africa shows that countries with vibrant electoral and civic cultures are more resistant to authoritarian reversals. **Gaventa and Barrett (2012)** provide a broader perspective, arguing that public participation enhances state responsiveness and social inclusion. Their global review of participatory governance initiatives shows that when citizens are involved in decision-making processes, outcomes are more equitable, transparent, and sustainable. They advocate for institutionalizing participatory spaces to deepen democracy and prevent marginalization, especially among vulnerable groups.

Dahl (1989), a foundational theorist in democratic studies, contends that meaningful participation requires not just the right to vote but also access to information, freedom of association, and the ability to influence public discourse.

For Dahl, effective participation is one of the key criteria for a “polyarchy”—a fully functioning democracy. He warns that when these conditions are eroded, democratic institutions risk becoming hollow or unresponsive to the people they serve. In the context of Nigeria and Burkina Faso, examining public participation reveals important dynamics of inclusion, political awareness, and civic engagement. The level and quality of citizen involvement in each country’s political life directly affect the strength and resilience of its democratic systems.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory Democratic Theory and Democratic Resilience

Participatory Democratic Theory provides a robust framework for understanding democratic resilience, especially within the context of West African states like Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Rooted in classical democratic ideals and further developed by theorists such as Carole Pateman (1970), Benjamin Barber (1984), and Archon Fung (2003), the theory emphasizes the direct involvement of citizens in political decision-making processes, beyond just voting in periodic elections. It asserts that democracy is strengthened when citizens actively participate in governance, engage with political institutions, and influence public policy at various levels.

Pateman, (1970) argues that political participation is not merely a means to influence government but a process that educates and empowers citizens, fosters civic virtue, and deepens democratic culture. This perspective is particularly relevant to fragile or transitioning democracies where institutions are often weak and citizen trust is low. In such contexts, participatory democracy serves as a mechanism for building legitimacy, promoting accountability, and resisting authoritarian tendencies. Barber (1984) takes this further by advocating for a model of democracy where citizens are co-creators of policy and not passive recipients of elite decisions. He contends that democratic resilience is directly tied to the degree of civic engagement, public deliberation, and institutional openness to grassroots participation. This is particularly pertinent in West Africa, where the marginalization of civil society and limited participatory channels often correlate with democratic instability. Fung (2003) introduces the concept of “empowered participatory governance,” which

focuses on practical institutional arrangements that allow ordinary people to engage meaningfully in public decision-making. He argues that resilient democracies are those that adapt institutions to include participatory practices, especially in addressing complex socio-political challenges.

Applying this theory to Nigeria and Burkina Faso, participatory democratic theory explains why varying levels of public participation and civic engagement have led to divergent democratic outcomes. Nigeria, despite its challenges, maintains a multi-party system, periodic elections, and a vibrant civil society, which have collectively contributed to its relative democratic continuity. In contrast, Burkina Faso's recurrent military interventions and weaker participatory structures reveal the fragility of its democratic institutions. Thus, participatory democratic theory not only clarifies the mechanisms through which democratic resilience is built or undermined but also underscores the importance of inclusive governance, civic education, and institutional reform.

Governance Structures:

Institutions and Stability in Nigeria and Burkina Faso

Governance structures, encompassing political institutions and their stability, play a crucial role in shaping the resilience or fragility of democracies. The institutional arrangements within Nigeria and Burkina Faso highlight contrasting trajectories of democratic consolidation in West Africa, reflecting broader regional dynamics. These differences are rooted in historical legacies, institutional design, political culture, and the capacity of state institutions to withstand internal and external shocks.

Nigeria's Federal Presidential System and Institutional Continuity

Nigeria operates under a federal system of government with a presidential democracy enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. The country is characterized by a multi-party system and periodic elections held every four years. Nigeria's federal structure divides power among the central government and 36 states, allowing for decentralization and accommodating its diverse ethnic and religious composition

(Adebayo & Adekunle, 2021). Despite significant challenges, including widespread corruption, electoral irregularities, and governance inefficiencies, Nigeria has sustained civilian rule uninterrupted since the return to democracy in 1999. Key institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the judiciary have played critical roles in maintaining political continuity. While INEC has faced criticism for logistical challenges and allegations of bias, its consistent conduct of elections has been pivotal in the democratic process (Osaghae, 2023). The judiciary, although occasionally compromised by political interference, continues to serve as a forum for electoral disputes and constitutional interpretation, thereby reinforcing the rule of law. These institutions function as anchors in Nigeria's democratic architecture, contributing to the system's resilience despite persistent governance flaws (Adejumobi, 2022).

Moreover, Nigeria's vibrant civil society and active media environment have bolstered governance by demanding accountability and transparency. The interplay between state institutions and societal actors fosters a degree of checks and balances essential for democratic durability (Mustapha, 2022). While challenges remain, such as ethnic tensions, corruption, and security threats, Nigeria's institutional framework provides a platform for managing conflict and facilitating political competition, crucial for democratic survival.

Burkina Faso's Governance: Institutional Weakness and Democratic Fragility

Burkina Faso presents a contrasting case marked by institutional instability and recurrent disruptions to constitutional governance. The country experienced a popular uprising in 2014 that ended the 27-year rule of President Blaise Compaoré, raising hopes for democratic renewal (Yaro, 2023). However, this optimism has been undercut by subsequent political turbulence, including military coups in 2022 and 2023 that interrupted the democratic process. Unlike Nigeria, Burkina Faso's institutions are considerably weaker, particularly in the realms of civil-military relations and institutional autonomy. The military's recurrent interventions indicate a fragile separation between civilian authority and military power, which undermines democratic consolidation (Crisis Group, 2023). The coups have been

justified by the military as necessary to address rampant insecurity linked to jihadist insurgencies, which have devastated large parts of the country (ICG, 2023). This insecurity exacerbates institutional weaknesses, as the government struggles to maintain control and provide basic services.

The constitutional framework in Burkina Faso has been repeatedly tested and broken, revealing the fragility of rule of law and institutional enforcement mechanisms. Weaknesses in the judiciary, electoral bodies, and legislature limit their capacity to serve as effective checks on executive power or military influence (Konate, 2022). Political institutions are further undermined by limited resources, corruption, and lack of public trust, which fuels cycles of instability and limits prospects for democratic resilience. Civil society and political parties in Burkina Faso face significant constraints due to insecurity and political repression, reducing public participation and limiting the pressure on institutions to uphold democratic norms (Kafando, 2023). The fragile institutional environment hampers the establishment of stable governance structures capable of withstanding crises, contrasting sharply with Nigeria's relatively more robust system.

More so, the governance experiences of Nigeria and Burkina Faso illustrate how institutional strength, legitimacy, and autonomy critically influence democratic stability. Nigeria's federal system, despite its flaws, incorporates institutional mechanisms and societal engagement that have enabled the country to manage political competition and survive governance challenges. In contrast, Burkina Faso's institutional fragility, compounded by military interference and insecurity, has led to recurrent breakdowns of democratic order. These contrasting cases emphasize that democratic resilience depends not only on formal constitutional provisions but also on the functionality and credibility of institutions tasked with upholding democracy. The military's subordination to civilian authority, an independent judiciary, and credible electoral management bodies are indispensable for democratic endurance (Diamond, 2020). Furthermore, security challenges, if not effectively addressed within democratic frameworks, can become catalysts for authoritarian regression, as seen in Burkina Faso.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis suggests that strengthening institutions, promoting civil-military dialogue, enhancing state capacity, and fostering inclusive governance are vital strategies for consolidating democracy in West Africa. Nigeria's experience offers lessons on the importance of institutional continuity and societal engagement, while Burkina Faso's challenges highlight the risks posed by institutional fragility and insecurity to democratic governance.

Civil Society Engagement in Nigeria and Burkina Faso: Roles, Challenges, and Impact

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are critical actors in democratic governance, acting as intermediaries between the state and the citizenry. They promote transparency, accountability, and civic education, thereby strengthening democratic resilience. In West Africa, the role of civil society varies significantly depending on political context, institutional capacity, and state-society relations. Nigeria and Burkina Faso offer contrasting examples of civil society engagement, reflecting divergent democratic experiences in the region.

Civil Society in Nigeria: Robustness and Diversity

Nigeria has one of the most vibrant and diverse civil society sectors in Africa, shaped by a history of activism against military rule and for democratic reforms (Fawole & Fawole, 2021). Nigerian CSOs range from grassroots community-based organizations to national advocacy groups, focusing on a broad spectrum of issues including human rights, governance, anti-corruption, electoral transparency, and social justice (Ojo & Akinola, 2022). This sector has grown substantially since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, benefiting from a relatively open political space and legal protections under the constitution.

Prominent organizations such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE) have been instrumental in shaping democratic norms and practices. The CDD engages in policy research, voter education, and election monitoring, contributing to the credibility of electoral processes (CDD, 2023). EiE, a youth-led movement, mobilizes citizen activism to

demand accountability and fight corruption, leveraging social media and grassroots mobilization to enhance public participation (Adeoye, 2022). These organizations exemplify the proactive role Nigerian civil society plays in holding government institutions accountable and fostering democratic awareness. Furthermore, Nigerian civil society has shown resilience even under political pressures, including state harassment and legal restrictions. CSOs often collaborate with international partners to strengthen advocacy efforts and build institutional capacity (Ibeanu, 2021). Their engagement in electoral observation, policy dialogue, and public education has been vital in mitigating electoral fraud and promoting transparency, which enhances the legitimacy of Nigeria's democratic institutions (Mustapha & Adedeji, 2022). Nevertheless, challenges remain. Funding constraints, government suspicion, and occasional crackdowns on activists hinder the full potential of civil society. Moreover, the heterogeneity of civil society actors sometimes leads to fragmentation and rivalry, which can dilute collective impact (Ojo, 2023). Despite these hurdles, the sector remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's democratic landscape.

Civil Society in Burkina Faso: Vibrancy under Threat

Burkina Faso's civil society has historically played a significant role, especially notable during the 2014 popular uprising that ended Blaise Compaoré's long authoritarian rule. Civil society groups, including trade unions, youth organizations, and human rights defenders, mobilized citizens and pressured the government toward democratic transition (Yameogo, 2022). This period demonstrated the potential power of civil society in challenging entrenched authoritarianism and fostering democratic aspirations. However, the political landscape has dramatically changed following the military coups of 2022 and 2023. The coups, which disrupted the constitutional order, ushered in a period marked by increasing repression of civil liberties, including freedoms of assembly, expression, and association (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The junta's intolerance for dissent has led to restrictions on CSO activities, the closure of media outlets, and arrests of activists, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship (Amnesty International, 2023).

This repression has severely curtailed the capacity of civil society to operate effectively. Many organizations face obstacles in organizing public protests or

engaging with the government on policy issues. The shrinking civic space undermines civil society's ability to monitor governance, advocate for reforms, and educate the public on democratic rights and responsibilities (Kafando, 2023). Consequently, the post-coup environment has weakened one of the key pillars necessary for democratic resilience. Despite these challenges, Burkina Faso's civil society remains engaged, albeit cautiously. Some CSOs have shifted focus toward humanitarian assistance and community resilience in response to escalating insecurity from jihadist insurgencies (International Crisis Group, 2023). Others continue to seek avenues for dialogue with transitional authorities to safeguard democratic gains (Tapsoba, 2023). The determination of these actors underscores civil society's persistent, though constrained, role in Burkina Faso's political dynamics.

Comparative Reflections

The divergent experiences of civil society in Nigeria and Burkina Faso reflect the broader political contexts shaping democratic resilience in both countries. Nigeria's relatively open political environment has enabled a thriving civil society sector capable of influencing governance and fostering democratic accountability. In contrast, Burkina Faso's ongoing political instability and authoritarian repression have constrained civil society, limiting its effectiveness as a democratic watchdog. This comparison highlights the importance of a supportive political and legal environment for civil society to flourish and contribute meaningfully to democracy. As scholars emphasize, robust civil society engagement is indispensable for democratic deepening, serving both as a check on state power and a conduit for citizen participation (Putnam, 2020; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2019). In conclusion, strengthening civil society institutions, protecting civic freedoms, and fostering constructive state-society relations are critical for enhancing democratic resilience in West Africa. Nigeria's experience offers valuable lessons on the benefits of a vibrant civil society, while Burkina Faso's challenges illustrate the risks when civic space is restricted. Addressing these dynamics is essential for sustaining democracy in the region.

Public Participation and Political Culture in Nigeria and Burkina Faso: Dynamics, Challenges, and Prospects

Public participation is fundamental to the health and resilience of democracies. It reflects the extent to which citizens are actively involved in political processes, ranging from voting and civic activism to engagement in policy dialogues and decision-making. The quality and vibrancy of public participation shape political culture, which in turn influences democratic stability and governance outcomes. In West Africa, Nigeria and Burkina Faso provide contrasting but instructive examples of how public participation interacts with political culture to impact democratic resilience.

Public Participation in Nigeria: Challenges and Emerging Civic Activism

Nigeria, Africa's most populous democracy, has a complex and often contradictory record on public participation. On the one hand, the country holds regular elections under a multi-party system, providing formal avenues for citizen involvement. On the other hand, electoral participation has been inconsistent and frequently undermined by systemic challenges. Voter apathy is a significant issue, fueled by widespread disillusionment with political elites, electoral malpractice, and a persistent culture of vote-buying (Akinola & Ojo, 2021). Reports of violence during elections further discourage citizen turnout, raising questions about the inclusiveness and credibility of electoral processes (Ezekwesili, 2022).

Despite these challenges, recent developments signal an important shift in Nigeria's political culture toward increased civic consciousness and youth engagement. The #EndSARS protests of 2020, sparked by widespread condemnation of police brutality, exemplified how Nigerian youth have harnessed public participation beyond the ballot box. The movement rapidly mobilized millions across cities, leveraging social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to organize protests, share information, and demand government accountability (Adebanwi, 2021). This digital activism showcased a new form of political participation rooted in grassroots mobilization and online engagement, challenging

traditional political actors and signaling a demand for deeper democratic reforms (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023).

Moreover, social media has become a crucial tool for political participation in Nigeria, enabling marginalized voices to be heard and facilitating real-time monitoring of government actions (Olaniyan & Agbaje, 2023). This digital public sphere has transformed the political culture by fostering greater political awareness, enhancing transparency, and encouraging citizen activism, particularly among younger generations (Obi, 2022). However, this form of engagement also faces obstacles, including government censorship, misinformation, and digital divides that limit access for some population segments (Nwafor & Eze, 2023).

Public Participation in Burkina Faso: From Mobilization to Repression

Burkina Faso's political culture has been shaped by cycles of popular mobilization and military interventions. The 2014 uprising, which led to the ousting of long-time president Blaise Compaoré, was a watershed moment demonstrating the capacity for collective political participation. Citizens from diverse social groups—students, trade unions, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens—mobilized extensively, reflecting a vibrant political culture energized by demands for democratic governance and accountability (Sanou, 2022).

However, the subsequent period has been marked by setbacks. The military coups of 2022 and 2023 disrupted constitutional rule and ushered in a period of political repression. Restrictions on freedoms of assembly, speech, and the press have severely curtailed opportunities for public participation (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The junta's control over political space has generated widespread skepticism and disillusionment toward formal electoral processes, which are viewed by many as lacking transparency and credibility (Diallo & Kaboré, 2023). Consequently, political apathy has increased, with many citizens feeling alienated from governance structures. Nevertheless, political awareness remains relatively high in Burkina Faso, rooted in a history of social mobilization and civic activism (Ouédraogo, 2023). Past experiences, such as the 2014 protests, highlight the latent potential for democratic renewal, contingent on the restoration of civil liberties and the reestablishment of

inclusive political institutions (Sawadogo, 2023). Even under military rule, informal networks and community groups continue to engage politically, often focusing on humanitarian and security issues exacerbated by jihadist insurgencies (International Crisis Group, 2023). These forms of civic engagement, though constrained, suggest that political culture in Burkina Faso is resilient and could be a foundation for future democratic revitalization.

Comparative Insights and Implications

The experiences of Nigeria and Burkina Faso illustrate how public participation and political culture are deeply intertwined and shaped by broader political contexts. Nigeria's political culture is characterized by a mixture of formal electoral participation and emergent digital activism, reflecting both the challenges of entrenched electoral malpractice and the transformative potential of youth-led movements. The #EndSARS movement exemplifies a shift toward more assertive, issue-based civic participation that transcends traditional electoral politics. In contrast, Burkina Faso's political culture reflects a pendulum swing between popular mobilization and political repression. While coups and authoritarian crackdowns have dampened formal participation and increased public skepticism, the underlying civic awareness and history of activism suggest a potential for democratic resurgence. The trajectory of public participation in Burkina Faso underscores the importance of protecting civil liberties and ensuring institutional inclusiveness for democratic consolidation. Both cases affirm the centrality of enabling environments for public participation: democratic governance flourishes where citizens feel empowered to engage politically without fear of repression, and where political institutions are responsive to popular demands (Bratton, 2019; Putnam, 2020). The use of social media as a participatory platform, especially in Nigeria, also highlights the evolving nature of political culture in the digital age, which offers new avenues for engagement but also new challenges for democratic accountability.

More so, public participation remains a vital element of democratic resilience in West Africa. Nigeria's blend of electoral challenges and vibrant civic activism demonstrates both the fragility and potential of its political culture. Burkina Faso's

experience, marked by popular uprisings and military repression, underscores the fragility of democracy where institutional and civil liberties are compromised but also highlights the enduring spirit of political engagement. Strengthening democratic resilience in both countries requires safeguarding civic freedoms, promoting inclusive political dialogue, and supporting innovative forms of participation that reflect evolving political cultures.

Comparative Insights and Challenges in Democratic Resilience: Nigeria and Burkina Faso

Nigeria and Burkina Faso, two pivotal West African states, offer insightful case studies into the dynamics of democratic resilience amid complex socio-political landscapes. While both countries share a commitment to democratic governance, their experiences underscore divergent trajectories influenced by institutional strength, civil society engagement, and security contexts. This comparative analysis highlights how Nigeria's relative institutional continuity contrasts with Burkina Faso's fragile democratic structures, while also identifying common challenges that impede democratic consolidation in both countries.

Institutional Continuity and Civil Society in Nigeria

Nigeria operates a federal presidential system that, despite persistent governance challenges, has maintained civilian rule uninterrupted since the return to democracy in 1999. The country's democratic institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and legislative bodies, have played a critical role in sustaining political continuity and managing transitions of power (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2022). Though these institutions are imperfect and often criticized for inefficiency, corruption, and politicization, their existence provides a framework that supports the rule of law and electoral processes.

Moreover, Nigeria's vibrant civil society sector significantly bolsters democratic resilience. Organizations focused on human rights, electoral integrity, anti-corruption, and civic education actively engage the populace and hold the government accountable. Groups like the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and

Enough is Enough (EiE) have become instrumental in promoting democratic norms and mobilizing public participation (Ojo & Alabi, 2023). The proliferation of digital activism, especially among Nigeria's youth, further energizes civil society's role in shaping political discourse and advocacy (Eze & Okonkwo, 2024). However, Nigeria's democracy is far from flawless. Governance inefficiencies, entrenched corruption, and a weak rule of law often undermine institutional effectiveness. Additionally, widespread political exclusion, especially among marginalized groups and youth, constrains meaningful participation and fuels disillusionment (Akinwale, 2023). Nevertheless, the country's relative institutional depth and active civic space remain important buffers against democratic collapse.

Democratic Fragility and Institutional Weakness in Burkina Faso

In contrast, Burkina Faso epitomizes the vulnerabilities of democratic systems lacking strong institutional foundations and facing acute security challenges. The country's political landscape has been marked by repeated military interventions, most recently the coups in 2022 and 2023, which have disrupted fragile democratic transitions following the popular uprising that ousted long-time ruler Blaise Compaoré in 2014 (Sanou, 2023). The military takeovers have eroded constitutional governance and fostered political instability. Burkina Faso's institutional weaknesses are evident in the limited capacity of civilian governance structures to manage security crises, deliver public services, or foster inclusive political participation. Weak civil-military relations and fragile political institutions have rendered the country susceptible to authoritarian backsliding (Diallo & Kaboré, 2023). Moreover, the state's inability to control vast swathes of its territory, especially in the northern regions plagued by jihadist insurgencies, has further undermined governance and democratic processes (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Civil society in Burkina Faso, once a key driver of political change during the 2014 uprising, now operates under severe restrictions. The post-coup environment has seen increased repression of civic freedoms, limiting the space for advocacy and citizen mobilization (Human Rights Watch, 2024). These conditions have fostered public skepticism towards electoral processes and diminished trust in state institutions, deepening democratic fragility. Common Challenges: Corruption,

Youth Unemployment, Rule of Law, and Political Exclusion

Despite their divergent paths, Nigeria and Burkina Faso face several shared challenges that impede democratic consolidation:

1. Corruption: Corruption remains pervasive in both countries, undermining public trust and weakening governance institutions. In Nigeria, corruption infiltrates various levels of government, distorting policy implementation and resource allocation (Transparency International, 2023). Similarly, in Burkina Faso, corruption erodes the already fragile state capacity, exacerbating governance failures and fueling grievances that militant groups exploit (World Bank, 2024).

2. Youth Unemployment: High rates of youth unemployment in both countries contribute to political disillusionment and social unrest. Large youth populations, when marginalized from economic and political opportunities, are more susceptible to radicalization or political apathy (UNDP, 2023). In Nigeria, youth unemployment remains a structural challenge that limits civic participation despite high political awareness (Adeyemi, 2023). In Burkina Faso, unemployment compounds the difficulties of governance and security, especially in conflict-affected areas (Sawadogo, 2024).

3. Weak Rule of Law: Both countries struggle with enforcing the rule of law consistently and impartially. Judicial inefficiencies, political interference, and limited access to justice weaken citizens' confidence in legal systems (Akinyemi, 2023). In Nigeria, electoral disputes and human rights violations often go unresolved, while in Burkina Faso, weakened institutions and military dominance have further eroded legal norms (Diallo & Kaboré, 2023).

4. Political Exclusion: Marginalization of ethnic, regional, and socio-economic groups reduces inclusivity and fuels tensions. In Nigeria, ethnic and regional divisions complicate political representation and resource sharing (Mustapha, 2023). Burkina Faso faces similar challenges with ethnic and regional disparities, compounded by security issues that limit political participation in affected areas (Ouédraogo, 2023).

5. Security Threats: Terrorism and Insecurity

Security concerns represent one of the most significant hurdles to democratic resilience in both nations. Northern Nigeria and the Sahel region of Burkina Faso face severe threats from terrorism, insurgencies, and armed banditry. In Nigeria, Boko Haram and other insurgent groups continue to destabilize the Northeast, causing humanitarian crises and undermining state authority (International Crisis Group, 2023). These security challenges restrict citizens' political participation and divert government focus from democratic deepening to counterterrorism. Similarly, Burkina Faso's struggle with jihadist violence across its northern and eastern territories has resulted in widespread displacement, state fragility, and a breakdown of governance (Sawadogo, 2024). The security vacuum exacerbates political instability and provides cover for authoritarian tendencies, further hindering democratic consolidation.

However, Nigeria and Burkina Faso illustrate contrasting but instructive experiences in democratic resilience. Nigeria's institutional continuity and active civil society provide a foundation for sustained democratic engagement, albeit amid governance challenges. Burkina Faso's democratic fragility reflects the vulnerability of political systems lacking strong institutions and facing acute security threats. Yet, both countries grapple with common obstacles: corruption, youth unemployment, weak rule of law, political exclusion, and insecurity that undermine democratic governance. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms to strengthen institutions, promote inclusive governance, empower youth, and enhance security while safeguarding civil liberties. Moreover, supporting vibrant civil societies and fostering political cultures that value participation and accountability will be critical to the democratic futures of Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen Democratic Institutions:** Both Nigeria and Burkina Faso must prioritize the reinforcement of democratic institutions such as independent electoral commissions, judiciaries, and anti-corruption bodies.
- 2. Enhance Civil-Military Relations:** Given the history of military interventions

in Burkina Faso and security challenges in Nigeria, reforms aimed at ensuring civilian supremacy over the military are critical.

3. Promote Inclusive Governance and Political Participation: To address widespread political exclusion and youth disillusionment, governments should create platforms for inclusive dialogue and participation. Governments should also tackle electoral malpractices such as vote-buying and violence to restore citizens' confidence.

4. Protect and Empower Civil Society: Civil society organizations in both countries must be protected against repression and provided with legal and financial support.

Leverage Regional and International Support: Regional bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union should continue enforcing democratic norms through timely interventions, mediation, and sanctions when necessary.

5. Manage Security Threats through Multi-sectoral Approaches: Addressing terrorism and insecurity in the Sahel and northern Nigeria requires not only military strategies but also socio-economic development, community engagement, and cross-border cooperation.

Harness Technology Responsibly: Governments and civil society should collaborate to promote digital literacy, regulate misinformation, and use technology to enhance political participation and government transparency.

Conclusion

This study highlights the divergent trajectories of democratic resilience in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, underscoring the complex interplay of institutional capacity, civil society strength, security dynamics, and political culture. Nigeria's relative institutional continuity and vibrant civil society contrast with Burkina Faso's democratic fragility, marked by recurrent military coups and weakened governance structures. Despite the challenges of corruption, insecurity, political exclusion, and economic hardship that both countries face, the presence of engaged citizens, active civil society, and regional democratic frameworks offers pathways for consolidation. However,

without concerted efforts to strengthen institutions, foster inclusive governance, and ensure security, democratic gains remain fragile.

The future of democracy in West Africa hinges on multi-level cooperation among governments, civil society, regional bodies, and international actors. By implementing comprehensive reforms that address the root causes of instability and empower citizens, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and their neighbors can reinforce democratic resilience and promote sustainable development. Ultimately, democracy's survival in West Africa depends not only on formal structures but also on the commitment of leaders and citizens alike to uphold democratic principles, engage in peaceful dialogue, and collectively resist authoritarian tendencies. With sustained efforts and strategic partnerships, the prospects for democratic stability and growth in the region remain cautiously optimistic.

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