SITUATION REPORT:

SDG 16

A REVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTAL
CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: **THROUGH
THE LENS OF SDG 16: PEACE,
JUSTICE & STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

SITUATION REPORT:

SDG 16

A REVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTAL
CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: **THROUGH
THE LENS OF SDG 16: PEACE,
JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

Content

Acronyms

ABC	All-Basotho Convention
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AES	Alliance of Sahel States
Al Shabaab	"The Youth"
AUEOM	African Union Election Observation Mission
AQIM	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
AUTJP	African Union Transitional Justice Policy
BH	Boko Haram
CSVR	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DC	Democratic Congress
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Demestic Product
GSDI	Global State of Democracy Initiative
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ISM	Islamic State Mozambique
ISCA	Islamic State Central Africa Province
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
LCB	Lake Chad Basin
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEWS	National Early Warning System
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
RTGNU	Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UMP	Union for the Presidential Majority
UPC	Union for Peace
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDP	Volontaires Pour la Défense de la Patrie
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front

Authors: CSVR,[1] and WANEP. [2]

Acknowledgements

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) express their gratitude to the dedicated teams who contributed to this report. From CSVR, we sincerely thank Dr. Bobuin Valery for his research support and Mary Izobo for her invaluable technical support. From WANEP, we are equally grateful to the Early Warning team for their insightful contributions and extend special appreciation to Ansoumane Samassy Souaré and Edward Jombla for their diligent research and editorial efforts respectively. We also acknowledge the broader CSVR and WANEP staff for their logistical and technical support in producing this report.

We express our appreciation to the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), and the Embassy of Sweden in Addis Ababa for their generous funding, which enabled the printing and dissemination of this publication. We are further grateful to regional stakeholders and partners whose insights enriched this work. Their collective commitment to advancing peace, justice, and strong institutions in Africa is deeply valued.

[1] Bobuin Jr Valery PhD, Advocacy Specialist, CSVR.
[2] WANEP Early Warning team.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the pertinent challenges to peace, justice and strong institutions in Africa. Drawing from open-source material, a balanced view of governance dynamics, threats to peace and security, human rights challenges and regional cooperation across the five regions of the continent. The report examines challenges to democratic consolidation, governance inclusivity, socio-economic equality, violent extremism, and civic space restrictions, which pose significant obstacles to peace and inclusive governance. It highlights opportunities for collaborative responses by African states, regional mechanisms, and global partners to advance SDG 16 and AU Agenda 2063, drawing on frameworks like the African Union Transitional Justice Policy(AUTJP). While it is acknowledged that these challenges do not all manifestly prevail across the continent, focus is placed on issues that are perceived to be the most pressing, pose the greatest challenge, and require urgent actions.

Key stakeholders who might benefit from this report include the African Union, regional economic communities, states, civil society organizations, international partners and global agencies engaged in governance reforms and peacebuilding interventions. By providing a situational overview of the main challenges to peace, justice and strong institutions, the report aims to give stakeholders an immediate glimpse of the regional and country contexts, highlighting areas for targeted interventions in advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. The cross-cutting analysis demonstrates how governance deficiencies, security threats and conflicts are interconnected across regions, sounding a need for coordinated approaches, heavily grounded on the African Union Transitional Justice Policy in addressing these developmental challenges.

Introduction

The realization of SDG 16 - promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels and the African Union Agenda 2063 goals 3 and 4 outlining visions for - an Africa of good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; and a peaceful and secure Africa, remain primordial for sustainable development on the continent. This report explores the multifaceted challenges to peace, security, the rule of law, human rights, and strong democratic institutions across Africa's five regions: North Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa. It identifies regional and country-specific trends, offering a nuanced understanding of how these challenges shape Africa's developmental trajectory.
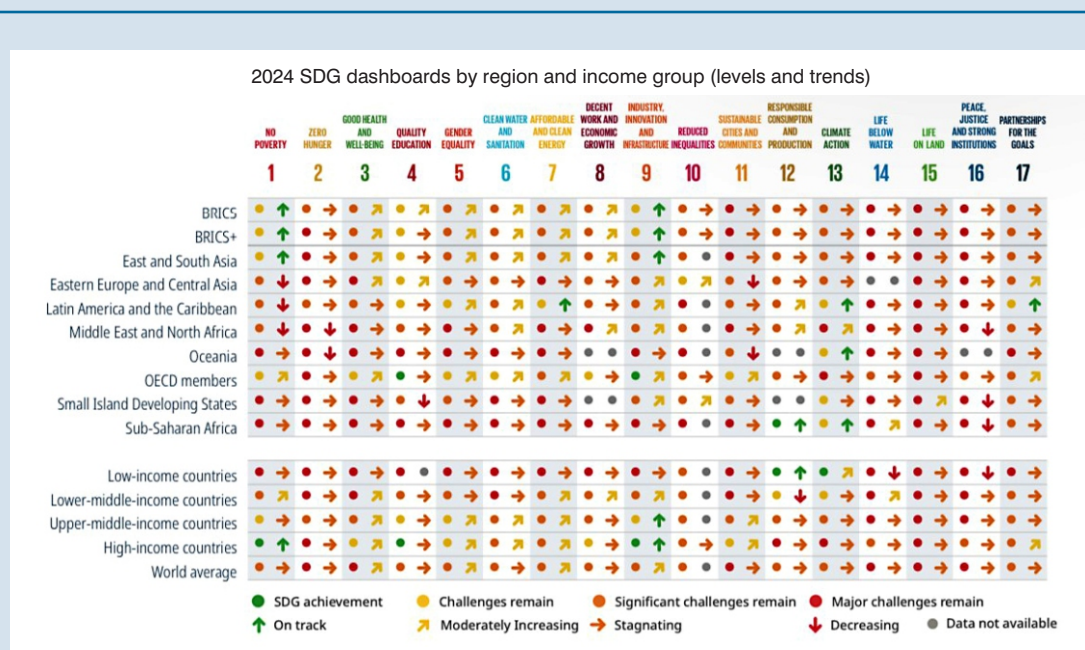
Source: Sustainable Development Report 2024

The report highlights that, despite diverse cultures, languages, political, and legal systems across Africa's five regions, many countries face similar challenges, such as governance constraints, security threats, and human rights concerns, that hinder the realization of SDG 16 and AU Aspirations 3 and 4. In its broadest sense, power struggles have been the main driver of conflicts, unconstitutional coups and coup d'états. In many contexts, the exercise of state power has been cited as contributing to governance tensions. Observers have noted that in some states, governance approaches may rely

_____

[3] Foucault M, Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78 Michel Senellart (ed). Graham Burchell (trans). (London: Palgrave, 2007), p.108.
[4] Foucault M, 'Governmentality' in his essential works, Volume 3 James D Faubion (ed.). (London: Penguin, 2000), p.211.

more on tactical enforcement than legal frameworks,[3] raising concerns about the use of state institutions to consolidate executive authority or constrain political opposition.[4]

While recognizing the considerable progress made in some countries towards democratic consolidation and institutional strengthening, such as Ghana, Botswana, Senegal, Mauritius, and Seychelles, the report highlights areas where governance constraints, security threats, and human rights concerns persist, requiring concerted effort to advance SDG 16 and AU Agenda 2063, Aspirations 3 and 4.

Chapter 01
North Africa

Post Arab-Spring Trajectories and Population Explosion: Threats to Security and Governance

1.1 Introduction

North Africa is a region spanning the tip of the continent. There is no consensus as regards what countries it is comprised of. The African Union considers Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to be the constitutive countries of the region.[5] In contrast, the United Nations considers all of these countries including Sudan and the Western Sahara while excluding Mauritania.[6] In this report, the African Union's definition is relied on.

The most significant challenges in the region are seen in population explosion, security, politics and governance. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) estimates that the confluence of these issues highlighted above could pose significant challenges to governments, contributing to instability in North Africa for the next two decades.[7] This is particularly relevant given the region's strategic position as a link to Europe and the Middle East. Irregular migrants have long used these countries as transit points in their journeys to Europe. At the same time, its proximity to Islamist jihad groups in the Middle East has made it susceptible to the vices of radicalism and violent extremism. Nonetheless, the region continues to enjoy a higher level of socio-economic development as compared to other regions on the continent. However, its political development is yet to make any significant progress.[8]

The 2010-2011 Arab Spring uprisings fundamentally changed the political landscape and trajectory of the region, creating expectations for deep democratic transformations which have not been met more than a decade later. While these popular movements successfully challenged authoritarian systems, the subsequent transitions have revealed the prevalence of structural barriers to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies as envisioned in SDG 16. This has given way to what scholars describe as competitive authoritarianism, whereby formal democratic institutions exist but they are strategically designed to favour

---

[5] See, African Union, https://au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles2 (accessed on 1 December 2024).
[6] See, United Nations, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions (accessed on 1 December 2024).
[7] NATO, "Strategic foresight analysis regional perspectives report on North Africa and The Sahel", 2017, p.vi.
[8] Ministry of Defence-United Kingdom, "Strategic trends programme regional survey – Africa out to 2045", 2016, p.119.

the incumbent and constrain meaningful political competition. This chapter examines three interconnected dimensions of North Africa's developmental challenges; the unmet democratic expectations from the gains of Arab Spring; the threat of violent extremism; and migration governance challenges that test the region's commitment to inclusive societies.

This regional analysis is particularly relevant given North Africa's strategic importance in managing global migration flows and security dynamics. Its proximity to Europe has made it a critical transit zone for irregular migration, and its location adjacent to the Middle East exposes it to transnational terrorist networks. The analysis reveals both shared patterns and unique issues which offer insights on the challenges to the meaningful realization of SDG 16 in the region.

1.2 Political Regression

In 2016, it was projected that "serious unrest is likely to continue in the near to medium future across the region, until institutions are put in place which create genuine capacity for state institutions rather than the individual who occupies power".[9] This captures the reality of the prominent challenge to SDG 16 in the region. At the dawn of the 2010s, regional uprisings widely referred to as the Arab Spring swept across North Africa, resulting in revolutions and changes in the political order in various countries. Democratic reforms introduced in the region have faced challenges in delivering sustained inclusivity in power or enhancing state accountability. Zoubi and Abderrahmane note that these reforms have often been limited in scope, underscoring the need for deeper structural changes to strengthen governance.[10] Bobuin notes that the promise of post-Arab Spring transitions has been constrained by structural barriers, underscoring the need for deeper institutional reforms.[11]

These governance systems can be characterized as having formal democratic institutions alongside mechanisms that advantage incumbents. While opposition parties formally participate in electoral processes, structural challenges create imbalances in the political landscape, often leading to environments where meaningful political competition faces significant constraints.[12]

In Egypt, since the political transition in 2013, there have been documented challenges to dissent, with legal measures, including terrorism-related charges, reportedly limiting civic engagement.[13] These measures have constrained civic space, freedom of assembly, and speech, posing challenges to public accountability and the independence of state institutions.[14] Recent efforts to expand public sector reforms, including judicial training in Egypt, signal steps toward strengthening institutional capacity.[15]

————————————————————

[9] Ibid.

[10] Zoubi H & Abderrahmane A, "Political, economic, and security challenges in North Africa" in Mezran K & Sanguini A (eds), North Africa 2030: What the future holds for the region (ISPI: Milan, 2021), p.13.

[11] Bobuin V, "Counterrevolutions" in Compendium on political regression & transitional justice processes: Lessons learned & strategies for engagement, GIJTR, (2024), p.56-60.

[12] Levitsky S & Way L, "Africa: Transitions without democratization", in Levitsky S & Way L, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War", (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.5.

[13] Freedom House, "Egypt", https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt (accessed on 3 December 2024).

[14] Human Rights Watch, "Egypt", https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/egypt (accessed on 3 December 2024).

[15] OECD, OECD Public Governance Reviews: Egypt: Strengthening the Foundations for More Efficient and Effective Public Governance Reforms, OECD Public Governance Reviews, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024).

Demonstrators wave Tunisian flags and raise placards against President Saied's policies, on 22nd September 2024.

Tunisian Popular Front gathering. Source: Ashoola

In Tunisia, following democratic gains post-Arab Spring, the country has faced challenges to political inclusivity since 2021. Governance reforms have led to greater executive authority, with the dissolution of the previous legislature and the introduction of a new constitution and electoral law. Freedom House has reported concerns about legal measures affecting political opposition, highlighting the need for broader stakeholder engagement to strengthen democratic processes.[16]

1.3 Conflict and Violent Extremism

The increasing presence, activity, and associated competition of non-state actors increases the likelihood for conflict, threatening stability and endangering civilian populations.[17] This depicts the situation in Libya, where armed groups formed since the ousting of Gaddafi in 2011 have progressively taken over much of the state. Since the state's monopoly of violence collapsed, the vacuum has been filled by numerous competing armed groups. Almost all these groups operate under the cover of state legitimacy, whether within newly created institutions or simply as units of the interior or defence ministries. In reality, they defend the interests of their leaders or social base and evade state control.[18] The consolidation of these private armies also diminishes the prospect of security sector reform, and their competition over access to state funding played a major role in the eruption of the second civil war in 2014. Such competition also provoked the third civil war in 2020.[19] This violence and persistent lack of physical security,[20] are not conditions for nurturing a peaceful society.

————————————————————————

[16] Freedom House, "Tunisia", https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia (accessed on 3 December 2024).
[17] NATO, "Strategic foresight analysis regional perspectives report on North Africa and The Sahel", 2017, p.vi.
[18] Lacher W, "Libya's Militias Have Become the State", Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2023, p.1.
[19] Ibid, p.1-4.
[20] Freedom House, "Libya", https://freedomhouse.org/country/libya (accessed on 5 December 2024).

Commendably, the threat of terrorism in the region has waned, with an overall decline in Jihadist attacks in the last five years owing to tight security measures and reconciliation policies.[21] Nonetheless, there remains lingering threats from terrorist groups affiliated to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh; and Foreign Terrorist Fighters who traveled to Iraq or the Syrian Arab Republic. The return of these fighters to their home countries increases the security threat. [22]

1.4 Migration Challenges

Migration governance in North Africa presents a challenge to the inclusive societies envisioned in SDG 16. There abound cases of discrimination, serious human rights violations, exploitation, lack of access to health care, police brutality and trafficking of migrants.[23] Refugee International reported that 85% of Black Africans (migrants) had suffered violence from Tunisian security forces.[24] The report also notes a resort to demagoguery and abuse in ad hoc attempts to manage the migration challenge.[25] Morocco and Algeria also serve as transits for migrants using the Western Mediterranean route. This refers to irregular arrivals in Spain through the Mediterranean Sea to mainland Spain and by land to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.[26]

Source:
Africa Center for
Strategic Studies

————————————————————
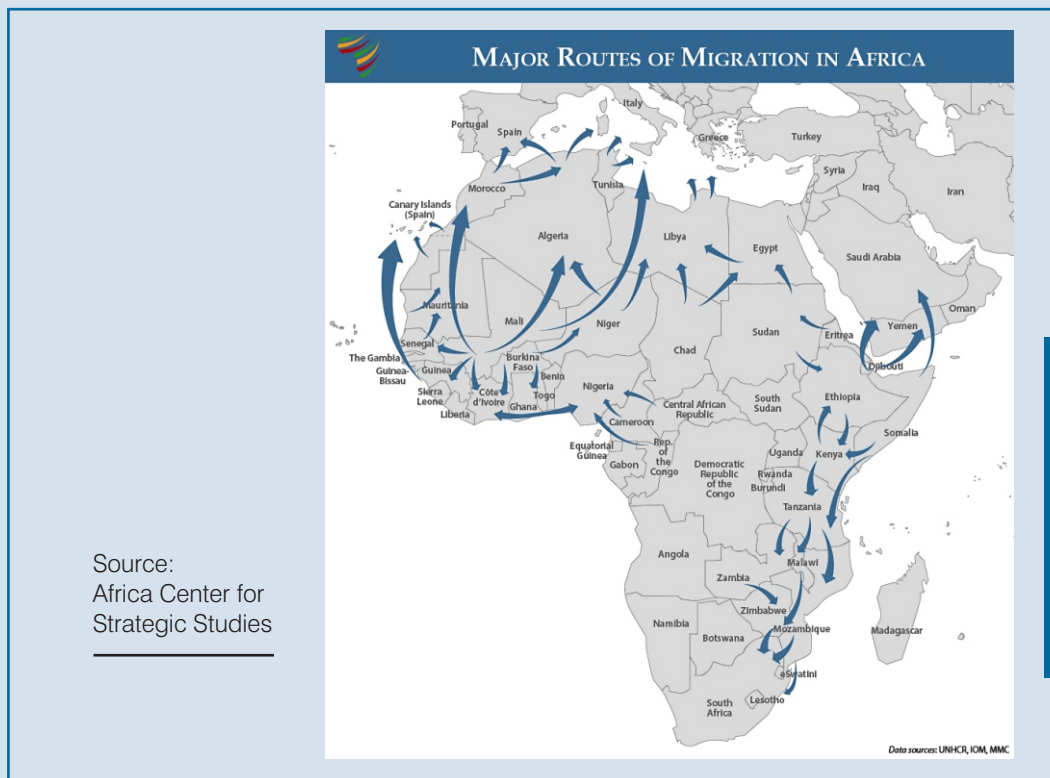
[21] Italian Institute for International Political Studies, "Jihadism in North Africa: A 'resilient' threat in times of global crises" (14 June 2023), https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/jihadism-in-north-africa-a-resilient-threat-in-times-of-global-crises-132039 (accessed on 14 December 2024).
[22] United Nations, "North Africa", Security Council - Counter-Terrorism Committee, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/north-africa#:~:text=The%20North%20Africa%20region%20continues,or%20the%20Syrian%20Arab%20Republic. (accessed on 14 December 2024).
[23] Mekki W, "The Human Rights Concerns of Migration into North Africa", UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog, 2024, https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2024/12/12/the-human-rights-concerns-of-migration-into-north-africa/ (accessed on 13 December 2024).
[24] Refugee International, "Abuse, corruption, and accountability: Time to reassess EU & U.S. Migration cooperation with Tunisia", 2023, https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/abuse-corruption-and-accountability-time-to-reassess-eu-u-s-migration-cooperation-with-tunisia/#endnotes (accessed on 4 December 2024).
[25] Ibid; Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: No safe haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees" (19 July 2023), https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/19/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees (accessed on 7 December 2024).
[26] European Council, "Migration flows on the Western routes", https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/western-routes/ (accessed on 5 December 2024).

A Human Rights Watch report documented the ill-treatment of black African migrants in Morocco. Such abuse included: Police abuse of migrants in informal settlements, Collective expulsions from Morocco to Algeria, Police and auxiliary forces use and threaten violence, lack of due process for adult and child migrants and the use of excessive force against migrants at the Moroccan border with Melilla, Spain.[27] The same treatment of black African migrants exists in Libya and Algeria.[28] Security forces have been reported to have taken migrants to the border, held them at gunpoint and forced them to march into the desert outside Algeria.[29] Such policies run against the ideals of inclusivity enshrined in SDG 16, as migrants of colour continue to be discriminated against and harshly treated.

Additionally, migrants in Algeria are at risk of exploitation by smuggling networks, particularly along routes from Mali or Niger to the coastal town of Maghnia, near Morocco.[30] This is a persistent issue, exacerbated by limited legal protections for irregular migrants.

—————————————————————

[27] Human Rights Watch, "Abused and expelled: Ill-treatment of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco", 2014, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/morocco0214_ForUpload_0.pdf (accessed on 7 December 2024).
[28] Amnesty International, "Libya 2023", https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa/libya/report-libya/ (accessed on 7 December 2024).
[29] Human Rights Watch, "Algeria: Inhumane Treatment of Migrants", (28 June 2018), https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/28/algeria-inhumane-treatment-migrants (accessed on 7 December 2024).
[30] UNODC, "Migrant smuggling to Morocco and the Western Mediterranean", UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, 2021, p.1-22; UN Migration, "Smuggling of migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route: Issues, challenges and perspectives, (Geneva: IOM, 2021).

Institutional Fragility and Protracted Conflicts

2.1 Introduction

The Central African region presents one of the most challenging environments for building peaceful, inclusive and just societies as envisioned in SDG 16. According to the African Union, it comprises: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe.[31] In contrast, the African Development Bank considers all the aforementioned countries, excluding Burundi and São Tomé and Príncipe, as constitutive countries of the region.[32]

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) notes that some parts of the region face many development challenges. Escalating insecurity, intensifying conflicts, political instability, military takeovers, climate change, and overlapping economic shocks are making achieving sustainable and inclusive development even harder.[33] These challenges are rooted in a history of extractive and centralized colonial institutions and subsequent post-colonial governance systems that continued the legacy of colonialism by maintaining a highly centralized executive. Additionally, cycles of conflict have undermined state capacity to govern and build strong political institutions, while also hindering social cohesion.[34] The Center for Strategic and International Studies affirms that the persistent challenges stem from a history of conflict and governance constraints, with prolonged leadership tenures and electoral processes often falling short of international standards for inclusivity and credibility.[35]

––––––––––––––––––––

[31] African Union, https://au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles2 (accessed on 1 December 2024).

[32] African Development Bank, "Central Africa", https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/central-africa (accessed on 15 December 2024).

[33] International Monetary Fund, "The Sahel, Central African Republic Face Complex Challenges to Sustainable Development" (16 November 2023), https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/11/16/cf-the-sahel-car-face-complex-challenges-to-sustainable-development (accessed on 15 December 2024).

[34] African Development Bank, "Central Africa regional integration strategy paper 2019-2025", p.17, https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/strategy-documents/central_africa_risp_2019-_english_version_020619_final_version.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2024).

[35] Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Central Africa", https://www.csis.org/programs/africa-program/regions/central-africa (accessed on 15 December 2024).

Unlike other regions on the continent which experienced some considerable democratic gains in the 1990's, the Central African region remains characterised by governance systems which allow for limited power contestation. This chapter contains a review of three critical dimensions of the region's governance and security challenges. First is the pattern of limited power contestation and popular participation in governance. This is characterized with the removal of presidential term limits. Secondly, there is the issue of the region's vulnerability to military take over, especially how governance deficits create conditions conducive for military intervention. Third, there is an analysis of conflict and violent extremism across the region, from the extremist threat posed by Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad Basin, to the complex conflicts in Cameroon, Central African Republic, and DR Congo.

This analysis is particularly relevant given the Central African region's representation among the world's most neglected displacement crisis. Four countries from the region—Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and Chad—appear in the Norwegian Refugee Council's ranking of the ten most neglected displacement crises globally. This indicates both the severity of humanitarian needs and the insufficient international attention these crises receive. Such neglect has implications for human security and also the prospects for creating peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

2.2 Limited Power Contestation and Popular Participation in Governance

Central Africa has experienced frequent constitutional amendments, often removing presidential term limits, which have concentrated executive authority in some states. In certain cases, this has limited the scope for institutional checks and balances, posing challenges to inclusive governance.[36] A modern democratic state relies on institutional power to govern inclusively through robust democratic institutions. In some Central African states, however, governance is challenged by limited separation of powers, where single parties often hold significant influence across executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Scholars like Fombad and Nwauche characterize these as governance systems with highly concentrated executive authority that extends significant influence over both executive functions and legislative processes.[37] This concentration of authority can hinder effective checks and balances, a critical component of inclusive governance.

Equatorial Guinea has maintained political continuity under the same leadership since 1979. Following the transition from military rule, electoral results have consistently shown strong support for the incumbent administration, with official figures ranging from 93.7per cent to 99 per cent across various election cycles since 1989, during which time the political system evolved from a one-party structure.[38] In 2016, key appointments, including familial connections to senior government roles, were made, which have contributed to perceptions of limited political inclusivity in the governance structure.[39]

———————————————————

[36] Mann M 'The autonomous power of the state: Its origins, mechanisms and results", 25 Archives Européenes de Sociologie, 1984, p.185-213, 190.
Fombad M & Nwauche E, "Africa's imperial presidents: Immunity, impunity and accountability", 5 African Journal of Legal Studies, 2012, p.93.
[38] APN News, "Equatorial Guinea leader poised to extend 43 years in power", (20 November 2022), https://apnews.com/article/africa-equatorial-guinea-malabo-government-and-politics-teodoro-obiang-nguema-mbasogo-f221186f2e29fc68e4371a13835e1918 (accessed on 15 December 2024); BBC, "Equatorial Guinea: World's longest-serving president to continue 43-year-rule", (26 November 2022), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63770351 (accessed on 15 December 2024).
Washington Post, "The world's longest-serving president just appointed his son as VP", (22 June 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/22/the-worlds-longest-serving-president-just-appointed-his-son-as-vp/ (accessed on 18 December 2024).
[39] Washington Post, "The world's longest-serving president just appointed his son as VP", (22 June 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/22/the-worlds-longest-serving-president-just-appointed-his-son-as-vp/ (accessed on 18 December 2024).

Cameroon has maintained political continuity under the same leadership structure for over four decades. Constitutional amendments affecting presidential term provisions were approved by parliament in 2008. This was enhanced by the absence of meaningful horizontal fragmentation—which optimally is seen in the relations between the political organs of government such that no single political party controls the three branches of government capable of enacting policy (executive, senate and congress).[40]

Governance structures in several countries in the region reflect limited distribution of authority across institutional bodies. Countries including Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, DR Congo, and Burundi demonstrate alignment between executive and legislative branches under single-party leadership, creating institutional imbalances that affect oversight mechanisms.[41] Many of these parties have absolute majorities in parliament, making it difficult for effective checks and balances, a prerequisite for enhanced accountability.[42]

2.3 Military Takeovers

In 2021, General Mahamat Déby assumed leadership in Chad following the death of President Idriss Déby.[43] The May 2024 presidential elections, which he won with 61 per cent of the vote, faced criticism for limited inclusivity and political space.[44] The country continues to navigate a complex political environment, with ongoing tensions underscoring the need for inclusive dialogue and electoral reforms. The country remains in a tense political situation, with analysts hinting at the possibility of another coup.[45] On January 9, 2025, the Presidential Palace came under heavy attack by 24 armed fighters, of which the defense forces killed 19.[46] This denotes some tension in the political landscape.

Prior to the military coup on 30 August 2023, Gabon's governance was led by the Bongo family for over five decades. Political inclusivity faced significant challenges, with limited space for opposition voices, reflecting broader governance constraints in the region.[47] The coup came after Ali Bongo had been declared elected to a third term during an election that was marred by irregularities and state manipulation.[48] It is important to underscore that the military takeover in Gabon was orchestrated by Bongo's cousin, General Brice Oligui Nguema, who was head of Gabon's Republican Guard.[49]

—————————————————————

[40] Ríos-Figueroa J, "Fragmentation of Power and the Emergence of an Effective Judiciary in Mexico, 1994- 2002," Latin American Politics and Society, Vol. 49, No. 1, (2007), p. 34.
[41] It is worthy to note that São Tomé and Príncipe is rated "Free" by Freedom House. It is characterised by a political system which has witnessed multiple transfer of power between political parties. As such it is not grouped as an authoritarian country, according to the trend in Central Africa.
[42] Ministry of Defence-United Kingdom, "Strategic trends programme regional survey – Africa out to 2045", 2016, p.137, 140.
[43] Aljazeera, "Chad's presidency attacked: Coup attempt, Boko Haram or 'drunk' fighters?", (9 January 2025), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/9/chads-presidency-attacked-coup-attempt-boko-haram-or-drunk-fighters (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[44] Aljazeera, "Chad's President Deby wins election against prime minister in heated race", (9 May 2024), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/9/chads-president-deby-wins-election-against-prime-minister-in-heated-race (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[45] Hudson C, "Chad: The Sahel's Last Domino to Fall", (6 December 2023), Center for Strategic & International Studies, https://www.csis.org/analysis/chad-sahels-last-domino-fall (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[46] Aljazeera, "Chad say military foiled armed assault on presidential complex, 19 killed" (9 January 2025), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/9/chad-say-military-foiled-armed-assault-on-presidential-complex-19-killed (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[47] Yates D, "Gabon: how the Bongo family's 56-year rule has hurt the country and divided the opposition", (17 August 2023), The Conversation, https://theconversation.com/gabon-how-the-bongo-familys-56-year-rule-has-hurt-the-country-and-divided-the-opposition-211537 (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[48] Henry A & Murray E, "What to Know About Gabon's Coup", (31 August 2023), The United States Institute of Peace, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/what-know-about-gabons-coup (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[49] Reddy M, "Gabon's Bongo family enriched itself over 56 years of kleptocratic rule, spreading its wealth across the world", (5 September 2023), https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/gabons-bongo-family-enriched-itself-over-56-years-of-kleptocratic-rule-spreading-its-wealth-across-the-world/ (accessed on 12 January 2025).

In his 2025 New Year's state address, he promised free and fair elections in eight months as leader of the transition.[50] It is expected that he rebrands himself more as a civilian in order to contest for the presidency.[51]

2.4 Conflict and Violent Extremism

The threat of violence posed by terrorist groups like Boko Haram is a serious challenge to peace and security in the Central African region, due to their indiscriminate and brutal targeting of defence forces and civilians alike. Boko Haram activities have spread from its original area of operation in north-eastern Nigeria into the entire Lake Chad Basin region, affecting the Far North region in Cameroon and Lake Chad Province in Chad.

Boko Haram Activity in the Lake Chad Basin Area
April 2014 - March 2024

Source: ACLED

_____
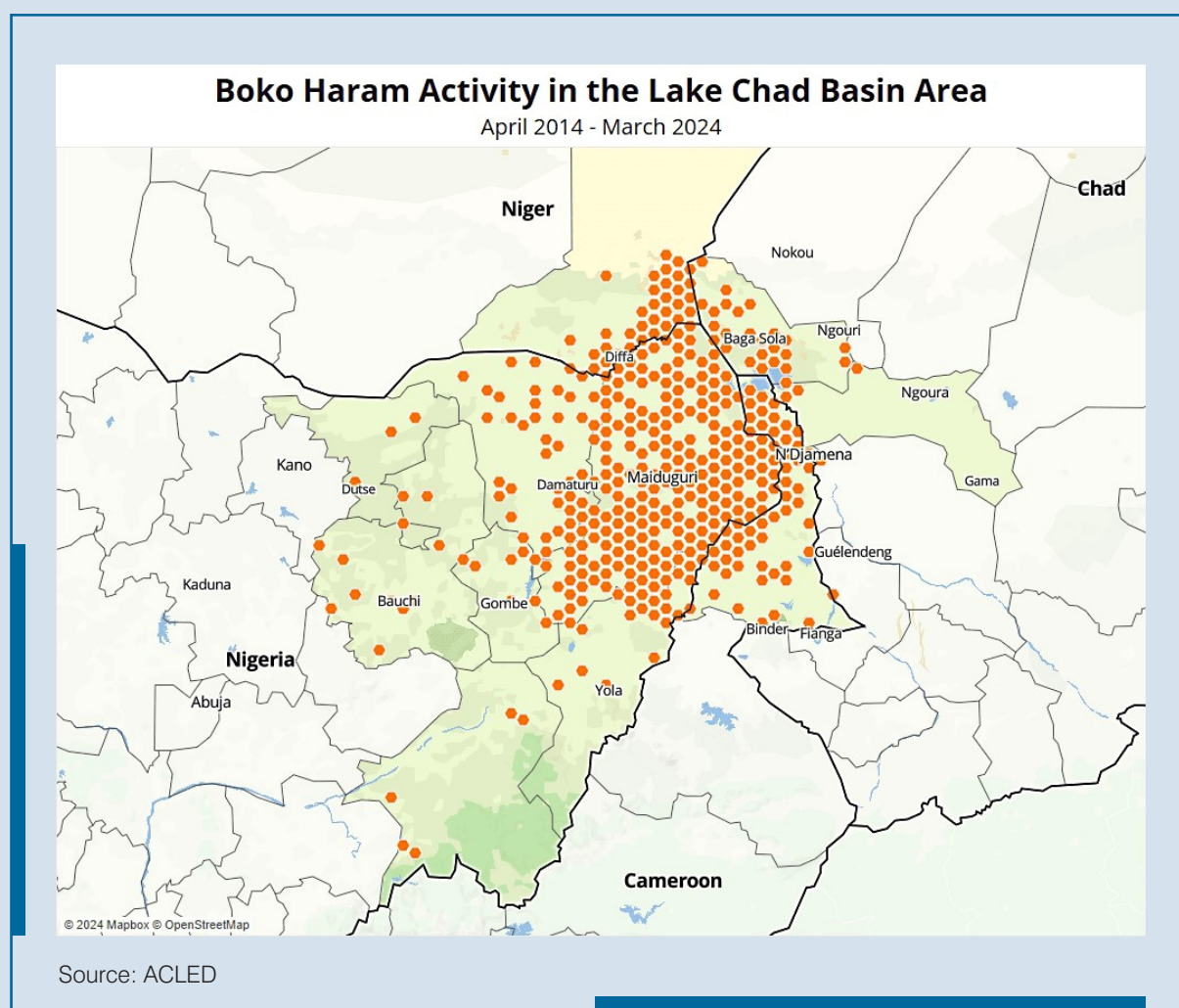
[50] RFI, "Gabon: Oligui Nguema promet des élections libres et transparentes dans ses voeux" (1 January 2025), https://www.rfi.fr/fr/en-bref/20250101-gabon-oligui-ngu%C3%A9ma-promet-des-%C3%A9lections-libres-et-transparentes-dans-ses-voeux (accessed on 12 January 2025).
[51] By the time of publication, General Oligui contested and won the presidential elections.

The group has splintered into two main factions (one of which, the Islamist State West Africa Province (ISWAP), is directly affiliated with ISIL) and a third group, Ba Koura(BK). Collectively, they remain major threats to States located around the Lake Chad Basin.[52] In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which established ties with ISIS in late 2018, poses a serious threat to peace and security. The ADF has been responsible for numerous attacks on civilians, the armed forces, and United Nations (UN) peacekeepers.[53]

MINUSCA peacekeepers on patrol in Bangassou, Central African Republic.
Source: Adrien Blanc

In the Central African Republic, it has been over a decade since the country last experienced sustained stability and peace. The civilian population is caught between warring parties. Different armed groups, loyalist forces, and their allies are fighting each other to control and exploit raw materials. As of January 2024, 46 per cent of the population in conflict-affected areas in the region was in dire need of humanitarian aid, exacerbated by a crumbling infrastructure, which has restricted the development of public services.[54] Tensions remain between the warring Séléka rebels (and their breakout groups) and their rivals, the Anti-Balaka, and efforts to enhance inclusivity by including these factions in government have instead triggered more instability, with poor prospects for peace.[55]

——————————————————————

[52] Security Council-Counter-Terrorism Committee, "Central Africa", https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/central-africa (accessed on 13 January 2025).
[53] US Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Democratic Republic of the Congo", Bureau of Counter Terrorism, https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/ (accessed on 13 January 2025).
[54] Norwegian Refugee Council, "What's happening in the Central African Republic?", (4 July 2024), https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2024/whats-happening-in-the-central-african-republic/ (accessed on 13 January 2025).
[55] Beevor E, "How rebels became kingmakers in the Central African Republic", (24 April 2019), International Institute for Strategic Studies, https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2019/04/central-african-republic-armed-groups/ (accessed on 13 January 2025).

As a result of these conflicts, gender-based violence (GBV) has reached alarming proportions in the country, with an average of two victims every hour (mostly women and girls).[56] In addition, parts of the country remain under full rebel control. In the southeast, a faction of the Union for Peace (UPC) armed group is active alongside the Lord's Resistance Army – a militant movement formed in Uganda – and a new Zande self-defence group.[57]

In neighbouring Cameroon, in 2016, a peaceful demonstration by lawyers and teachers of the two Anglophone regions against the use of the French language in courtrooms and classes, and the broader marginalisation by the Francophone majority was met with reprisal by the government forces.

The Anglophone regions of Cameroon.
Source VOA

This has resulted in a violent separatist conflict which persists to date. Now known as the Anglophone Crisis, it has several times been ranked as the most neglected crisis in the world.[59]

———————————————————

[56] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Central African Republic: Situation Report, 5 Dec 2024", https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-situation-report-5-dec-2024 (accessed on 13 January 2025).

[57] Lechner J & Ingasso V, "Wagner woes and a rebel crackdown: A briefing on the Central African Republic's shifting conflict", (7 September 2023), The New Humanitarian, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/09/07/wagner-woes-and-rebel-crackdown-briefing-central-african-republics-shifting (accessed on 14 January 2025).

[58] Agbor A & Esther Effundem Njieassam, "Beyond the contours of normally acceptable political violence: is Cameroon a conflict/transitional society in the offing?" 22(1) Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal, 2019.

[59] Norwegian Refugee Council, "Cameroon tops list of most neglected crises", (4 June 2019), https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/june/cameroon-tops-list-of-most-neglected-crises (accessed on 15 January 2025).

Over 6000 persons have been killed by both government forces and separatist fighters, with another 638,000 internally displaced persons.[60] The outlook for this crisis is bleak, with no end in the near future.

DR Congo is another precarious case in the region, with hostilities taking place across almost the entire country. Fighting in North Kivu led to significant displacement of populations, disrupted humanitarian aid delivery, and created food shortages in Goma, the provincial capital. The warring parties – the national army, allied militias, Rwandan troops, and the M23 (March 23) armed group – killed civilians, committed abuses against camp residents, and exacerbated risks faced by internally displaced people.[61] This conflict intensified in January 2025 when the M23 gained control over Goma, sparking fears that a regional war involving Eastern and Southern African countries might ensue.[62]
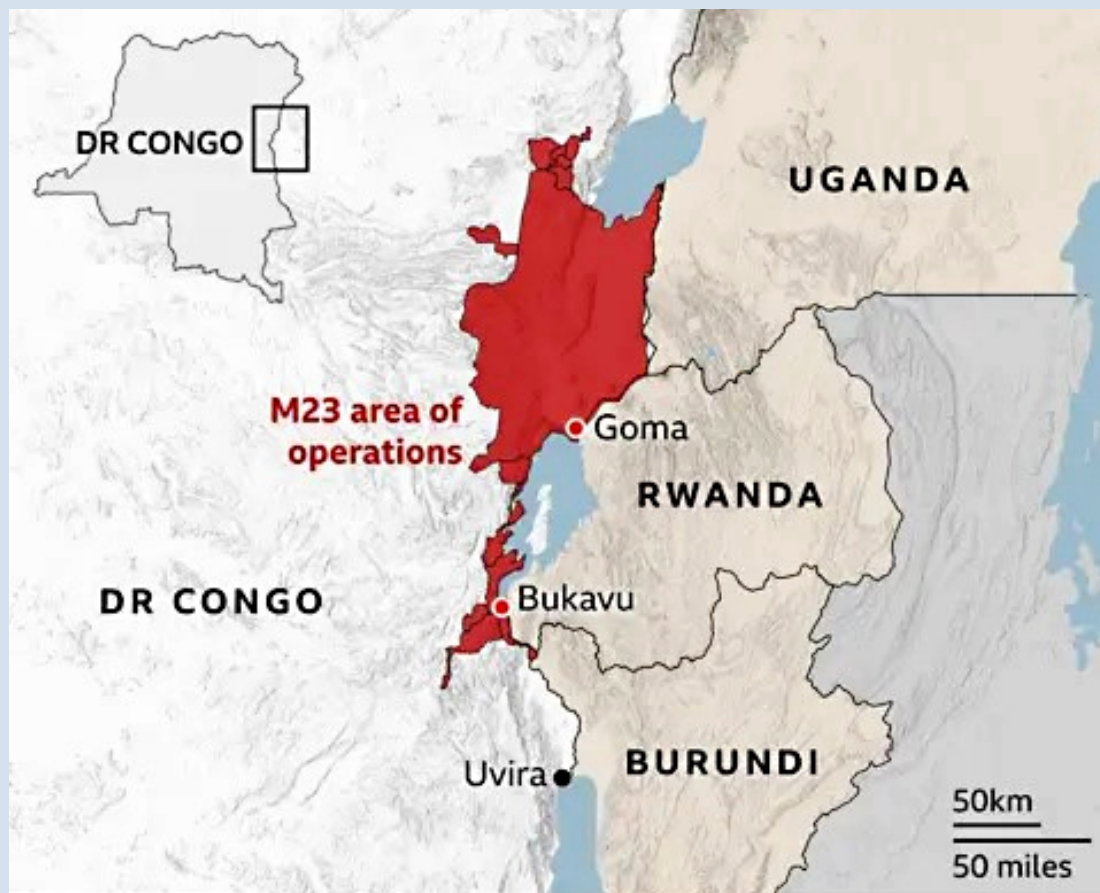
Source: Critical Threats, 5 March 2025

————————————————————

[60] Human Rights Watch, "Cameroon: Events of 2023", https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/cameroon (accessed on 15 January 2025).

[61] Human Rights Watch, "World report 2025: Events of 2024", 2025, p.125.

[62] Nantulya P, "Risk of regional conflict following fall of Goma and M23 offensive in the DRC", (9 January 2025), Africa Center for Strategic Studies, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/risk-of-regional-conflict-following-fall-of-goma-and-m23-offensive-in-the-drc/ (15 January 2025).

Also, over 100 armed groups are active in eastern DR Congo. All the warring parties have been accused of gender-based violence including raping of women.[63] The country also remains susceptible to coup d'états, which further jeopardizes the security situation. On May 19, 2024, a coup was repelled by state forces, with 37 of the plotters sentenced to death.[64]

Chad is grappling with political instability and frequent threats of rebellions, and has also been facing the spill over of insecurity from all its neighbouring countries for years.[65] Similarly, Burundi is in a post-conflict phase facing persistent political tensions and violence, with repercussions for the stability of the neighbouring countries.[66] In the Norwegian Refugee Council's ranking of the ten most neglected displacement crises in the world, four Central African countries (Cameroon, DR Congo, the Central African Republic and Chad) made the list.[67] This marks the region as the most neglected globally in this regard. This means that the enormous forced displacement, dire humanitarian need and loss of lives in this region has still not sufficiently captured the attention and engagement of the global community, translating to a prolonged lifespan of the conflict.

---

[63] Ibid, p.127-128.
[64] BBC News, "US and British citizens among 37 sentenced to death in DR Congo coup trial", (13 September 2024), https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2e2v2le8wo (accessed on 15 January 2025).
[65] Ingerstad G & Lindell M, "Challenges to peace and security in Central Africa: The role of ECCAS", Studies in African Security, 2015, p.1.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Norwegian Refugee Council, "World's most neglected displacement crises 2023", https://www.nrc.no/feature/2024/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crises-2023 (accessed on 16 January 2025).

Unconstitutional Changes in Government and the Expansion of Violent Extremism

3.1 Introduction

West Africa is the largest regional bloc on the continent, and according to the African Union, it comprises 15 States, which include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra-Leone and Togo.[68] The region has achieved notable democratic gains over the past two decades, establishing a culture of periodic elections and peaceful political transitions in countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, and Liberia. These gains now face serious threats from a plethora of daunting challenges, with several simultaneously prevalent in many countries in the region, while also existing as cross-border issues.

The region remains the epicentre of violent extremism, organized crime and communal violence, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria and Niger. The expanded threats of extremism to the littoral states of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Ghana compound the peace and security stability of the region. Recent armed attacks near Burkina Faso's borders with northern Ghana, Benin, and Togo highlight extremist groups' growing strength and expansion into coastal states.

Between January and December 2024, 1,802 security incidents were reported in the northern regions of the four coastal countries.[69] The frequent cross-border and internal displacement of populations has increased pressure on weak social services and facilities, such as health, nutrition, and education, and impeded access to limited vital resources, including food, drinking water, and housing. This has heightened tension among communities across the affected areas.[70]

---

[68] African Union, https://au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles2 (accessed on 1 December 2024).
[69] Data from WANEP NEWS (January to December 2024), www.wanep.org (accessed on 10 January 2025).
[70] Ibid.

Also, the global geopolitical conflicts and economic insecurity raise the stakes of the competitive dichotomy between the global North, Russia, China and the Middle East influence in the region. The effect of the Russia-Ukraine and Middle East crises constitutes other complexities, given the political alignments of the Sahel countries to Russia. As the local population grow, dissatisfaction with French and other Western powers suggests that countries like Iran and Turkey could capitalize on the shift in regional dynamics to expand their military and economic presence in West Africa and the Sahel.[71] Similarly, the emerging geopolitical realignments challenge the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) capacity to maintain cohesion and effectiveness, with the potential to reshape its governance and security landscape.
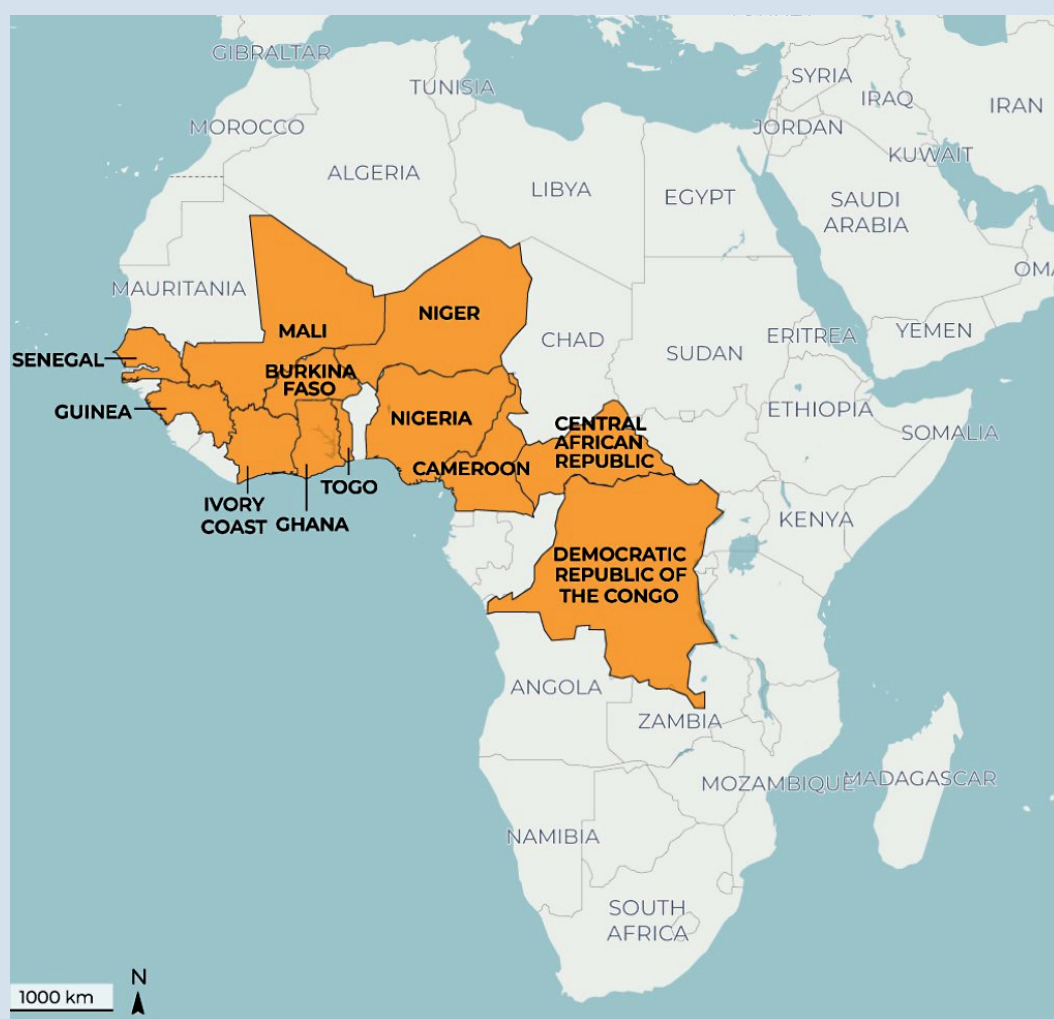
An Aljazeera investigation reveals a pro-Russian influence campaign where articles written by seemingly non-existent writers appeared in at least 12 countries in West and Central Africa. Source: Aljazeera

———————————————————————

[71] Mumtaz Z, "Another crescent: Iran's brewing influence in the Sahel Region" (22 June 2024), The GeoPolitics, https://thegeopolitics.com/another-crescent-irans-brewing-influence-in-the-sahel-region/. (accessed on 7 February 2025).

In this chapter four interconnected dimensions of West Africa's developmental challenges are laid out. The analysis begins with the recent wave of military takeovers in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, exploring how these interventions have disrupted democratic progress and created new forms of political uncertainty. The second part carries a review on the issue of constitutional amendments aimed at extending or removing presidential term limits. These have become a significant source of political instability, often serving as catalysts for military interventions. Thirdly, there is an analysis on violent extremism and its expansion from traditional Sahel strongholds into coastal West African states, particularly by organizations like Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Boko Haram. Lastly, the chapter provides a review on maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which has emerged as the world's second-most piracy-prone region after the Horn of Africa.

3.2 Military Takeovers

In the last two decades, West Africa has made significant progress in governance, peace and security. This is evident by the growing political culture of periodic elections, resulting in peaceful political transitions in countries such as Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Notwithstanding this, the past five years has witnessed military takeovers that have truncated democratic governance in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger. In addition to this development, West Africa continues to experience political instability, with military-led transitions shaping governance trajectories and stalled progress toward ending the military administrations in the coup-affected countries.[72]

Source:
WANEP Annual
Peace & Security
Outlook 2024.

_____
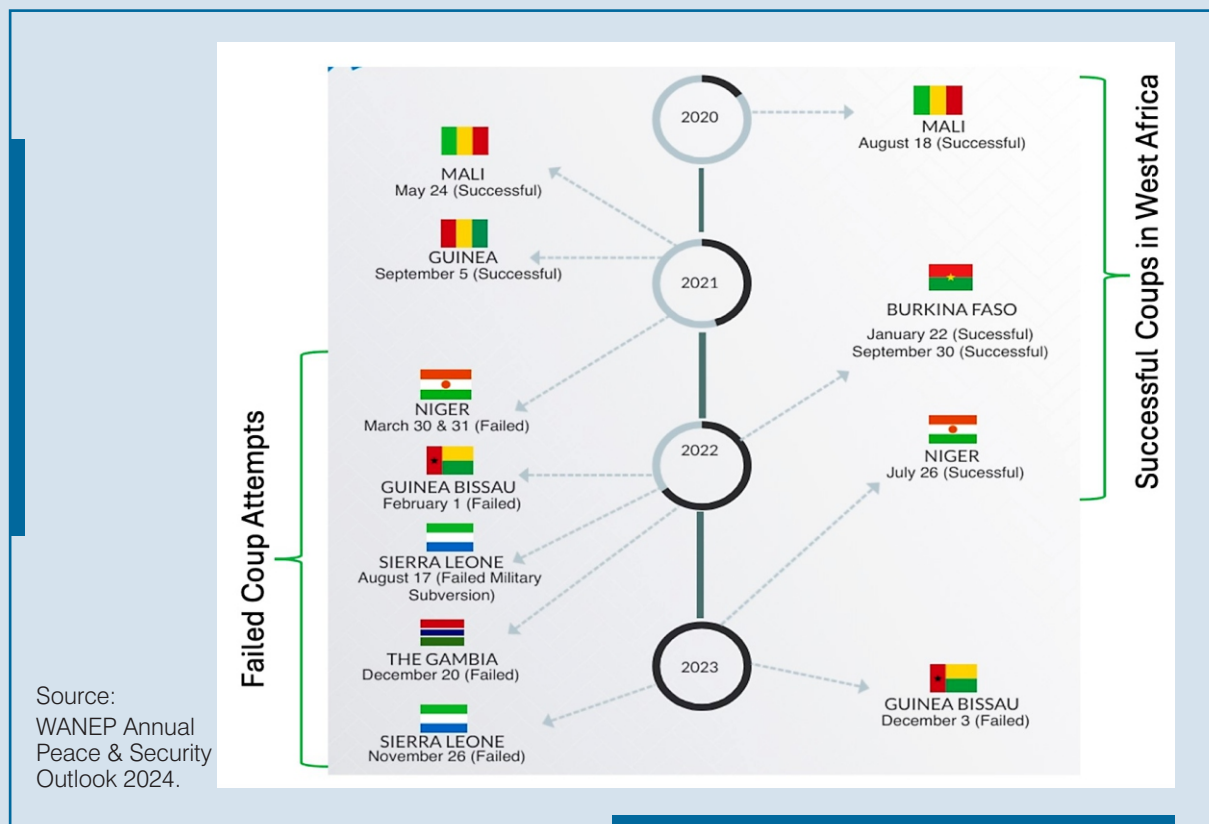
[72] WANEP, "Is West Africa heading towards a protracted military transition? (29 October 2024), https://wanep.org/wanep/is-west-africa-heading-towards-a-protracted-military-transition/ (accessed on 27 January 2025).

The military leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on 28 January 2024 announced their withdrawal of membership from ECOWAS. Before this, the three states had formed a bloc known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as a strategy to tackle the rising insurgencies and armed group attacks in their respective countries.[73] The national dialogues in Mali and Burkina Faso, from 13 April to 10 May 2024, ended with recommendations to extend the military transitions until 2027 and 2029, respectively.[74]

Furthermore, the transitional authorities in Mali suspended the activities of political parties and associations on April 10, 2024, resulting in the arrest of several political leaders for defying the decision.[75] However, following persistent pressure from civil society organisations and opposition groups, the suspension was lifted in July 2024, enabling a gradual resumption of political activities.[76] Meanwhile, in Niger, legal proceedings against former President Bazoum Mohamed culminated on June 14, 2024, when the State Court lifted his immunity after two postponements.[77] This decision permits his prosecution for high treason, conspiracy to undermine state security, and condoning terrorism, escalating political tensions in the country.[78]

In Burkina Faso, civil society continues to denounce the repressive use of the April 2023 General Mobilization Act, and several of its representatives who criticized the government's security choices have been forced to join the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP French acronym).[79] Guinea's 24-month transition period, agreed upon with ECOWAS in 2022, ended in December 2024 with little progress toward constitutional governance.[80] Stringent civic and political restrictions and the transitional authorities' failure to meet the timeline for restoring constitutional order have also intensified tensions with the political opposition, deepening the country's instability. These developments underscore the fragility of transitional governance and the persistent challenges facing political inclusivity and democratic restoration in the region.

It important to underscore that, the transitional processes in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have been marred by the exclusion of key stakeholders and persistent uncertainties. In addition, ongoing transitions have been fraught with a lack of concrete measures towards civilian rule.

————————————————————

[73] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The withdrawal of three West African states from ECOWAS", 2024, https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2024/06/the-withdrawal-of-three-west-african-states-from-ecowas/#:~:text=On%2028%20January%202024%2C%20the,)%2C%20the%20regional%20economic%20bloc. (accessed on 27 January 2025).

[74] Mbianda K, "Political transition and democratic challenges in central Sahel" (26 November 2024), ACCORD, https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/political-transition-and-democratic-challenges-in-central-sahel/ (accessed on 26 January 2025).

[75] Human Rights Watch, "Mali: junta suspends political parties, associations" (April 12 2024), https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/12/mali-junta-suspends-political-parties-associations (accessed on 26 January 2025).

[76] Le Monde, "Mali junta re-authorizes political activities suspended in April" (11 July 2024), https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/11/mali-junta-re-authorizes-political-activities-suspended-in-april_6680751_4.html (accessed on 26 January 2025).

[77] Aljazeera, "Niger court scraps immunity of deposed President Bazoum" (14 June 2024) https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/14/niger-court-scraps-immunity-of-deposed-president-bazoum (accessed on 26 January 2025).

[78] Ibid.

[79] Traore D, "La société civile dénonce une "réquisition massive et ciblée des citoyens" (7 November 2023), https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/burkina-faso-la-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-civile-d%C3%A9nonce-une-r%C3%A9quisition-massive-et-cibl%C3%A9e-de-citoyens/3045911 (accessed on 26 January 2025).

[80] Reuters, "Guinea proposes a shorter transition timeline of 24 months" (22 October 2022), https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/guinea-junta-proposes-shorter-transition-timeline-24-months-2022-10-21/ (accessed on 12 January 2025).

Map Showing ECOWAS and AES

LEGEND:

ECOWAS –

AES –

Source: WANEP • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Source: WANEP Annual Peace
and Security Outlook 2025.
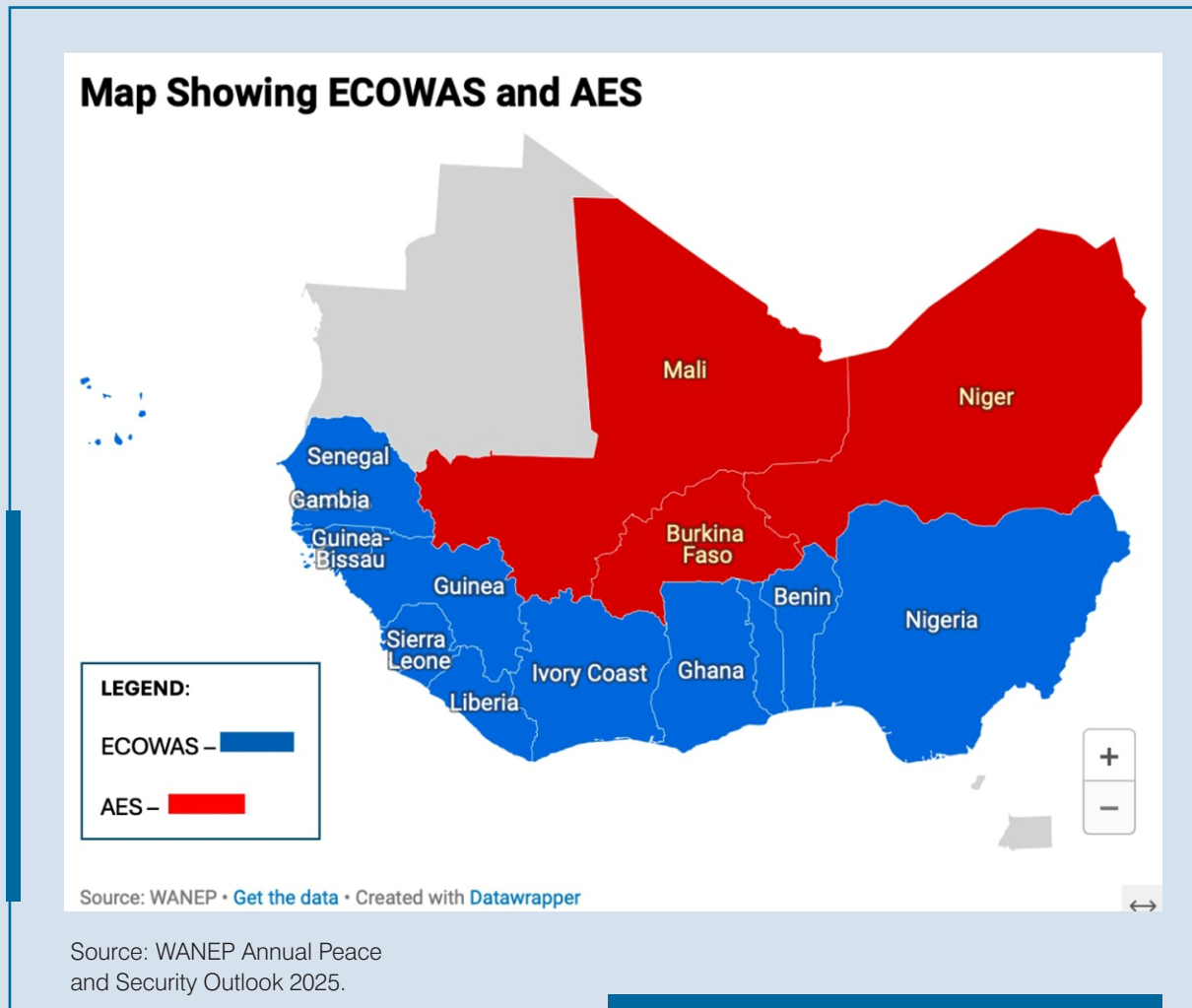
Concerns about governance challenges during military-led transitions have been raised, including restrictions on independent media, reported intimidation, arrests of political figures, and the use of decrees to limit dissenting views. The military administrations of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali formally announced withdrawal from ECOWAS on 9 January 2025. This came after they had announced the creation of the AES on 16 September 2023, in response to the perceived mishandling by ECOWAS of the 2023 coup in Niger.

The ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government had earlier approved the withdrawal but provided a six-month transitional period (29 January – 29 July 2025) for potential readmission.[81] This window allows the withdrawing states to reconsider their decision and re-engage with ECOWAS, preserving regional cooperation and stability. It remains highly unlikely that these countries will return to the regional bloc in the near future.

——————————————————————

[81] Ewokor C, "'West African bloc approves historic exit of military-run states" (16 December 2024), BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp31lny4jweo?at_campaign_type=owned&at_campaign=Social_Flow&at_ptr_name=twitter&at_link_origin=BB CAfrica&at_link_id=185AD0C4-BBA5-11EF-BBE5- C64E3A7A2F9C&at_format=link&at_link_type=web_link&at_medium=social&at_bbc_team=editorial&s=09 (Accessed on 12 January 2025).

The political impasse has strained ECOWAS' relations with Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, undermined regional security cooperation and the effectiveness of sub-regional security mechanisms, such as the G5 Sahel, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and the Accra Initiative to curb rising insecurity facing the region. The withdrawal of AES countries would affect regional unity and efforts to boost economic and security cooperation. The regional bloc would lose 17 per cent of its 446 million people and more than half of its total geographical area relevant for trade and economic development.[82] Additionally, inter-state tensions resurfaced, including a bilateral crisis between Benin and Niger and another between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. These developments underscore a complex and fragile regional environment with significant implications for peace, security, and governance in the years ahead.

3.3 Limited Power Contestation and Popular Participation in Governance

Within the region, efforts to amend the constitution to extend presidential term limits have been met with popular protests, sparking political instability, which has sometimes occasioned coups. This was seen in Burkina Faso, where Blaise Compaoré attempted to amend the constitution to extend his 27-year term, sparking the 2014 Burkina Faso uprising that led to the military taking over power.[83] The same consequences were seen in Guinea when Alpha Condé had manipulated the constitution to allow for a third term—this was referenced months later by the coup plotters, who cited "the non-respect of democratic principles" as their rationale[84] for seizing power.

In Togo, constitutional amendments in 2019 extended eligibility for executive leadership until 2030, followed by a 2024 reform that shifted the selection of the head of state to the parliamentary majority. These changes, led by the long-standing ruling party, Union pour la République (formerly the Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais), have raised concerns among some stakeholders about political pluralism, given the party's dominance since 1969.[85]

3.4 Violent Extremism

West Africa faces a complex security situation - particularly violent extremism driven by socio-political and economic challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment, and weak governance.[86] These factors, combined with porous borders, ethnic tensions, and protracted conflicts, have allowed extremist groups to gain ground, especially in the Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) and some coastal West African countries, Togo, Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Armed groups linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and their affiliates, have spread, exploiting local grievances and weak state presence and infrastructure. These groups continue to carry out prominent attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.[87] Nigeria, the most populous country in the region, is most affected by the security crisis, primarily due to the active presence of Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the activities of other armed bandits.

_____

[82] Ibid.
[83] ABC, "Two feuding army chiefs both claim power after Burkina Faso's president resigns, flees the country", (31 October 2014), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-01/two-burkina-faso-army-chiefs-claim-power-after-president-flees/5859352 (accessed on 10 February 2025).
[84] Morocco World News, "Coup d'Etat Confirmed in Guinea, Special Forces Capture President Alpha Conde", (5 September 2021), https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/09/55400/coup-detat-confirmed-in-guinea-special-forces-capture-president-alpha-conde/ (accessed on 10 February 2025).
[85] Reuters, "Togo's President Gnassingbe set to switch job to stay in power", (28 May 2024), https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/togos-president-gnassingbe-set-switch-job-stay-power-2024-05-28/ (accessed on 10 February 2025).
[86] Aubyn F, "The risk of violent extremism and terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa" (10 December 2021), ACCORD, https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-risk-of-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-in-the-coastal-states-of-west-africa/ (accessed on 30 January 2025).
[87] Ibid.

Ten Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism

Burkina Faso recorded the highest impact of terrorism for the second consecutive year

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022	2024
Burkina Faso	114	113	111	110	52	30	21	15	7	6	4	2	1	1
Pakistan	2	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	8	9	7	4	2
Syria	19	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	6	5	6	5	5	3
Mali	40	22	19	21	16	13	10	9	8	7	7	4	3	4
Niger	50	60	45	34	19	19	18	19	14	12	8	10	10	5
Nigeria	8	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	5	8	8	6
Somalia	5	7	7	7	8	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	7	7
Israel	22	18	22	23	29	31	33	31	34	34	35	26	2	8
Afghanistan	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	6	9
Cameroon	49	57	58	19	11	11	12	10	10	11	12	11	12	10

Source; Institute for Economics & Peace.

Over time, Boko Haram's violence expanded beyond Nigeria into neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Despite military efforts, its decentralised structure has allowed for continued attacks in Nigeria, Niger and Chad. In addition, the groups use suicide bombings, kidnappings, torture, rape, forced marriages, child soldier recruitment, and attacks on government infrastructure, as well as on civilians, traditional leaders, and religious figures.[88] Similarly, ISWAP, a 2016 splinter group of Boko Haram, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS) and adopted more strategic tactics.[89]

Unlike Boko Haram, ISWAP has focused on recruiting local Muslim populations and gained significant territorial control. Its operations primarily target the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) and have become more sophisticated, with bombings, ambushes, and kidnappings.

————————————————————

[88] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Nigeria" (14 March 2025), https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/nigeria/ (accessed on 17 March 2025).
[89] Ahmed P, Factional split inside Boko Haram: Evolving dynamics and future implications, Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, 2019.

Since 2017, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)—a nonstate armed group based in Mali and active across much of West Africa, including parts of Burkina Faso and Niger has posed serious security threats in the region. JNIM also aligns itself with Al-Qaeda and seeks to build a Salafi-Islamist state in West Africa.[90] The group regularly attacks multinational and state security forces as well as local and foreign civilians in West Africa. Like other nonstate armed groups, JNIM exploits a lack of economic opportunities as well as ethnic and social divisions among the population in northern and central Mali and neighbouring regions to facilitate recruitment and build its influence. Moreover, the group continues to fund itself by ransoming captives, taxing locals, smuggling weapons, and extorting human and drug traffickers. Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) indicated an increase of 1,915 terrorism-related and armed attack incidents in 2024, compared to 1,601 attacks reported in 2023 and 932 attacks recorded in 2022.[91] Also, there were over 8,500 conflict-related fatalities by the third quarter of 2024, compared to 7,215 over the same period in 2023. The attacks were mainly targeted at civilians, security operatives, installations, government facilities, international organisations, and aid workers.

3.5 Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea, a crucial region in West Africa, has become a hotspot for maritime insecurity, threatening regional stability, global trade and economic growth.[92] Spanning the coastlines of countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo, it is vital for international shipping and is rich in oil and gas resources. However, the region faces increasing threats from piracy, armed robbery, illegal fishing, and other criminal activities, making maritime security a priority.[93]

Over the past decade, maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea has escalated, with the region becoming the world's second-most piracy-prone area, after the Horn of Africa.[94] Nigeria's territorial waters are particularly affected by frequent hijackings, kidnappings, armed robberies, and cargo theft, often linked to ransom demands.[95] Piracy groups exploit the region's weak security infrastructure to target oil tankers and merchant vessels. The involvement of organised criminal groups et networks, including local fishermen, corrupt officials, and sometimes politicians, has worsened the situation.

It is important to underscore that piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has evolved from petty theft to well-planned attacks on oil platforms and vessels, costing the region billions of dollars annually.[96] The shipping industry faces higher costs due to piracy threats, including increased insurance premiums and the need for security interventions.[97] Addressing maritime insecurity in the Gulf requires stronger regional cooperation and enhanced security measures.

————————————————————————

[90] US Department of National Intelligence, "Foreign terrorist organizations, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)", https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/jnim_fto.html (accessed 10 January 2025).
[91] WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS), www.wanepsystems.net (accessed on 10 January 2025).
[92] Tachie-Menson E, "An in-depth analysis of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea" (5 September 2024), ACCORD, https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/an-in-depth-analysis-of-maritime-security-in-the-gulf-of-guinea/#:~:text=The%20Gulf%20of%20Guinea%20(GoG,%2C%20and%20oil%2Drelated%20crimes. (accessed on 10 January 2025).
[93] European External Action Service, EU Maritime Security in The Gulf of Guinea: Strategy and Action Plan, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/note_eu_gog_strategy.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2025).
[94] Amani Africa, "Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea" (28 June 2022), https://amaniafrica-et.org/maritime-piracy-in-the-gulf-of-guinea/. (accessed on 10 January 2025).
[95] Bell C, et al., Pirates of the Gulf of Guinea: A cost analysis for Coastal States, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's Global Maritime Crime Program.
[96] Anyika V, et al., "The economic cost of Gulf of Guinea piracy", 10(5) An African Journal of Arts and Humanities, 2024.
[97] Ibid.

The Gulf of Guinea. Source: ACCORD.

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is mostly driven by several key threats, including piracy, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery at sea, illegal fishing, oil theft, and terrorism.[98] It is important to underscore that piracy is the most prominent threat, with armed groups hijacking ships to kidnap crew members for ransom or steal valuable cargo, especially crude oil.

While most attacks occur off Nigeria's coast, other countries like Benin, Togo, and Cameroon also face incidents, particularly kidnappings for ransom. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing further destabilises the region, as foreign vessels exploit marine resources, often funding criminal activities.[99] Oil theft, involving the illegal siphoning of crude oil from pipelines and offshore platforms, deprives governments of revenue and causes serious environmental damage to coastal communities. Additionally, terrorism and armed conflicts, particularly in Nigeria's Niger Delta, exacerbate the situation by targeting oil infrastructure and maritime vessels, disrupting shipping and increasing regional tensions.

———————————————————————

[98] Tachie-Menson E, (as above).
[99] See, Food and Agricultural Organisation, "Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing",   https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/en/ (accessed on 10 January 2025).

This threat also affects regional economies and global trade. Disruptions from piracy and criminal activities affect key trade routes, particularly for oil and other commodities, causing delays, price hikes, and disruptions to global supply chains.[100] For countries affected by this phenomenon, the economic impact is severe, with increased shipping costs, reduced foreign investment, and loss of oil revenues. Security risks also deter international shipping companies, reducing trade volume and hindering economic growth.

The humanitarian toll is significant, as piracy, kidnapping, and terrorism lead to loss of life, psychological and financial burdens on crew members' families, and displacement of local communities, especially those reliant on fishing and oil extraction.[101]

---

[100] Bell C, et al. (as above).
[101] Ibid.

State Fragility and the Quest for Consolidation of Democratic Governance, Peace and Security

4.1 Introduction

East Africa encompasses some of the continent's most dynamic economies alongside the world's most fragile states, depicting a polarising region which manifests stark contrasts in governance outcomes and security conditions. The region comprises Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Further extending the definition of East Africa is the Horn of Africa, a de facto sub-region with a distinct geopolitical entity consisting of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.[102] Quite remarkably, the region has the fastest-growing economies in Africa in recent years, but political fragility in some countries is a major challenge to this growth.[103]

The region includes the current global epicenter of state fragility in Somalia, the humanitarian catastrophe of Sudan's ongoing civil war, and South Sudan's post-independence struggles, while simultaneously showcasing economic success stories and innovative approaches to governance. The complex landscape of the region's developmental trajectory warrants a nuanced understanding to the main challenges to SDG 16.

In this chapter, three critical dimensions of East Africa's governance and security landscape are reviewed. The first issue addressed is the persistent challenge to power contestation and popular participation in governance, focusing on countries where prolonged leadership tenures and limited political pluralism have become normalised features of the political system. The second major focus is on the manifestations of conflict and violent extremism, examining both interstate and intrastate conflicts that have defined much of the region's recent history. Third, additional governance challenges that affect democratic consolidation and service delivery across the region are addressed.

---

[102] Stock R, Africa South of the Sahara: A Geographical Interpretation, 2nd edition, (New York: The Guildford Press, 2004), p. 26.
[103] African Development Bank, "East Africa Regional Overview", https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/east-africa-overview (accessed on 3 January 2025).

The regional analysis is particularly relevant for understanding the relationship between state fragility and regional security dynamics. East Africa's position at the intersection of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean creates unique vulnerabilities to transnational threats while offering strategic opportunities for economic development and international partnership. The proliferation of multiple foreign military bases in Djibouti, the strategic importance of maritime routes through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and the region's role in global counter-terrorism efforts highlight the international dimensions of local governance challenges.

4.2 Limited Power Contestation and Popular Participation in Governance

President Yoweri Museveni has been Uganda's head of state since 1986, representing one of the region's longest-serving administrations. President Museveni once expressed concerns about the issue of extended tenure in African governance after his ascension to leadership. Four decades later, his administration continues to shape Uganda's political landscape.[104] Drawing from empirical data, Kagoro finds that a key challenge in the political landscape is the close alignment between the ruling National Resistance Movement, state institutions, and security apparatus, which limits the space for opposition groups to effectively contest power.[105]

It is worth noting that in March 2024, the President appointed his son (General Muhozi) as Chief of the Defence Forces.[106] Critics could perceive such familial appointments as limiting inclusivity in the state governance structure. Tapscott also alleges that, though the state regularly organises elections, the violence is outsourced to local actors targeting the opposition.[107] This poses a risk for the eruption of electoral violence in the country.

An opposition rally in Uganda, 2021. Source: Kwabula Richard

————————————————————

[104] Reuters, "FACTBOX-Quotes from Uganda's Museveni", (22 July 2008), https://www.reuters.com/article/economy/factbox-quotes-from-ugandas-museveni-idUSL22075237/ (accessed on 3 January 2025).

[105] Kagoro J, "Uganda: authoritarianism in the age of regular elections - a review of the 2021 electoral violence" in Lindstaedt N & Van den Bosch J (eds.), Research Handbook on Authoritarianism, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing), p.331-355.

[106] VOA News, "Uganda's Museveni Appoints Son as Military Chief", (22 March 2024), https://www.voanews.com/a/uganda-s-museveni-appoints-son-as-military-chief/7538898.html (accessed on 3 January 2025).

[107] Tapscott R, Arbitrary states: Social control and modern authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2021.

Rwanda presents a governance model with strong executive influence, where formal democratic institutions coexist with significant centralised authority. Legal frameworks have sometimes been leveraged to consolidate power, posing challenges to pluralistic contestation.[108] President Kagame assumed power in 2000 following the resignation of President Pasteur Bizimungu. [109]

The streets of Kigali in 2020. Rwanda is one of the fastest developing countries on the continent.
Source: Emmy Noah

Some analysts, including Grajeda, suggest that Rwanda's governance model, while projecting democratic development externally and achieving notable security and stability outcomes in the short term, may face sustainability challenges due to certain governance practices that could potentially impact long-term development trajectories.[110]

_____

[108] Rafti M, "A perilous path to democracy: Political transition and authoritarian consolidation in Rwanda", Institute of Development Policy and Management, 2008, p.24.
[109] Reuters, "Rwanda's ex-president freed from prison", (6 April 2007), https://web.archive.org/web/20160306153527/http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-rwanda-president-idUKL0649673220070406 (accessed on 3 January 2025).
[110] Grajeda M, "Kagame's ruse in Rwanda: The debilitating role of authoritarianism in Rwanda and its impact on long term, sustainable development", MA Thesis, Chapman University, 2011, p.6.

Eritrea faces unique governance challenges, with limited opportunities for citizen participation and the consolidation of the rule of law, reflecting complex historical and political dynamics. The country maintains particularly stringent controls on information flows both domestically and internationally. President Isaias Afwerki has led the country continuously since independence in 1993.

An electoral poster for Rwandan President Paul Kagame during the campaigning on July 29, 2017 in Kigali, Rwanda. 2017. Source: Marco Longari/AFP
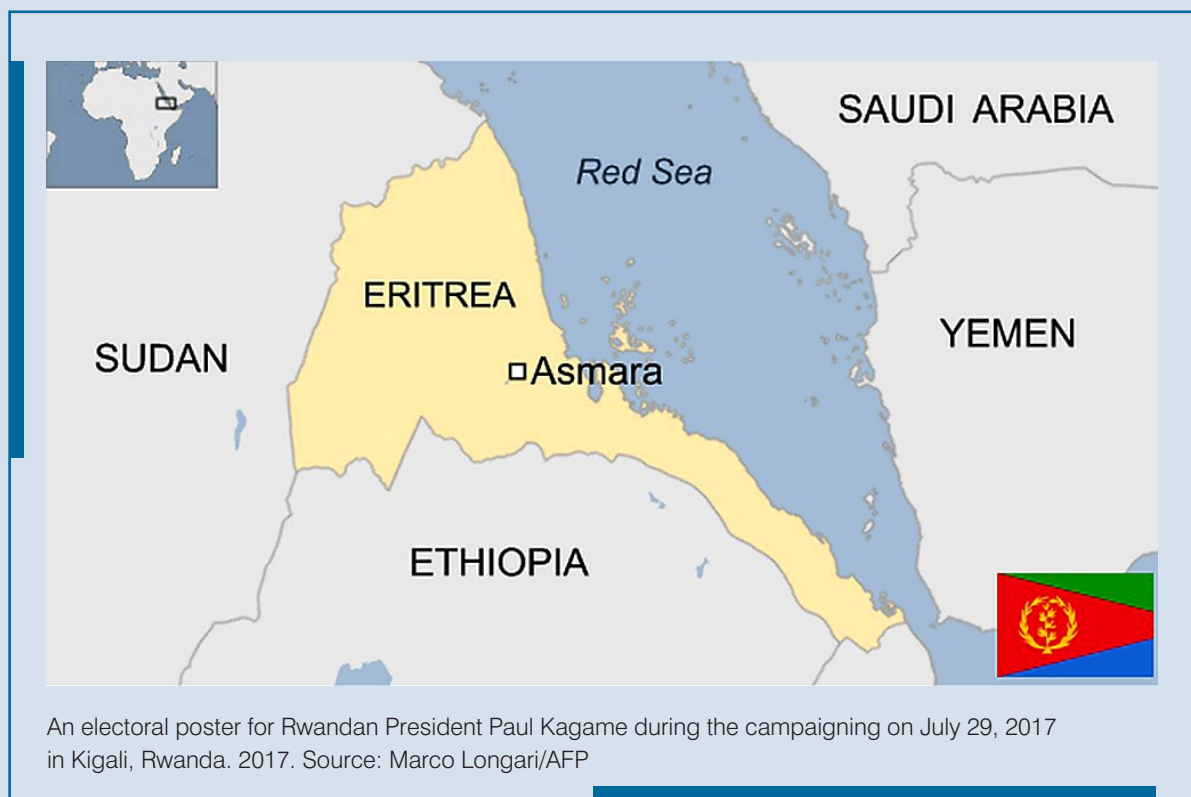
Various international observers characterise the governance structure as having significant military influence on civic affairs.[111] Many challenges exist to realising meaningful citizens participation in governance and consolidating the rule of law. For instance, a constitution ratified in 1997 is yet to be instituted, there have never been presidential or parliamentary elections in the country, and government functions are executed by the President and a circle of advisers.[112] Since 2001, the government has shut down all independent media outlets.[113] Eritrea is a one-party state, with the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) as the legal party of the country. The main political opposition is Eritreans in the diaspora who had escaped the country, as the government restricts emigration by limiting the issuance of exit visas.[114] The country is ranked 173/173 worldwide in the category of 'participation' in the Global State of Democracy Initiative (GSDI).[115]

—————————————————————

[111] Freedom House, "Eritrea: Freedom in the World 2024", https://freedomhouse.org/country/eritrea/freedom-world/2024#:~:text=Eritrea%20is%20a%20militarized%20authoritarian,is%20the%20sole%20political%20party (accessed on 5 January 2025); US Department of State, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Eritrea, https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/ (accessed on 5 January 2025).

[112] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report — Eritrea, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p.3-34; Freedom House, "Eritrea: Freedom in the World 2024" (as above).

[113] Ibid.

[114] Bernal V, "Civil Society and Cyberspace: Reflections on Dehai, Asmarino, and Awate", 60(2) Africa Today, 2013, p.21-36.

[115] Global State of Democracy Initiative, Eritrea, https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/eritrea (accessed on 6 January 2025).

Comoros has been facing democratic challenges in recent times. Since independence in 1975, the country has recorded about 20 attempted or successful coups.[116] This political instability looked to have been managed by the Fomboni Framework Agreement of 17 February 2001.[117] One of the key results of the agreement was the rotational presidency after a single term among the three main islands: Grand Comore, Anjouan, and Moheli. This was subsequently entrenched in the 2001 Constitution. These instruments were lauded at the African Union Summit in Nouakchott, Mauritania in July 2018 as being fundamental in maintaining "the peaceful environment enjoyed by the Comorian people", with the Assembly "STRONGLY UNDER[lying] the necessity of their continued respect".[118]

Map of Comoros. Source: CIA World Factbook

_____
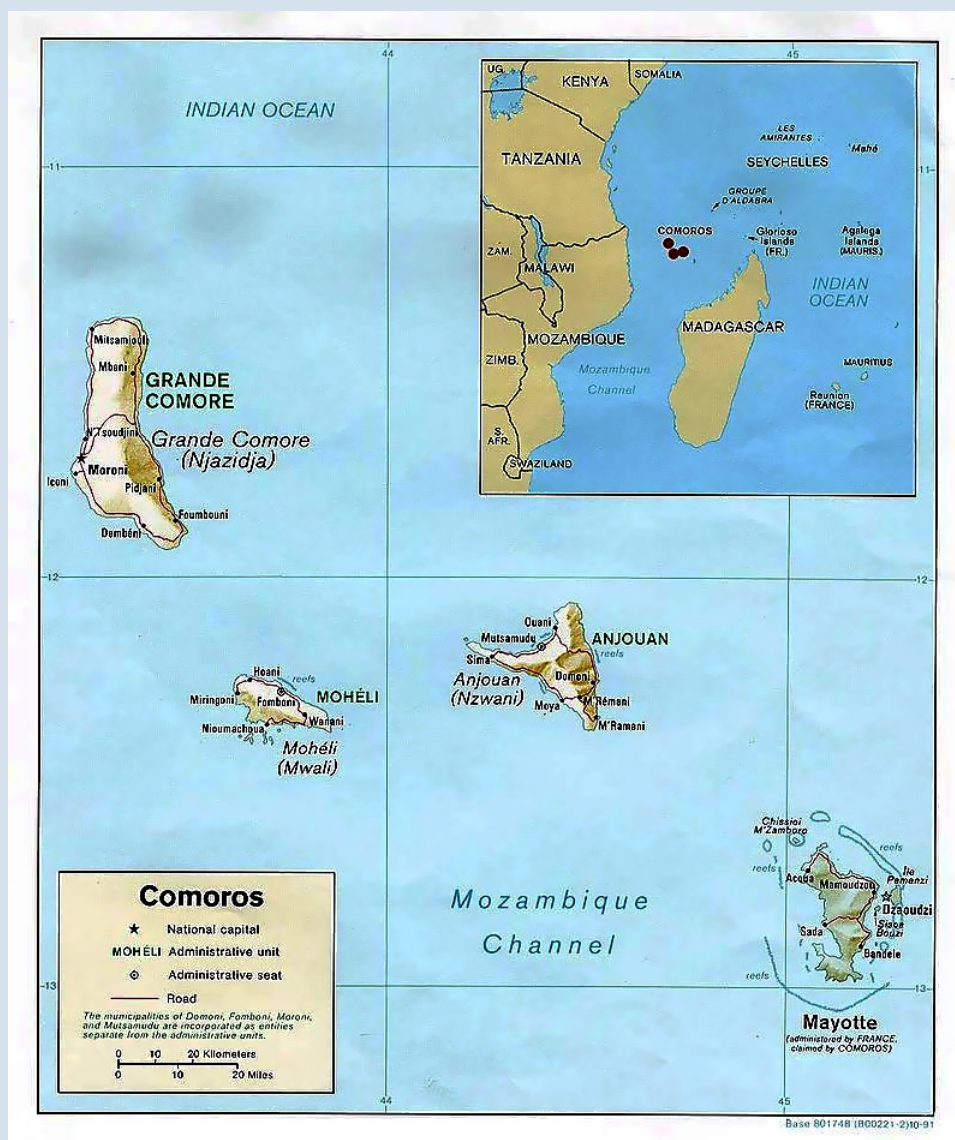
[116] Amani Africa, "Briefing on the situation in The Comoros", (1 June 2021), https://amaniafrica-et.org/briefing-on-the-situation-in-the-comoros/ (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[117] Fomboni Agreement, https://ucdpged.uu.se/peaceagreements/fulltext/com20010217.pdf (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[118] Assembly of the Union, Thirty-First Ordinary Session 1 - 2 July 2018 Nouakchott, Mauritania, Assembly/AU /Dec.690-712(XXXI), https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/36130-assembly_au_dec_690_-_712_xxxi_e.pdf (accessed on 6 January 2025).

President Assoumani won the 2001 elections and, in accordance with the Constitution, left in 2006 when it was the turn of the island of Anjouan to hold the presidency. He contested again in 2016 and won. In his second term, President Assoumani initiated a constitutional referendum in 2018 that removed presidential term limits, diverging from the Fomboni Framework Agreement and the 2001 Constitution. His recent term has faced challenges with political inclusivity, including reported restrictions on press freedom and opposition activities. The offices of the three vice-presidents representing each of the Islands were removed. The electoral duties of the Constitutional Court were transferred to the Supreme Court, where its members were appointed by Assoumani. In the recent elections of 2024, the political apathy in the country was greatly evident with a voter turnout of just 16 per cent.

Djibouti has maintained relative stability in the region and demonstrates governance continuity with limited leadership alternation. President Ismaël Omar Guelleh has led the country since 1999, succeeding his uncle Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who served as president from 1977. A 2004 diplomatic cable from the US Embassy described Djibouti's governance as highly centralised. This centralisation was reinforced in 2010 with the removal of presidential term limits, posing challenges to political pluralism and institutional checks. This political continuity was enhanced in 2010 when presidential term limits were removed. At the National Assembly, the ruling party maintains a majority after its ruling coalition, Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP), obtained 94 per cent of the vote. This requires members of parliament to keep party affiliations aside if they are to effectively check on executive power. Moreover, it has been reported that there have been restrictions on several opposition groups from forming recognised political parties. Additionally, familial appointments across key state institutions are likely to be perceived as not enhancing popular participation in governance. Presidential elections will be held in 2026, and it is unclear whether Guelleh will run or if there is any succession plan.

Beyond political participation and power contestation, the country serves as an example to African states in the realm of refugee integration. It has passed progressive legislation which protects and guarantees the socio-economic rights of refugees. This is Law No. 159/AN/16/7th L on the Status of Refugees, enacted in 2017. Also, the country's strategic location on the Horn of Africa makes it highly relevant in geopolitics as major global powers seek to maintain a pulse on one of the most important trade routes in the world. It is located in the narrowest points of the Red Sea, the Bab-el-Mandeb, while also close to the resource-rich Arabian Peninsula, and the strategic shipping route of the Gulf of Aden. This importance has made the country the only one in the world to host at least eight foreign military bases.

————————————————————

[119] Council on Foreign Relations, "Authoritarianism in Comoros Is Resurgent", (31 October 2018), https://www.cfr.org/blog/authoritarianism-comoros-resurgent (accessed on 6 January 2025); Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Comoros Election Exercise Promises More of the Same", (11 January 2024), https://africacenter.org/spotlight/comoros-election-exercise-promises-more-of-the-same/ (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[120] Ibid.

[121] BBC News, "Comoros President Azali Assoumani wins fourth term in disputed poll", (17 January 2024), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68002934 (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[122] US Embassy Djibouti, Djibouti: Government anxious over elevated profile, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04DJIBOUTI123_a.html (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[123] Global State of Democracy Initiative, Djibouti, https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/djibouti (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[124] US Embassy Djibouti, Djibouti 2023 Human Rights Report, https://dj.usembassy.gov/djibouti-2023-human-rights-report/ (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[125] Africa Intelligence, "Ismail Omar Guelleh governs family-style with Kadra, Naguib, Saad and co", (19 June 2015), https://www.africaintelligence.com/insiders/djibouti/2015/06/19/ismail-omar-guelleh-governs-family-style-with-kadra-naguib-saad-and-co/108078596-be1 (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[126] Douet M, "Djibouti's Guelleh: Wily strategist with a firm grip on power", (7 April 2021), BARRON'S, https://www.barrons.com/news/djibouti-s-guelleh-wily-strategist-with-a-firm-grip-on-power-01617774005 (accessed on 6 January 2025).

[127] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report — Djibouti. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024. p.7

Djibouti

Gulf of Aden

FRENCH BASE

FRENCH BASE

Camp Lemonnier

The People's Palace

CITY OF DJIBOUTI

Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport

US BASE

JAPANESE BASE

ITALIAN BASE

Gulf of Tadjoura

Port of Djibouti

2km

DJIBOUTI

Doraleh multi-purpose port

M&G

CHINESE BASE

United States: 4 000 troops **Cost of military base's lease:** $63-million a year

France: 1 450 troops **Lease:** $36-million a year

China: 1 000 troops **Lease:** $20-million a year

Japan: 180 troops **Lease:** unknown

Italy: 80 troops **Lease:** $2.6-million a year

Gulf of Aden

100km

YEMEN

Aden

Red Sea

ERITREA

DJIBOUTI
City of Djibouti

Berbera

SOMALIA

ETHIOPIA

The foreign military bases in Djibouti. Source: Simon Allison [Mail & Guardian].

4.3 Conflict and Violent Extremism

Of the three least safest and insecure countries globally in 2024, East Africa hosts two of them - South Sudan and Sudan, ranked as 161st and 162nd of 163 surveyed countries, respectively. Throughout 2020, almost half of the states in the region were involved in active armed conflicts. The risk of fragility is heightened by many reasons, including restricted access to natural resources, poverty and inequality, intergroup tensions and weak state institutions. Intrastate conflicts are particularly rife, most notably the Sudanese Civil War. This war came in the aftermath of the Sudanese Revolution of 2019, which saw the ousting of long-time President Omar al-Bashir, decisively by two military factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). They led the transition government until violence erupted between them in April 2023, relating to issues over state control. Since then, tens of thousands have been killed and millions uprooted from their homes, with no end in sight. This chaotic context is not conducive to building strong institutions to support peace, security or meaningful citizenry participation in governance. It is also concerning that diplomatic efforts to end the war have not been equal to the moment and have failed.[131]

South Sudanese President Salva Kiir casting his vote in the 2011 independence referendum.
Source: Al Jazeera English

————————————————————

[128] Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World", 2024, p.9, https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf (accessed on 3 February 2025).

[129] Davis I, "Armed conflict and peace processes in East Africa" in Davis I (ed.), SIPRI Yearbook Online: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p.217.

[130] Adeto Y, "State fragility and conflict nexus: Contemporary security issues in the Horn of Africa", 19(1) African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 2019, p.12-34.

[131] International Crisis Group, "Bolstering Efforts to End Sudan's Civil War", (30 January 2025), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/bolstering-efforts-end-sudans-civil-war (accessed on 4 February 2025).

South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan in 2011, and immediately after its independence, the country was plunged into a bloody civil war, which lasted for 7 years. The immediate cause of this was the fallout between President Salva Kiir from the Dinka ethnic group and the then Vice President Riek Machar from the Nuer ethnic group over allegations of the latter planning a coup. Considering the two figures originate from rival pastoralist ethnic groups with a history of hostilities,[132] the country quickly descended into a deadly national, political, and ethnic crisis.[133] This ended with a peace deal struck in 2018,[134] and the subsequent creation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGNU) in February 2020.[135]

This agreement was viewed as a negative peace as it did not effectively address the underlying causes of the tensions which occasioned the war. In 2021, it was touted to "remain dormant for the foreseeable future because it is no longer guiding the actions of the warring parties. Consequently, the country faces the risk of a multidirectional war, which could occur at any time, as the Juba-based elites are fighting proxy wars using communities".[136] As of 2025, South Sudan continues to face volatile security and human rights conditions. The absence of elections and reported constraints on civil and political freedoms, particularly for opposition groups, highlight the need for inclusive transitional processes to strengthen governance.[137] Moreover, critical transitional justice mechanisms like The Action Plan for the Armed Forces on Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence in South Sudan remain stalled, likewise the Truth Commission and Hybrid Court for South Sudan.

Ethiopia was still coming to terms with the Tigray War (which lasted from 2020 to November 2022), one of the deadliest wars in the 21st century,[138] when conflict broke out a few months later in the Amhara region. The belligerents are the Fano Militia and the Ethiopian government. The origins of this war are well-documented, tracing back to the longstanding perceptions of the marginalisation of the Amhara people since 1991, when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) took control of the new government.[139] However, the immediate cause of the war was the Ethiopia–Tigray peace agreement, also called the Pretoria Agreement.[140] The Amhara people felt betrayed by this agreement as they believed that their concerns and territorial claims were not considered. Amhara forces participated in this war alongside the government against the TPLF. They were fuelled by their desire to reclaim lands like Welkayit, Raya, Korem, Abergele, Tsagibchi, Metekel and Dera, which had been annexed post-1991 into the Tigray region.

———————————————————————

[132] Sefa-Nyarko C, "Civil War in South Sudan: Is It a Reflection of Historical Secessionist and Natural Resource Wars in "Greater Sudan"?", 9(3) African Security, 2016, p.190.

[133] Mawadza A & Carciotto S, South Sudan: A young country divided by civil war, Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa, 2016, p.1-2.

[134] The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed on 12 September 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[135] UN News, "UN chief welcomes South Sudan's Unity government, lauds parties for 'significant achievement" (22 February 2020), https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057941 (accessed on 4 February 2025).

[136] ACCORD, "The Current State of Politics and the Peace Process in South Sudan", Conflict & Resilience Monitor, 2021, (17 March 2021), https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-current-state-of-politics-and-the-peace-process-in-south-sudan/ (accessed on 5 February 2025).

[137] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Events of 2024, p.425-429; Freedom House, "South Sudan, Freedom in the World 2024", https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-sudan/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 6 February 2025).

[139] Kebede A, "The immediate causes of the Amhara Fano Force's rebellion against the government of Abiy Ahmed", African Security Review, 2024, p.1-13; Workneh Y, "Reactions to nation-building: The roots of Amhara nationalism in Ethiopia and its implications", Cogent Social Sciences, 2024, p.7-9.

[140] Agreement for a lasting peace through a permanent cessation of hostilities between the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf (accessed on 7 February 2025).
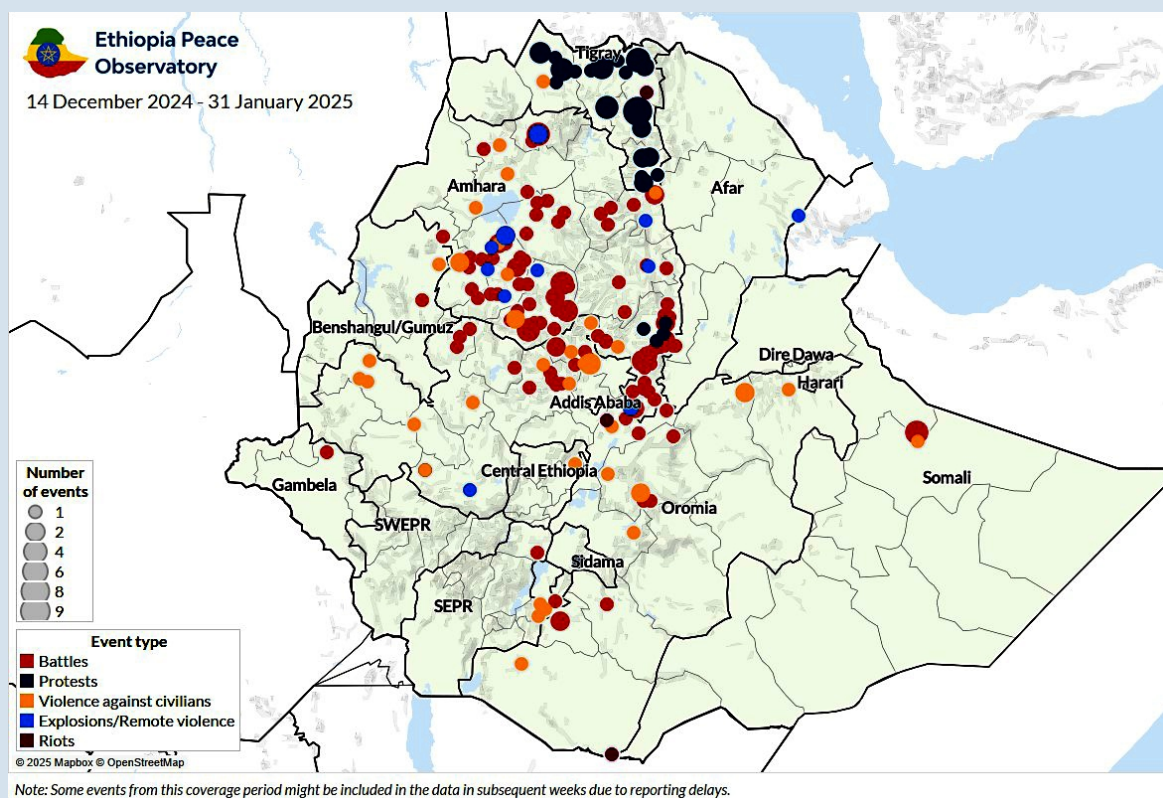
Source: ACLED

These lands except Metekel and Dera were restored, while the Amhara National Regional State had to return Welkayit and Raya to the Tigray National Regional State. In addition the agreement only focused on addressing the casualties in the Tigray region. This sparked a conflict which has occasioned human rights abuses, displacement and violence.[141] It undermines the government's ability to build and consolidate strong institutions that provide access to justice, promote the rule of law, and guarantee peace and security. The prognosis is that this conflict could metamorphose into a civil war.[142]

_____

[141] Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Army Attacks Health Care in Amhara Conflict" (3 July 2024), https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/03/ethiopia-army-attacks-health-care-amhara-conflict (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[142] Abebe A & Moges Z, "Ethiopia's Amhara Conflict Could Spark Civil War" (6 March 2024), Foreign Policy, https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/06/ethiopia-amhara-conflict-civil-war/ (accessed on 7 February 2025); Harter F, "Refugees in Ethiopia's Amhara region continue to face almost daily attacks" (21 November 2024), https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/11/21/refugees-ethiopia-amhara-region-continue-face-almost-daily-attacks (accessed on 7 February 2025).

Somalia is reeling from the effects of a multidimensional crisis. After decades of external efforts to support building strong institutions, it has not translated into the revival of a strong and functional government.[143] Menkhaus contends that this is partly caused by powerful interests that weaken state institutions.[144] This situation remained tenuous even after the establishment of a post-transitional federal government in 2012.

Source: Italian Agency for Development and Cooperation.

——————————————————
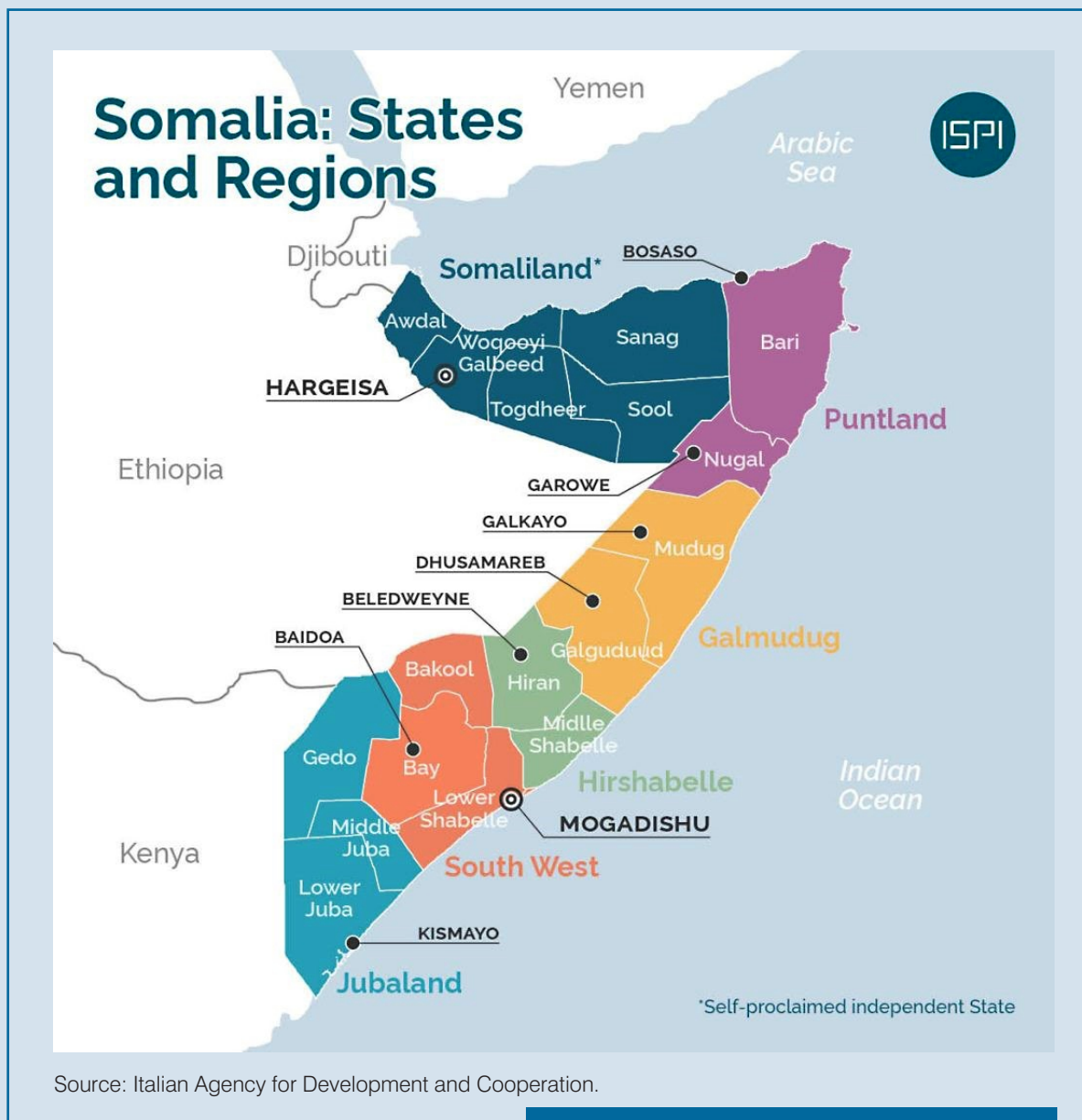
[143] Menkhaus K, "State failure, state building, and prospects for a 'functional failed state' in Somalia", 656 The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 2014, p.154.
[144] Ibid.

Since that time till date, Somalia has been ranked the 'world's most fragile state' five times,[145] and came in second place seven times. It is currently the most fragile state in the world.[146] The country has a history of civil wars, particularly in the 1990, which followed the fall of former president Mohammed Siad Barre, culminating in a virtual state collapse, occasioning violence and instability.[147] One of the notable consequences was the independence declaration in 1991 of the breakaway state of Somaliland. Though not recognised by any country, it has regularly held elections and has managed to maintain a degree of stability amidst the turbulence in the region.[148]

Also threatening the territorial integrity of Somalia is the breakaway state of the hitherto semi-autonomous state of Puntland. In 2024, Puntland declared its independence by withdrawing from the federation.[149] Meanwhile, a prominent threat to peace and security in Somalia is posed by the Salafist jihadi group—Al-Shabaab, translated in English to mean "The Youth". It espouses terror as it seeks to overthrow the government and create a state which invokes the literal interpretation of religious texts and the return to the early traditions of pious companions of the Prophet Muhammad.[150] The group carries out indiscriminate attacks on both civilians and armed forces. In 2012, the group pledged its loyalty to Al-Qaeda and is the wealthiest member of the confederation.[151]

Kenya is also grappling with the looming threat to its peace and security posed by Al-Shabaab. While the group's activities were primarily domestic to Somalia, they have spread to neighbouring countries, with Kenya being the worst affected. In recent times, there has been a surge in the number of Kenyans who have been radicalised into radical Islamist movements like Al-Shabaab, leading to more frequent and deadly attacks in the country.[152] This prompted the state to launch Operation Linda Nchi in 2011 as a pre-emptive military operation against Al-Shabaab to take it out in Somalia and create a buffer zone to protect Kenya's northern region.[153] This counter-terrorism operation failed to reduce the capacity of Al-Shabaab, but on the contrary, spurred the group to increase the intensity and frequency of its attacks.[154] In the last decade, the group has carried out at least 30 terrorist attacks in Kenya.[155] It is thought that the group particularly sets Kenya in its sights because it sent troops to Somalia under the banner of the African Union Mission in Somalia and its position as a major hub for business, tourism and diplomacy in the region, hosting the United Nations headquarters in Africa.[156]

——————————————————

[145] The Fund for Peace, "Fragile States Index", https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/ (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ramadane Z, "State failure, poverty and terrorism", 6(7) Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 2014, p.14.

[148] Ferragamo M & Klobucista C, "Somaliland: The Horn of Africa's Breakaway State" (21 January 2025), Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/somaliland-horn-africas-breakaway-state (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[149] Ahmed M, "Puntland to operate independently from Somalia after law change", (1 April 2024), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-01/puntland-to-operate-independently-from-somalia-after-law-change?embedded-checkout=true (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[150] Marchal R & Sheik Z, "Salafism in Somalia: Coping with coercion, civil war and its own contradictions", 6(1-2) Islamic Africa, 2015, p.136.

[151] Director of National Intelligence, "Foreign terrorist organizations: Al-Shabaab", https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/al_shabaab_fto.html (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[152] Torbjörnsson D, "Explaining the differences in al-Shabaab expansion into Ethiopia and Kenya", Studies in African Security, 2017, p.1.

[153] Watkins E, "Al-Shabaab Militancy Undermines Kenya's LAPSSET", 8(6) Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 2016, p.10.

[154] Ibid, p.11.

[155] Sinkó G & Besenyo J, "Analyzing the evolution of the threat al-Shabaab poses to Kenyapost-Westgate attack period", 10(1) Politics & international relations, 2024, p.1.

[156] Ibid, p.7-8; Mathis E, "Kenya as a target for Al-Shabaab: A theory for understanding cross-border terrorism", 8(1) The Dialogue, 2024, p.72-74.

Al-Shabab's spokesman, Ali Mohamud Rage, speaks to Kenyan foreign fighters at one of the Islamist insurgent group's military training camps in Somalia in 2017. Source: Havard Kennedy School, Belfer Center.

4.4 Other Challenges

Tanzania's challenge is making justice accessible to all classes of society. These constraints are particularly encountered by women, small businesses, and the rural poor due to various socioeconomic, cultural, political, infrastructure, and governance issues. Moreover, lack of public information, slow publication of judicial decisions and perceptions of corruption hinder access to justice. The judicial system entertains about 200,000 cases annually, with about 120,000 decided annually. This creates a backlog and weakens public trust in the judicial system. It should be noted that is not common to Tanzania alone but a common feature in most African states. In addition, the country has been making a gradual comeback from an authoritarian decline. In 2023, President Samia Suluhu Hassan lifted a 6-year ban on opposition rallies instituted by her predecessor in 2016. Nonetheless, reports still abound of the arrests and harassment of the opposition. This poses a challenge to the fair contestation of power in the country.

————————————————————

[157] World Bank Group, "Bringing Justice Within the Grasp of Ordinary Men and Women in Tanzania", (16 July 2024), https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2024/07/16/bringing-justice-within-the-grasp-of-ordinary-afe-men-and-women (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[158] Ibid.

[159] Aljazeera, "Tanzania's President Hassan ends 6-yr ban on opposition rallies", (3 January 2023), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/3/tanzania-president-hassan-lifts-ban-on-opposition-rallies (accessed on 7 February 2025).

[160] Human Rights Watch, World report 2025, (as above), p.611-613.

About 2000 kilometres away from Tanzania is Madagascar, a country with marginally better levels of civic enjoyment by its citizens. There remain some traces of political instability, a legacy of the last decade when the country returned to electoral politics in 2013. As a result, voter apathy is prevalent, with reports of government restrictions on opposition activity and disregard for the rule of law.[161]

---

[161] Freedom House, "Madagascar: Freedom in the World 2024", https://freedomhouse.org/country/madagascar/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 7 February 2025).

Inequality, Security Challenges and Institutional Decline

5.1 Introduction

At the bottom of the continent is the Southern African region. It occupies a unique position in continental governance dynamics, historically representing Africa's most successful regional example of democratic consolidation and peaceful transitions of power, while simultaneously confronting the world's highest levels of income inequality and related social challenges. The region comprises Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.[162]

The region has typically been Africa's best-performing region in many areas of democracy, but recent trends indicate increasing citizen dissatisfaction with democracy.[163] This is fueled by the failures of the government to address persistent socio-economic inequality. In the most recent data, South Africa has the highest income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of around 0.67.[164] It makes the top ten with five other South African countries like Namibia, Zambia, Eswatini, Mozambique, and Botswana. This makes the region the most unequal in the world.[165] A link can be drawn with this inequality and some developmental challenges like violent extremism, societal violence, conflict, political regression and xenophobia.

The region's developmental paradox stems from its combination of relatively strong democratic institutions with persistent socio-economic inequalities that threaten social cohesion and political stability. While Southern Africa has generally avoided the military coups and widespread violent extremism that characterise other African regions, it faces distinct challenges related to criminal violence, electoral instability, and governance systems that struggle to address historical legacies of racial and economic exclusion.

————————————————————

[162] African Union, https://au.int/en/member_states/countryprofiles2 (accessed on 1 December 2024).
[163] International IDEA, "Imagining Democratic Futures: Southern Africa Foresight Report 2025", Discussion Paper, December 2024, p.1.
[164] Sulla V, Zikhali P &Cuevas F, Inequality in Southern Africa: An Assessment of the Southern African Customs Union. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2022), p.1.
[165] Ibid.

In this chapter three interconnected dimensions of Southern Africa's governance and security challenges are addressed. The analysis begins with emerging patterns of restricted power contestation and popular participation in governance. In the second part, there is a review of the peace and security challenges that distinguish Southern Africa from other continental regions. Rather than facing widespread military interventions, the region confronts high levels of criminal violence, gender-based violence, and electoral instability that threaten social cohesion and institutional legitimacy. Third, additional governance challenges are reviewed.

5.2 Limited Power Contestation and Popular Participation in Governance

Since 1975, Angola's governance has been led by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). While leadership transitions have occurred, political contestation remains largely within the ruling party, posing challenges to broader pluralism. In the 2022 general elections build-up, the opposition formed the United Patriotic Front, an ad hoc electoral coalition of various opposition parties and forces, aiming to challenge the ruling party. [166]

Angolan polling agents during the 2022 elections. Source: African Union

---

[166] Bloomberg, "Angola Opposition Parties Unite to Challenge MPLA's 46-Year Rule" (5 October 2021), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-05/angola-opposition-parties-unite-to-challenge-mpla-s-46-year-rule (accessed on 16 February 2025).

The ruling party claimed a narrow 51 per cent victory, which was contested by the opposition, contributing to challenges in sustaining public trust in democratic institutions.[167] The African Union Electoral Observation Mission (AUEOM) to the country also noted that: "as was the case in 2017, the AUEOM noted limitations on the right of access to information and the freedom of the press.[168] It is noted that, though they abound, some restrictions on the press and civil society have been eased under the administration, while corruption remains common.[169]

The Kingdom of Eswatini maintains a traditional monarchical system of governance that is unique on the continent. The King and Queen Mother hold comprehensive constitutional authority with significant influence across all three branches of government.[170] Since 1973, political parties have not contested elections in Eswatini. This point was reiterated in the final report of the African Union Election Observation Mission(AUEOM) to the 21 September 2018 parliamentary Elections in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Eswatini on the African map.
Source: Shosholoza.

[167] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report — Angola. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p.3
[168] African Union Election Observation Mission to the 24 August 2022 General Elections in the Republic of Angola, para. 20, https://papsrepository.africa-union.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2216/AUEOM%20Final%20Report%20for%20the%2024%20August%202022%20General%20Elections%20in%20Angola.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed on 17 February 2025).
[169] Freedom House, "Angola", https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 17 February 2025).
[170] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report — Eswatini. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p.3.

Amongst other points, it was recommended that the state "consider reviewing the 1973 decree and allow for the formation, registration and participation of political parties in elections in accordance with the provisions of the 2005 Constitution, and in compliance with the country's international commitment".[171]

It is reported that political dissent and civic activism continue to attract harsh punishment under the Terrorism Act of 2008 and the Sedition and Subversive Activities Act of 1938.[172] The centralised governance structure and limited space for dissent pose challenges to addressing income inequality, as reforms are often shaped by established leadership, underscoring the need for broader stakeholder inclusion.

For about 37 years, Zimbabwe was under the rule of Robert Mugabe and his ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. This came to an end in November 2017 when the military orchestrated what has since been described as the "world's strangest coup". [173]

A military tank positions itself on the street as the coup is carried out. Source: Crisis Group

———————————————————————

[171] African Union Election Observation Mission Report: Eswatini 2018, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36629-doc-report_of_the_african_union_election_observation_mission_to_the_25_august_and_21_september_2018_parliamentary_elections_in_the_kingdom_of_eswatini.docx (accessed on 15 February 2025).

[172] Human Rights Watch, World report 2025, (as above), p.155.

[173] CNN, "Zimbabwe's military takeover was the world's strangest coup" (21 November 2017), https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/20/africa/zimbabwe-military-takeover-strangest-coup/index.html (accessed on 18 February 2025).

This coup sparked interesting debates on the recurrent role of the military in settling internal disputes within the ZANU-PF.[174] This dispute escalated barely a week before the coup when Mugabe sacked Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa and expelled him from the party.[175] This was widely considered an internal succession dispute between two factions of the ruling party, and the military identified itself as a military wing of ZANU-PF, organised a coup, and installed the sacked VP Mnangagwa as President.[176]

In the wake of these events, prominent military leaders were introduced into the new government during the coup.[177] On face value, this raises questions about compliance with Article 23 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Mutanda argues that in what was a case of "conscious political naivety", the coup got the backing of the masses against a backdrop of decades of political repression, human rights violations and economic recession, when it was simply a case of internal power struggles in the ZANU-PF.[178] The party continues to dominate governance, with ongoing challenges to fostering political pluralism and ensuring robust opposition participation.[179]

Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a. Source: Incontext.

————————————————————-

[174] Pigou P, "Zimbabwe's very peculiar coup", International Crisis Group, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/zimbabwe/zimbabwes-very-peculiar-coup (accessed on 18 February 2025).
[175] Ibid.
[176] Nyathi M & Ncube M, "The 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe: Implications for human rights and the rule of law", 20 African Human Rights Law Journal, 2020, p.826-827.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Mutanda D, "Zimbabweans behind the November 2017 coup: A case of conscious political naivety", 9 Cogent Social Sciences, 2023, p.1-18.
[179] Knoppe H, "Democracy support in dominant party states: The case of Zimbabwe", European Democracy Hub, 2021, p.4; Kika M & Mavedzenge J, "Towards Elections that Work in Zimbabwe", Journal on Democracy, Governance and Human Rights in Zimbabwe, 2023, p.3.

5.3 Peace and Security

Mozambique has been grappling with multiple challenges—the threat of violence posed by jihadist militants looking to establish an Islamist state, and more recently, the scourge of electoral violence. Since 2017, the historically marginalised region of Cabo Delgado, faced with deteriorating socio-economic conditions and the rise in active regional and global Salafi-jihadi networks, has proven a conducive environment for the entrenchment of a radical Islamist insurgency.[180]

The insurgency group goes by many names: Al Shabaab ("the Youth"), Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a ("the People of the Sunnah and the Community"), Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCA or ISCAP).[181] It is now known as the Islamic State Mozambique (ISM). According to the UNDP's report in 2017—Journey to Extremism, youth economic disenfranchisement is the primary cause of radicalism into violent extremism in Africa. The Islamist insurgency has been able to capitalise on this issue, with devastating consequences on the civilian population.[182] Using extreme violence as a modus operandi, the state has been plunged into widespread fear and insecurity as the jihadists look to expand their movement.

Mozambique conducted general elections on October 9, 2024, to determine presidential succession. The long-established Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), which has maintained governance continuity for nearly five decades, presented Daniel Chapo as its candidate to succeed President Felipe Nyusi. The electoral contest included independent candidate Venâncio Mondlane and the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) party, which faced certain organizational challenges during the campaign.[183] A few days after the polling, Mondlane called for his supporters to protest against the handling of the elections, on the grounds of alleged fraud by election observers. The European Union election observation mission noted "…deliberate invalidation of opposition votes, instances of fraudulent alteration of polling results in favour of the ruling party, indications of ballot box stuffing…". [184]

On 18 October, unidentified gunmen murdered Mondlane's lawyer, who was preparing to challenge the election results in court. This sparked nationwide protests, which were met with a heavy-handed response from the security forces. Fresh spates of protests erupted in December 2024 when the Constitutional Council confirmed FRELIMO's victory, and in the ensuing week, 176 people were reportedly killed, including protesters, children and some police officers.[185] The death toll has now exceeded 300,[186] and as of March 2025, sporadic incidents still persist.[187] This underscores the fragility of the state in quickly erupting into violence during elections.

————————————————————

[180] Estelle E & Darden J, "Assessing the Northern Mozambique insurgency" in Combating the Islamic State's spread in Africa: Assessment and recommendations for Mozambique, American Enterprise Institute, 2021, p.5.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Orre A & Forquilha S, "Poorly designed youth employment programmes will boost the insurgency in Mozambique", CMI Brief, 2023, p.1-4.

[183] International Crisis Group, "What is Driving Mozambique's Post-electoral Protests?", (15 November 2024), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/east-and-southern-africa/mozambique/what-driving-mozambiques-post-electoral-protests (accessed on 20 February 2025).

[184] European Union Election Observation Mission Mozambique 2024 Final Report, p.7, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2025/EU%20EOM%20Mozambique%202024%20Final%20Report%20ENG.pdf (accessed on 20 February 2025).

[185] Global State of Democracy Initiative, Mozambique, https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/mozambique (accessed on 20 February 2025).

[186] Aljazeera, "SADC must act now to save Mozambique from becoming a failed state", (4 February 2025), https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/2/4/sadc-must-act-now-to-save-mozambique-from-becoming-a-failed-state (accessed on 11 March 2025).

[187] DW, "Dialogue or confrontation? Mozambique's Chapo chooses both", (8 March 2025), https://www.dw.com/en/dialogue-or-confrontation-mozambiques-president-chapo-chooses-both/a-71848792 (accessed on 11 March 2025).
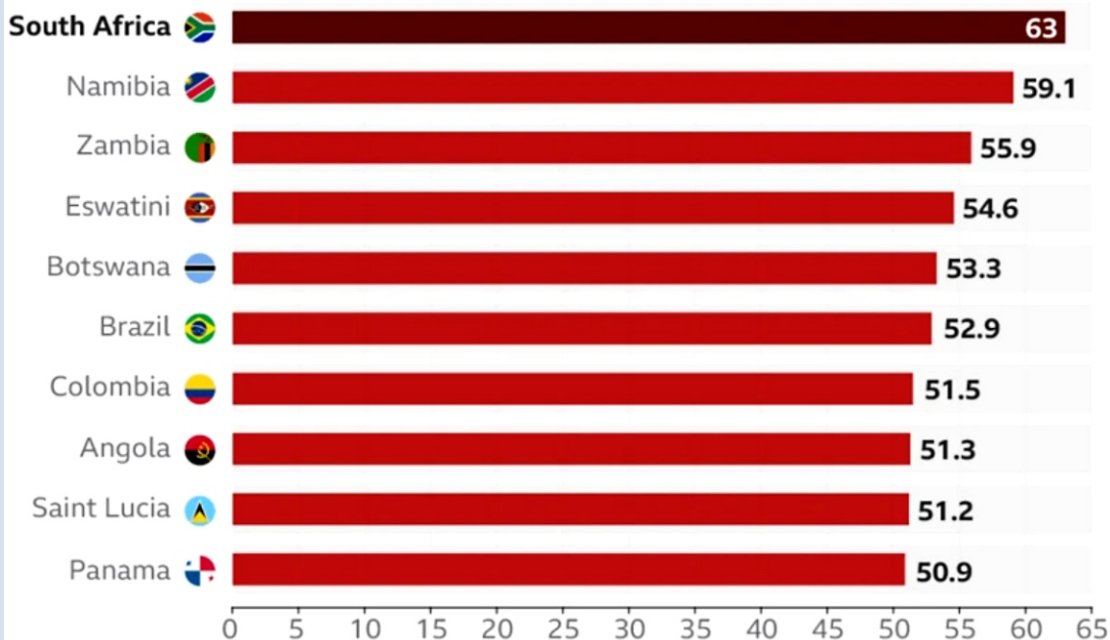
South Africa is one of the more liberal democracies in Africa, given its record of free and fair elections and the presence of an independent judiciary. However, the country continues to struggle with high levels of violence and crime, which pose a threat to peace and security. Recent data from the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime puts South Africa's murder rate of 45 per 100,000 (2023/24) as the second highest for countries that publish crime data.[188]

More so, the rate of gender-based violence is one of the highest in the world, with 1 in 5 women in relationships reported to have experienced physical violence by a partner.[189] Petty crime and robberies are also rife, and this has been thought to have an intrinsic link with massive income inequality among citizenry in the country.

Top 10 most unequal countries in the world
2010-2022 Gini coefficient*

Country	Gini
South Africa	63
Namibia	59.1
Zambia	55.9
Eswatini	54.6
Botswana	53.3
Brazil	52.9
Colombia	51.5
Angola	51.3
Saint Lucia	51.2
Panama	50.9

*A higher Gini index indicates greater inequality

Source: Human Development Report 2023/2024.

———————————————————————

[188] UNODC, Intentional homicide, https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims (accessed on 12 March 2025).
[189] Stats SA, "Crimes against women in South Africa, an analysis of the phenomenon of GBV and femicide", https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/1_Stock/Events_Institutional/2020/womens_charter_2020/docs/30-07-2020/A_Statistical_Overview_R_Maluleke.pdf (accessed on 12 March 2025).

Through a lens of strain theory and the economic theory of crime, it has been seen that the social stresses that arise from this inequality has been a primary driver for crime for the former, and for the latter-those potential offenders are driven by a thought process which weighs the gains of crime against the consequences of being caught.[190] Essentially, income inequality contributes to crime in general with educational inequality more linked to violent crime. [191]

In neighbouring Lesotho, the issue of violence and high levels of crime are equally challenging to peace and security. The country has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence globally, with 86 per cent of women having experienced such violence in their lifetime.[192] It is worth noting that this costs Lesotho more than $113 million a year, meaning every citizen loses at least $50 every year to violence against women and girls.[193]

Source: Lesotho Times.

————————————————————————
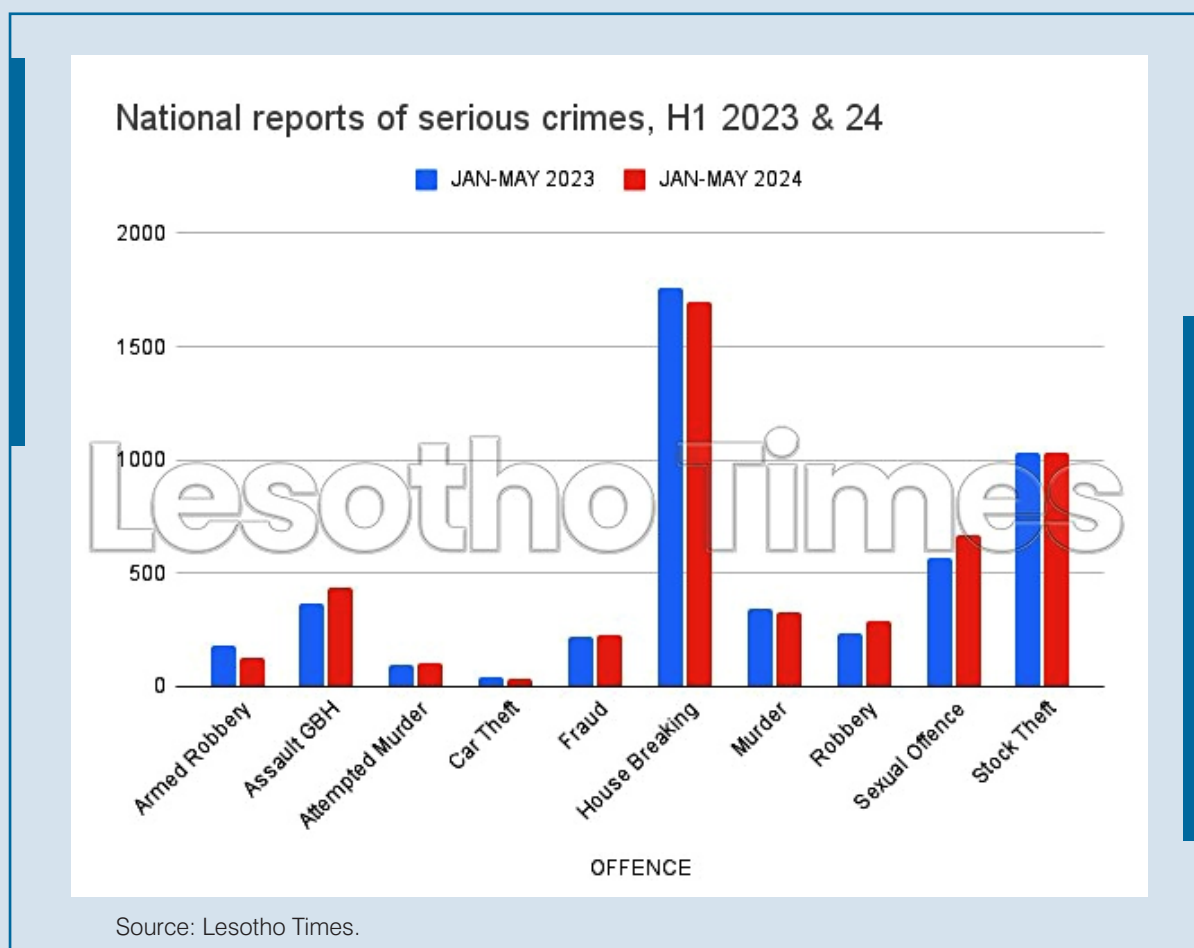
[190] Adam F & Grobbelaar S, "Education- and Income Inequality as Drivers of Violent Property Crime in South Africa: A System Dynamics Model", 14 Sustainability, 2022, p.4.

[191] Büttner N, "Local inequality and crime: New evidence from South Africa", The Journal of Economic Inequality, 2025, p.3; Lamb G & Warton G, Inequality, poverty and the perpetration of violent crime in South Africa in Farrall S & McVie S, Handbook on Crime and Inequality, (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2025) 200-220.

[192] UN Lesotho, United to end Gender Based Violence in Lesotho, UN Newsletter, Issue 2, 2022, p.2.

[193] The Commonwealth, "The economic cost of violence against women and girls: A study of Lesotho", (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022.

It is further estimated that the total cost, including loss of income and expenses associated with medical, legal and police support, equates to around 5.5 per cent of Lesotho's gross domestic product (GDP).[194] This loss invariably drives inequality further, leaving the economy robbed of developmental funds, thus continuing the cycle of crime and violence driven by poverty. The crime wave almost leads to a breakdown in the judicial system as an underfunded judiciary sits on thousands of untried cases. This translates to criminals roaming free as crimes go unsolved/unpunished, particularly concerning for a country which was ranked in 2021 to have the sixth worst murder rate in the world.[195]

In addition, Lesotho has recently shown a vulnerability to political instability. This has been placed at the feet of poverty and socio-economic underdevelopment. Between 2012 and 2021, there were two coalition governments (2012-2015 and 2015-17) with neither finishing its 5-year term due to internal fights, and the country's worsening political instability profile. Multiple coalition governments have followed since then. This instability played out over 2014 and 2015 in the political conflict between the All-Basotho Convention (ABC) and the Democratic Congress (DC) over the appointment of the army commander. This resulted in the army's involvement with the killing of two Lieutenant Generals, and other soldiers, intimidation of politicians, torture, and arrest of soldiers. While it is relevant to underscore this potential for instability given a record of politicisation of the military, it is commendable to note that Lesotho is moving beyond this towards increased levels of democratic consolidation.

5.4 Other Challenges

Zambia has earned a reputation as one of the more solid democracies in Africa, but it has been noticed that there has been some democratic regression in recent times. The country has had nine presidential elections since 1991, with power being transferred among four political parties. Recently, reports abound of police withholding permits for opposition rallies, and even arrests of opposition protesters at rallies which have been granted permission. These restrictions have also been extended to the press. A recent report by the Media Institute of Southern Africa says that more than 60 per cent of persons surveyed think the media cannot operate freely due to frequent harassment and intimidation.

———————————————————

[194] Ibid.
[195] The Guardian, "Lesotho murder rate ranked sixth worst in world as judicial system breaks down", (1 September 2021), https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/01/lesotho-rate-ranked-sixth-worst-in-world-as-judicial-system-breaks-down (accessed on 12 March 2025).
[196] Pherudi M, 'Political instability in Lesotho: Causes and possible remedies", 34 Botswana Journal of African Studies, 2022, p.82.
[197] Ibid.
[198] UNDP, "Understanding conflict, peace and gender context in Lesotho", (UNDP & Kingdom of Lesotho, 2021), p.17-20.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Freedom House, "Lesotho", https://freedomhouse.org/country/lesotho/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 12 March 2025).
[201] Action Aid, "Shrinking space in Zambia: Time for action", Policy Briefing, 2019, p.1.
[202] Freedom House, "Zambia", https://freedomhouse.org/country/zambia/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 13 March 2025).
[203] VOA, "Report alleges shrinking media space in Zambia", (24 December 2024), https://www.voanews.com/a/report-alleges-shrinking-media-space-in-zambia-/7912610.html (accessed on 13 March 2025).

Malawi's prominent challenge is corruption. Corruption is not particular to Malawi. It is a common challenge faced across the continent. The country has made considerable democratic gains, laudably holding free and fair elections with frequent power alternations between political parties.

Nonetheless, the delivery of government services continues to be affected as allegations persist of rife corruption of government and judicial officials. This translates to bad governance, with the implications of weakening state institutions, exacerbating socio-economic inequality and reducing citizen confidence in the state.

_____

[204] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report — Malawi. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p.5; Freedom House, "Malawi", https://freedomhouse.org/country/malawi/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 12 March 2025).
[205] Chatam House, "Malawi, the land of broken promises", (27 October 2022), https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2022-08/malawi-land-broken-promises (accessed on 12 March 2025).

Chapter 06

Cross-Cutting Issues across Africa

6.1 Introduction

The regional analyses presented in the preceding chapters reveal that while Africa's five regions demonstrate distinct characteristics in their approaches to governance, security, and institutional development, they are united by recurring patterns and interconnected challenges that transcend geographical boundaries. Despite the diversity of cultures, languages, political systems, and historical experiences across the continent, similar obstacles to achieving SDG 16 and AU Agenda 2063 aspirations manifest repeatedly, suggesting deeper structural issues that require comprehensive, continent-wide approaches rather than isolated regional responses.

This cross-cutting analysis is particularly significant for understanding how individual country challenges aggregate into continental patterns that require systemic responses. The examination reveals that many seemingly local issues, from coup d'états in specific countries to electoral violence in particular contexts, reflect broader institutional weaknesses and governance deficits that characterise contemporary African political systems. This perspective suggests that sustainable solutions require not only targeted interventions in specific countries or regions but also continental approaches that address underlying structural issues. The cross-cutting examination also highlights the interconnected nature of developmental challenges, demonstrating how governance deficiencies create conditions for security threats, which in turn undermine human rights protection and regional cooperation.

The chapter's analytical framework draws heavily on the African Union Transitional Justice Policy as a comprehensive approach for addressing these interconnected challenges. The policy's emphasis on context-specific frameworks that simultaneously address past injustices, present governance deficits, and future institutional development provides a coherent strategy for tackling the complex, multi-dimensional nature of Africa's developmental challenges. This approach recognises that sustainable peace, justice, and strong institutions require addressing root causes rather than symptoms, and that effective responses must integrate backwards-looking accountability with forward-looking institutional reform.

6.2 Governance and Power Dynamics

Governance across Africa faces challenges in balancing formal democratic institutions with tendencies towards centralised authority, which can limit the effectiveness of checks and balances and create uneven opportunities for political contestation. This generally gives the incumbent regime an unfair advantage vis-à-vis the opposition and other powers (legislative and judiciary) within the state. These democratic institutions have been used to maintain the continuity of many administrations often facilitated through constitutional amendments which have extended term limits or even removed it altogether.

A recurring theme across Africa has been the ruling party's domination of both the judiciary and legislative branches, sometimes for years, undermining prospects for effective checks and balances. Leadership transitions in several countries have demonstrated patterns of continuity within established political networks, including familial relationships, raising questions about broader participation in governance processes.

This phenomenon can potentially create political instability as established constitutional procedures are set aside as the guidelines for succession in favour of opaque extra-constitutional machinations. Weakened institutions face the most threats post-presidential succession. These governance deficiencies can spiral into conflict, coups and also create environments where accountability is minimal, corruption thrives, and meaningful citizen participation in governance is more performative than substantive.

6.3 Peace and Security Challenges

Peace and security challenges reveal a concerning pattern of instability spanning across all five regions of Africa. From political transitions involving military interventions in West and Central Africa to the spread of radicalism and violent extremism, driven largely by socio-economic disenfranchisement and ongoing conflicts, Africa faces significant security challenges requiring coordinated responses.

Radical Islamist groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, Al-Shabaab, and JNIM are increasingly operating across national borders, exploiting ungoverned spaces and preying on local grievances to establish strongholds across West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and more recently even in Southern Africa's Mozambique. Jihadism is now less driven by religious motivations but more by socio-economic grievances of Africa's youth.

| RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	CHANGE	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	CHANGE	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	CHANGE
84	Senegal	2.084	↓ 15	112	Belarus	2.291	↑ 3	=140	Pakistan	2.783	↑ 2
85	Guinea-Bissau	2.085	↓ 12	113	Nicaragua	2.295	↑ 12	=140	Niger	2.792	↓ 6
86	France	2.088	↓ 14	114	Benin	2.306	↓ 1	142	Venezuela	2.821	↑ 3
87	Trinidad and Tobago	2.092	↓ 10	115	Papua New Guinea	2.315	↓ 10	143	Haiti	2.827	↓ 9
=88	China	2.101	↓ 6	116	India	2.319	↑ 5	144	Ethiopia	2.845	↑ 5
=88	Cyprus	2.101	↓ 5	117	Guatemala	2.332	↔	145	Palestine	2.872	↓ 9
90	Algeria	2.11	↓ 2	118	Gabon	2.372	↓ 18	146	Colombia	2.887	↔
91	Jamaica	2.119	↑ 2	119	Djibouti	2.374	↓ 8	147	Nigeria	2.907	↔
92	Rwanda	2.12	↑ 4	120	Togo	2.381	↓ 2	148	Myanmar	2.943	↑ 6
93	Bangladesh	2.126	↓ 8	121	Zimbabwe	2.396	↓ 1	149	Burkina Faso	2.969	↓ 1
94	Equatorial Guinea	2.132	↓ 14	122	Kenya	2.409	↓ 3	150	Central African Republic	3.009	↑ 1
95	Mauritania	2.136	↓ 6	123	Honduras	2.415	↑ 1				
96	Panama	2.14	↓ 9	124	Guinea	2.423	↑ 2	151	Iraq	3.045	↑ 2
97	Dominican Republic	2.157	↑ 5	125	Lesotho	2.461	↓ 3	152	North Korea	3.055	↓ 2
98	Cuba	2.16	↔	126	Uganda	2.477	↓ 3	153	Somalia	3.091	↑ 2
99	Peru	2.179	↑ 5	127	South Africa	2.507	↑ 2	154	Mali	3.095	↓ 2
=100	Georgia	2.195	↓ 6	128	Libya	2.528	↑ 4	155	Israel	3.115	↓ 11
=100	Sri Lanka	2.195	↓ 1	129	Burundi	2.567	↓ 2	156	Syria	3.173	↑ 2
102	Saudi Arabia	2.206	↑ 5	130	Ecuador	2.572	↓ 16	157	Russia	3.249	↑ 2
103	Eswatini	2.209	↑ 3	131	Brazil	2.589	↔	158	Democratic Republic of the Congo	3.264	↑ 4
104	Philippines	2.21	↑ 4	132	United States of America	2.622	↓ 2				
105	Egypt	2.212	↑ 4					159	Ukraine	3.28	↓ 3
106	Azerbaijan	2.248	↓ 3	133	Iran	2.682	↑ 10	160	Afghanistan	3.294	↔
=107	El Salvador	2.25	↑ 21	134	Lebanon	2.693	↓ 1	161	South Sudan	3.324	↑ 2
=107	Mozambique	2.25	↑ 3	135	Chad	2.704	↑ 5	162	Sudan	3.327	↓ 5
109	Côte d'Ivoire	2.255	↓ 9	136	Eritrea	2.748	↑ 5	163	Yemen	3.397	↓ 2
110	Republic of the Congo	2.261	↑ 6	137	Cameroon	2.773	↑ 1				
				138	Mexico	2.778	↓ 1				
111	Guyana	2.286	↑ 1	139	Türkiye	2.78	↔				

Source: The Global Peace Index 2024, showing the least secure countries in the world.

 In addition, electoral violence is a persistent driver of instability across the continent, with contested results triggering social unrest, as seen more recently in Mozambique. It is worth noting that many of the security challenges on the continent have their roots in ethnic and regional marginalisation, where some minority groups feel excluded from power structures and resource distribution in the state. This can be seen in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis and the conflict in Ethiopia's Amhara region. In all, the transnational nature of some of these threats, combined with weak state capacity in border regions, creates a vacuum that undermines peace and security, ushering in instability across many regions on the continent.

6.4 Human Rights and Social Justice Issues

Human rights challenges on the continent continue to call for concern. Across multiple regions, it has been noted that there has been a trend of restrictions on civil society and media freedoms. Journalists and opposition figures have been targets of threats, harassment and detention across many countries, thereby constraining the civic space. Gender-based violence has reached alarming rates, especially in conflict zones like DR Congo, as well as in Southern African countries like South Africa and Lesotho, which report some of the highest rates globally. The economic and social costs of this violence are staggering, with Lesotho losing an estimated 5.5 per cent of its GDP annually to gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, increased attention needs to be given to the internal displacement and refugee crisis on the continent, which is affecting millions. Four Central African countries rank in the world's top 10 of the most neglected displacement crises.
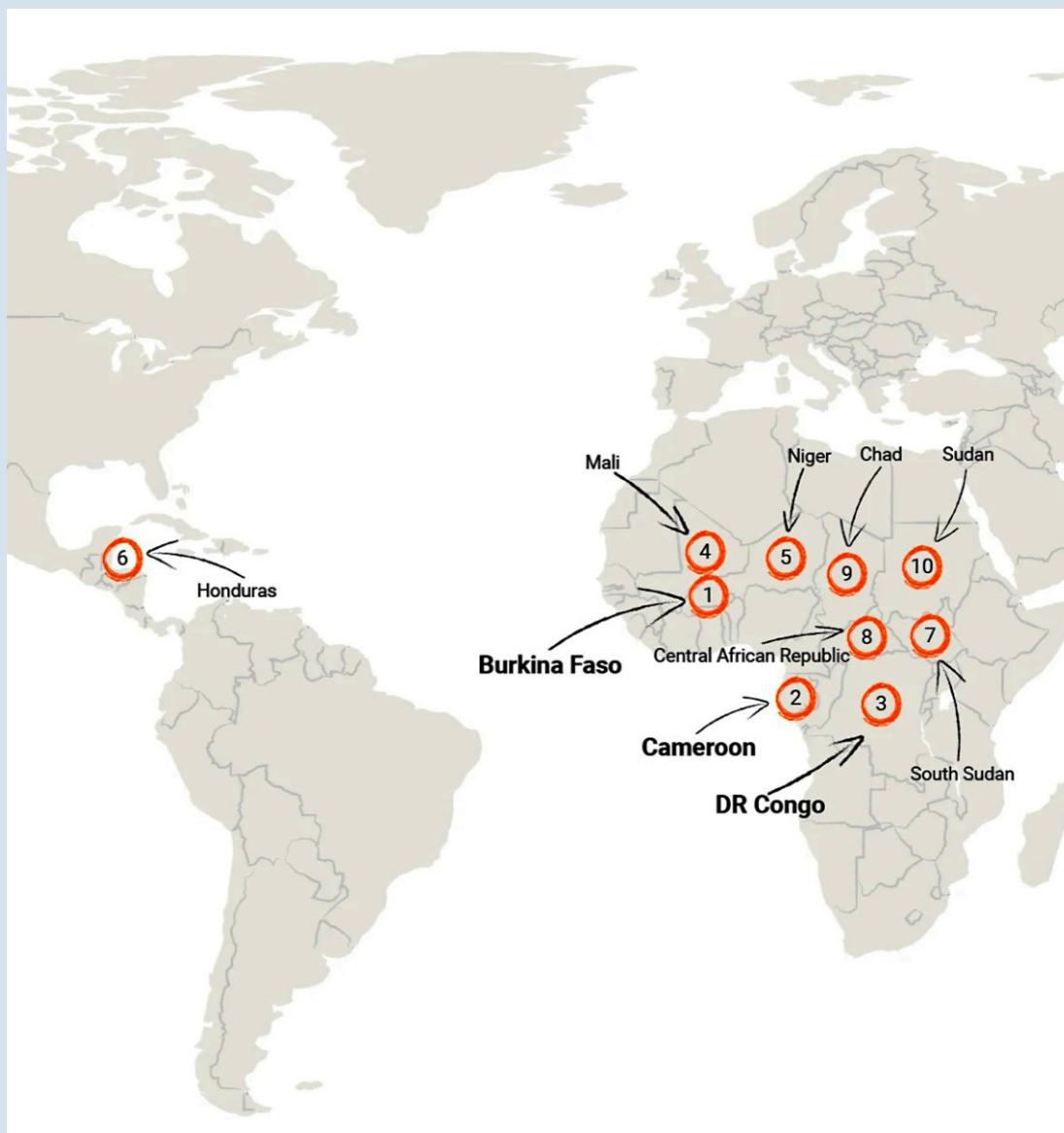
The world's most neglected displacement crises in 2024. Source: Norwegian Refugee Council.

The interconnected nature of these human rights and social issues demonstrates failures in justice systems and protection mechanisms to drive agendas which guarantee the rights of vulnerable populations, thereby exacerbating socio-economic inequality.

6.5 Regional Cooperation and External Actors

Regional blocs like the ECOWAS are facing mounting challenges in the wake of the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which threatens economic integration and collective security cooperation. This comes after these three countries had earlier withdrawn from the G5 Sahel, a critical institutional body that drives cooperation in security policies in West Africa, specifically aimed at addressing radicalism and violent extremism in the region. This apparent breakdown in security cooperation coincides with the increasing geopolitical competition as Western powers, Russia, China, and emerging players like Turkey and Iran vie for influence in exploiting rare minerals and strategic positions that might benefit their economic and military interests. The potential effect is a rise in the activities of armed groups and other criminal networks as regional security cooperation becomes more complex and less coordinated. Similarly, maritime insecurity might rise in the Gulf of Guinea as a less coordinated security approach can decrease effectiveness and efficiency of efforts.

6.6 Climate Change and its Impacts on Peace and Security

Climate change is an existential threat to human security in Africa. This phenomenon is manifesting through rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, desertification and extreme weather events.[206] Over the past decades, temperatures in the Sahel have risen 1,5 times faster than the global average.[207] In many instances, it has led to agricultural losses, land erosions, excessive floods and other hazards like diseases that continue to threaten lives and livelihoods across many communities in Africa. In 2022 alone, floods in Nigeria displaced 1.3 million people, destroyed over 80,000 homes, and submerged vast farmland, crippling food production and livelihoods.[208] According to recent data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), flooding affected 7.5 million people across West and Central Africa, displacing more than 1.1 million people in 2024.[209] Additionally 649,000 homes were damaged or destroyed with 1,277 schools affected, and 221 healthcare facilities.[210] The floods also adversely affected livelihoods as 960,000 hectares of cropland became unsuitable for farming and livestock production, while an estimated 128,000 cattle were swept away by the floods.[211]

The impact of climate change has also contributed to increased competition between pastoral and farming groups over access to productive lands and water bodies.[212] These have often escalated into violent conflicts that continue to claim lives, occasioning heavy destruction of property and internal displacement.[213] Furthermore, urban and semi-urban areas are rapidly getting overburdened as the existing infrastructure struggle under the additional pressure from climate induced migrants and internal displaced persons.

————————————————————

[206] Sissoko K, et al. "Agriculture, livelihoods and climate change in the West African Sahel," 11 Regional Environmental Change, 2010, p.119-125.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Leadership NG, "2022 Flood: 603 dead, 1.3m displaced across Nigeria – Federal Govt" (2022), https://leadership.ng/2022-flood-603-dead-1-3m-displaced-across-nigeria-federal-govt/ (16 May 2025).
[209] OCHA, "West and Central Africa: Flooding Situation 2024 Overview - as of 10 February 2025" 20 February 2025, https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/chad/west-and-central-africa-flooding-situation-2024-overview-10-february-2025 (accessed on 16 May 2025).
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Bobuin V & Diakaria T, "Transitional justice tools to address violent extremism and radicalism in Mali", GIJTR, 2024.
[213] Ibid.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report underscores the multifaceted nature of the challenges to peace, security, justice and strong institutions on the continent. From challenges to democratic consolidation, political transitions, violent extremism, civic space constraints, conflict, and gender-based violence, these issues call for comprehensive and collaborative responses from African states, regional mechanisms, and global partners. Many of these issues are driven by underlying socio-political tensions, and their effects might last for generations.

Therefore, it is essential that any approach to address these issues is informed by a transitional justice approach which is both forward and backing looking. That is, an approach which looks at the cause, the effect and the pathway for future transformation. For instance, in addressing the occurrence of a coup d'état in a country, focus does not solely need to be placed on the quick end of the transition period and a return to civilian rule. There needs to be consideration to understand the root causes of the coup d'états (might be popular protest, insecurity, or maybe political instability), the institutional framework which made that possible, the long-term effects of the coup d'état need to be addressed, especially if widespread human rights violations occurred during the transition period. These necessitate accountability mechanisms, societal healing and reconciliation, and eventually a pathway for democratic consolidation which is cognisant of the whole-of-society approach.

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy provides a framework for addressing these issues, even from a lens and context of socio-economic inequality. The policy provides member states with specific guidelines for developing context-specific frameworks and mechanisms to address the legacies of conflict and violence while promoting peace, reconciliation, and democracy.

The report identifies key priority areas that African states, regional mechanisms, the African Union, and other developmental stakeholders would benefit from addressing with renewed focus and collaborative engagement.

I. African States are the primary stakeholders in fostering governance reforms, strengthening democratic institutions and addressing security and human rights challenges. They are encouraged to;

- Strengthen constitutional frameworks which enhance meaningful checks and balances amongst all arms of government and prioritise electoral reforms that independent electoral management bodies promote, which promote inclusivity and fairness.

- Step up efforts to respect, protect, and fulfil media freedoms and freedom of association. In the appropriate contexts, they are encouraged to establish transitional justice mechanisms and intensify capacity-building programs that strengthen citizen participation in governance, transition, and peace processes.

- Intensify efforts to address socio-economic inequality, which are drivers for youth radicalisation into violent extremism and other forms of violence. Additionally, national action plans should be implemented to combat GBV.

- Reinforce and implement national laws/policies that protect biodiversity and climate resilience across African countries.

II. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union at their various levels are responsible for setting norms and coordinating responses towards achieving the broader goals of SDG 16 and the AU Agenda 2063. They are encouraged to;

- Strengthen regional security cooperation to counter transnational security threats. This is particularly relevant to the Sahel region. ECOWAS should prioritise dialogue with the AES to counter the insurgency from Boko Haram, JNIM and other radical jihadist groups. The African Union can develop a continental framework to coordinate the response and strategy.

- Increase resource mobilisation and advocacy to address the neglected displacement crisis.

- Encourage member states to promote constitutional reforms that strengthen democratic freedoms, and offer expert support in constitutional development and reforms post-transitions to guarantee non-reoccurrence and democratic consolidation.

- Promote electoral integrity and consistently apply Article 23 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance to address unconstitutional changes in government.

III. Developmental Partners, including civil society organisations, global agencies and international partners, are essential for funding and supporting peacebuilding, good governance and human rights initiatives. They are encouraged to;

- Provide funding and support for training for electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, judicial institutions, and other programs that enhance citizen participation in governance.

- Continuously advocate for human rights by documenting human rights violations and engaging the appropriate authorities for redress.

- Collaborate with states, Regional Economic Communities and the African Union to enhance security and governance initiatives.

- Climate change resilience inititaves should focus more on communities affected by climate induced hazards.

Disclaimer

SITUATION REPORT:

SDG 16

A REVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: **THROUGH THE LENS OF SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**