

# STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA: Trends, Facts, and Opportunities for Renewal

CSOs/Media Engagement in Abuja  
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West Africa Democracy  
Solidarity Network

# PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Democratic Context
- Effects of Democratic Recession in West Africa
- Opportunities for Democratic Renewal (Is there hope for Democracy?)
- Creatives for Democracy

# CONTEXT

## Democracy has had its own dimensions

- 1950s and Early 1960s, post colonial independence era - African Countries adopted liberal democracies
- Mid 1960s – 1980s – autocratic governance characterized by civilian or military rule in the form of one-party rule, one-person rule, and military rule
- 1990s – Early 2000s – “the third wave of democratization” characterized by the return of multi-party democracy, popular struggles for fundamental rights,
- Since mid – 2000s, the democratization wave has been in reverse gear –there is a general downward spiral in democracy and a concomitant upward trend towards autocracy.

# Manifestations of Democratic Recession in West Africa:

- Military Coup
- Constitutional Coup
- Declining Election integrity
- The contradictory role of digital and social media

- Despite AU's zero tolerance for UNCG, military coups remain pervasive
- Between 2002 – 2023, 26 successful military coups have occurred in Africa
- The majority of the military coups have occurred in West Africa (13), followed by Central Africa (5), Northern Africa (4), Eastern Africa(3), and Southern Africa (1)

## MILITARY COUP



# Military COUP

- Since 2019 (last 5 years) 10 successful military coups have occurred in seven countries in Africa:
- 6 of these military coups took place in West Africa
  - Mali (2020; 2021)
  - Guinea (2021)
  - Burkina Faso ( Feb, 2022; Sept 2022)
  - Niger (2023)
- In addition, there have been unsuccessful military coups in in Niger (2021); Guinea Bissau (2022; 2023); Mali 2022, The Gambia (2022), Burkina Faso (2023) and Sierra Leone (2023)



# Constitutional COUP (TERM ELONGATION)

- A more complex phenomenon of democratic recession has been the executive coups that take the form of **manipulation of constitutions by incumbent heads of states to lengthen their stay in power**
- Between 2002 and 2023, there have been 35 amendments to constitutions in 24 Africa countries (
- The Amendments were successful in 29 cases in 18 countries (that is 80% of the countries) and failed in only 6 cases in 5 countries
- In WA, constitutional manipulation of term limit have taken place in Cote d' Ivoire (2020), Guinea (2020), and Togo (2019 / 2024) causing violence due to protest and closing the space for competitive electoral politics



# DIMINISHING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

- Politicization of EMBs remains the single most dangerous threat to electoral integrity and a major trigger for democratic decline (Trust in EMBs is all time low according to the Afrobarometer)
- Often, elections in Africa tend to be violent resulting in loss of lives and destruction of property







# EFFECTS OF DEMOCRATIC RECESSION

## *Worsening HR Situation and Civic Space*

- In Burkina Faso, we are seeing the compulsory deployment of activist to the battle field to fight terrorist and insurgents for expressing any form of dissent
- In march this year, Human Rights Watch reported that soldiers killed at least 223 villagers including at least 56 children in two attacks on February 25 in Burkina Faso
- Suspension of several international media outlets, including the BBC, Deutsche Welle, The Guardian, Voice of America, Le Monde, and others, due to their coverage of a HRW report accusing the army of attacks on civilians in the battle against rebels.
- In Mali, we are witnessing the suspension of all political parties activities following demands from numerous political parties and civil society groups for presidential elections to restore constitutional order

# EFFECTS OF DEMOCRATIC RECESSION

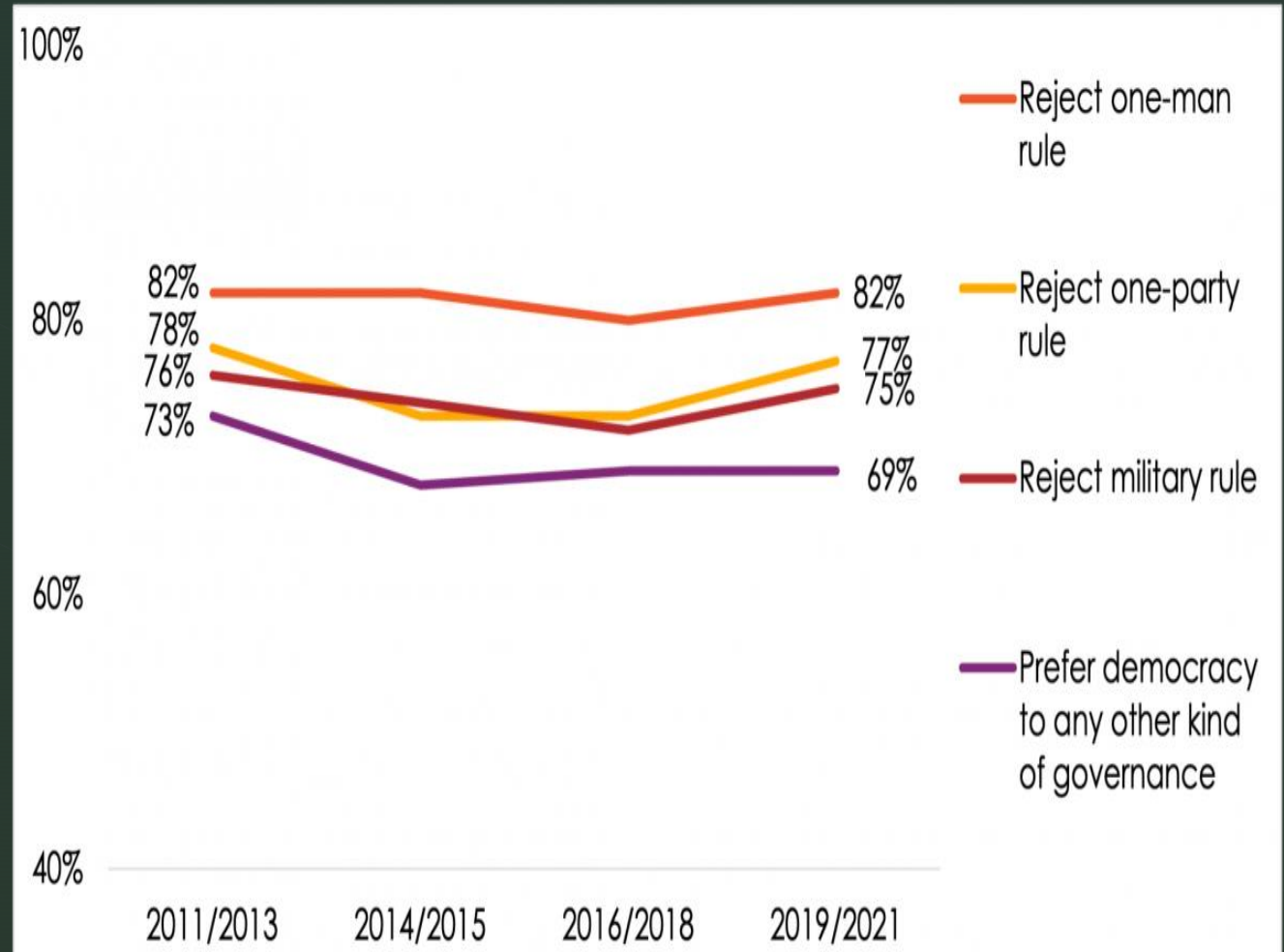
## Geo-Political Interest

- Russian – French Rivalry in West Africa and the Sahel undermining effective coordination of peace and security in the Sahel and coastal West Africa
- Dominance of the Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) in the Sahel with implications for security and human rights concerns.
- Proposed “Sahel Exit” threatens regional integration and weakening the legitimacy of ECOWAS (stalled transitions)



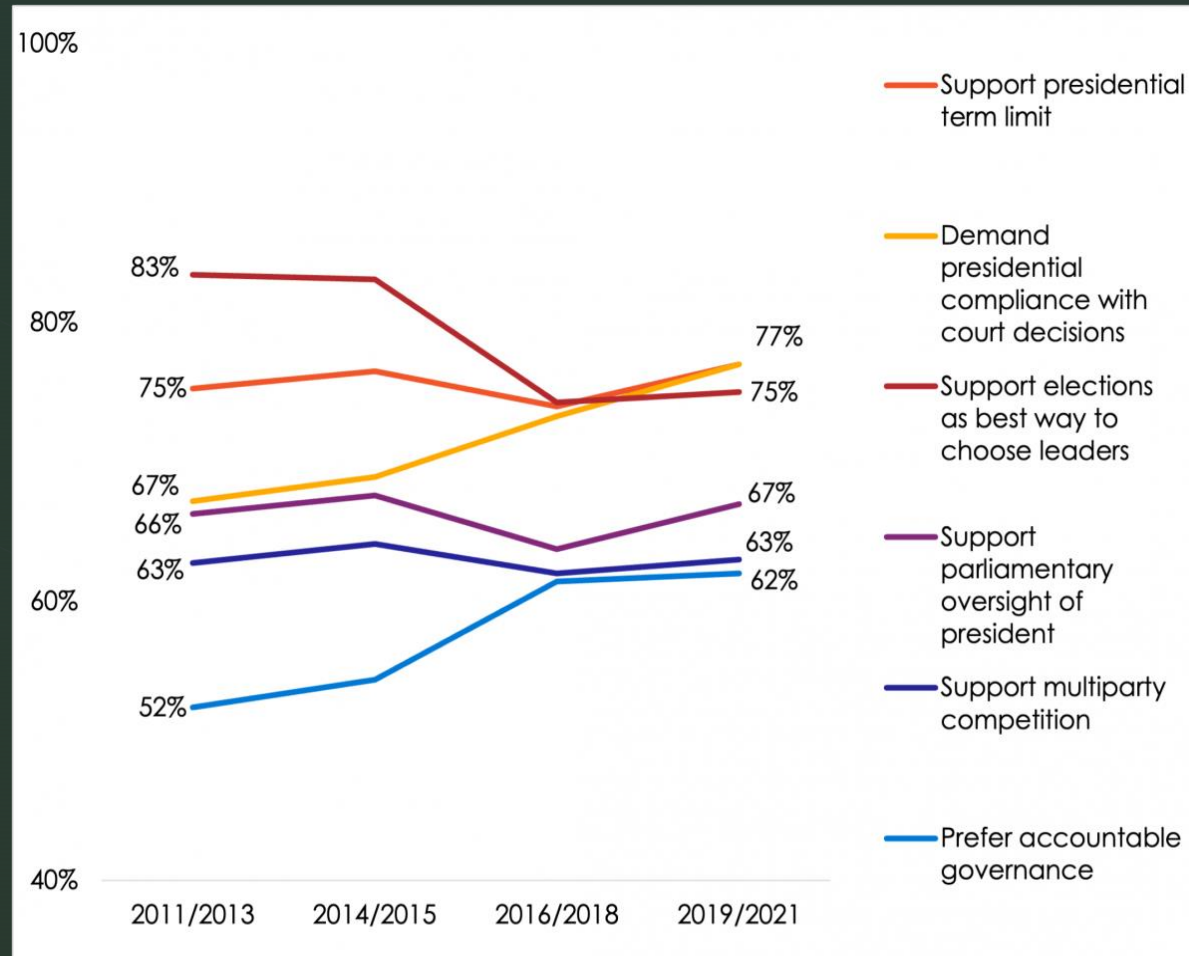
# IS THERE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA?

- Democracy continue to remain the preferred form of governance despite the challenges (Afrobarometer)



# IS THERE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA?

## ■ Support for Democratic Norms and Institutions



# IS THERE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA?

- Successful electoral outcomes in Liberia and Senegal. Both elections witnessed the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition in these countries



# IS THERE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA?

- ECOWAS intention to review its Protocols and Normative Frameworks to strengthen capacity and resilience for democracy, peace and security in West Africa (Term Limit)
- Interventions and efforts towards mediating the exit of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS



# IS THERE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA?

- Active Youthful Population willing to engage meaningfully in democratic processes including the use of the digital space for activism





# CSOs and Media FOR Democracy

- CSOs and Media have been part of the democratic struggle
- WADEMOS as a Solidarity Movement for Democracy
- Mobilizing and harnessing the resources, voice and power of CSOs, Young People, Diaspora, Social Movements, DEMOCREATIVES to promote and protect democratic norms and values - human rights and respect for the rule of law, gender rights, disability rights, peace and security and advocacy against corruption and bad governance



# CSOs and Media FOR DEMOCRACY

- In CONCLUSION, we are critical to fostering democratic culture, we connect individuals with their community, create conversations, raise awareness, and, most of all, speak against the ills of government.
- CSOs have the content, media has the platform.

