

Women's Exclusion from Political Participation and Coup D'état: A Case Study of Selected African Countries

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ABSTRACT

African leaders often cling to power for extended periods without recognising the need for a peaceful transfer of authority. Consequently, many African countries are governed by long-term leaders who remain in office for decades, often maintaining their positions through seemingly democratic processes. The spread of these distorted democracies has increased tensions and triggered coup d'états targeting sitting presidents. Countries such as Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Zimbabwe (selected countries) have experienced coups in the past decade. One significant consequence of these coups is the disruption of women's political participation. During coups and transitional governments, women are often excluded from political roles. This paper, through qualitative, document-based research, provides an overview of coups in the selected countries, examines their impact on women's political involvement, explores these countries' obligations regarding women's political rights, and offers recommendations to improve women's political participation across Africa. Its main contribution is advocating for the inclusion of women in post-coup governments. It suggests gendered sanctions, such as the appointment of women as generals and deputies, and calls for gender-balanced leadership in transitional governments.

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INTRODUCTION

Coup d'état are defined as 'an illegal and overt attempt by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive.'¹ Most coup d'états in Africa are military-led.² When a military force has failed to oust the ruling government, it is called a coup d'état attempt.³ The history of coups d'état in Africa dates back to 1946, with a total of 222 coups d'état and attempts recorded since then.⁴ To date, it has experienced the highest number of coups d'état among continents.⁵ Huntington observed a decline in these events in 1991, noting the diminishing culture of coups coinciding with the emergence of

¹ Jonathan Powell, Trace Lasley, and Rebecca Schiel, "Combating Coups d'état in Africa, 1950–2014," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 51, no. 4 (2016): 482–502, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-015-9210-6>.

² Holger Albrecht, Kevin Koehler, and Austin Schutz, "Coup Agency and Prospects for Democracy," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2021): 1052–63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab079>.

³ Jonathan M Powell and Clayton L Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2 (2011): 249–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397436>.

⁴ John J. Chin and Jessica Kirkpatrick, "African Coups in the COVID-19 Era: A Current History," *Frontiers in Political Science* 5:1077945 (2023) :1-20, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.1077945>.

⁵ Tinuade A. Ojo and Alison Zuva, "The Untold Struggles of Women during a Coup d'état", <https://ipac.joburg/the-untold-struggles-of-women-during-a-coup-detat/>, September 16, 2023.

the third wave of democratisation.⁶ This lull, however, was short-lived, as evidenced by the uprisings in Tunisia a decade later and the subsequent, frequent resurgence of coups d'état in other parts of Africa.⁷ As of 2022, 46 of the region's 54 countries have been subject to one or more coups d'état and coup d'état attempts.⁸

This study represents a notable departure from traditional research on the impact of coup d'état on Africa's democracy. Instead, it delves into the repercussions of coup d'état on gendered politics, specifically the undermining of women's political rights in Africa. Focusing on Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Zimbabwe (selected countries), it offers insights into regional variations in coups d'état across Africa during 2015-2024. The period chosen highlights recent trends in coups d'état across three sub-regions of Africa. This helps to develop a broader perspective on the effects of coups d'état on African women's political inclusion. In the subsequent section, a synopsis of coups d'état in selected countries is provided, followed by a discussion on how coups d'état affect women's political participation, and the level of legal responsibility that the selected countries bear toward women's political rights is then elucidated. Measures taken by the African Union against the coup d'état are also highlighted, and it is concluded that they do not address the plight of women's political inclusion, necessitating recommendations to enhance women's political participation in the context of the unconstitutional change of government.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative document-based research methodology. A document-based methodology involves analysing and reviewing both printed and electronic documents.⁹ The primary documents that were consulted include the African Union instruments on unconstitutional governments. These African Union Instruments were analysed to see the extent to which they address women's political inclusion. In this regard, invaluable insights were also drawn from sub-regional frameworks and the Constitutions of the selected countries. Data on the selected countries' ratification of regional instruments and the number of women in parliament and ministerial positions were obtained through internet searches, including Google, ProQuest, and the University of South Africa online library. Once these documents were collated and purposively sampled, a systematic analysis approach was used to draw meanings and conclusions from the gathered data. Some meanings and findings were corroborated by the scholarly views gathered from journal articles, textbooks, book chapters, and online articles.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Synopsis of Coup d'état in Africa 2015-2024

Between 2015 and 2024, Africa experienced 33 coup d'état and coup d'état attempts. This section provides brief highlights of the successful coup d'état.

Gabon

Gabon, situated in Central Africa, experienced a coup d'état on 30 August 2023, when the military revolted against President Ali Bongo Ondimba following his disputed victory in the 23 August 2023 elections. This occurred an hour after the announcement of the election results. Following the ousting of the President, a transitional government was established under the leadership of General Bruce Oligui Nguema to lead the country until democratic elections could be organised within a two-year timeframe. After the military takeover in Gabon, the African Union suspended Gabon's participation in its activities. At the same time, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) denounced the coup d'état and imposed sanctions.¹⁰ Additionally, Gabon was barred from participating in Commonwealth intergovernmental

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *The Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (1991): 12–34.

⁷ Pal Ahluwalia, "African Democracy Withering?" *African Identities* 22, no. 2 (2024): 239–40.

⁸ Chin and Kirkpatrick, "African Coups in the COVID-19 Era: A Current History."

⁹ Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40. DOI: 10.3316/QRJ0902027.

¹⁰ Obangom Gerauds W., "African Union Suspends Gabon's Membership after Military Coup d'état," *Aljazeera Online*, August 31, 2023. Accessed on May 28, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/gabon-awaits-next-move-junta-after-coup-d-etats-ousts-president-bongo-2023-08-31/>.

meetings and events, including ministerial and heads-of-government meetings, pending the restoration of democracy.¹¹

Niger

In Niger, the military overthrew the government of President Mohammed Bazoum on 26 July 2023, with General Abdourahamane Tiani assuming the presidency.¹² In September 2023, the African Union responded by suspending Niger from all its activities. As a Western African country, ECOWAS intervened and facilitated the negotiation with the junta to restore constitutional order. Several calls by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for the military leaders of the coup d'état to step down have been defied.¹³ However, broad sanctions were imposed on Niger due to the junta's refusal to step down.¹⁴ Niger's military government received support from the neighbouring military governments of Mali and Burkina Faso.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has experienced the most uprisings from 2015 to 2024. During this period, Burkina Faso experienced three coup d'état attempts in 2015, 2016, and 2023, and two successful coups d'état in 2020 and 2022. In the most recent coup d'état, Captain Ibrahim Traore assumed the presidency in what was termed 'the transitional period'. Initially, the transitional period was expected to end with elections in 2024, but the election year was extended to 2029.¹⁵ ECOWAS imposed travel, commercial, and economic sanctions after the coup d'état, but these were lifted in February 2024.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the country has been under African Union sanctions since 2022, and these sanctions will remain in place until the country's constitutional order is restored.¹⁷

Guinea

On 1 October 2021, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya assumed the presidency after ousting President Alpha Condé in a military coup d'état of 5 September 2021. The military Government has failed to demonstrate commitment to its promise of a transition to a civilian government by the end of 2024.¹⁸ This promise is one of the 10-point transition roadmap that the junta negotiated with ECOWAS.¹⁹ The African Union also imposed sanctions on Guinea following this, and it continues to monitor the country's political situation.²⁰

Mali

The country experienced two military coups d'état in 2020 and 2021. The 2021 coup d'état led to the inauguration of Global Assim Goita as a transitional president, with the expectation that elections would

¹¹ The Commonwealth, "Gabon Partially Suspended from the Commonwealth Pending Restoration of Democracy," *Press Release*, 2024. Accessed on May 29, 2024. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/gabon-partially-suspended-commonwealth-pending-restoration-democracy#:~:text=In%20accordance%20with%20the%20steps,pending%20the%20restoration%20of%20democracy>

¹² Africanews, "The 7 Military Coup d'états over the Last Three Years," August 30, 2023. Accessed on May 29, 2024. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/08/30/africa-the-7-military-coups-over-the-last-three-years/>.

¹³ Aljazeera, "Niger Military Names 21-Person Cabinet Ahead of Key West African Summit ECOWAS Leaders Will Hold a Summit to Agree on a Plan of Action for Niger, Where Coup d'état Leaders Refuse to Stand down," Aljazeera News, August 10, 2023. Accessed on May 29, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/10/niger-military-names-21-person-cabinet-ahead-of-west-african-summit>.

¹⁴ Peyton Nellie and Onuah Felix, "African Union Suspends Niger over Coup d'états, Prepares Sanctions," Reuters, August 22, 2023. Accessed on May 28, 2023. [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/african-union-suspends-niger-all-its-activities-following-coupd-etats-2023-08-22/#:~:text=JOHANNESBURG%2C%20Aug%2022%20\(Reuters\),that%20might%20legitimise%20the%20junta..](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/african-union-suspends-niger-all-its-activities-following-coupd-etats-2023-08-22/#:~:text=JOHANNESBURG%2C%20Aug%2022%20(Reuters),that%20might%20legitimise%20the%20junta..)

¹⁵ Nunoo Favour, "Burkina Faso Extends Military Rule by Five Years", BBC News, Accra," May 26, 2024. Accessed December 9, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5117d8kz16o>.

¹⁶ Shuaibu Ibrahim G., "ECOWAS Lifts Sanctions on Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali," February 24, 2024. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/ecowas-lifts-sanctions-on-niger-burkina-faso-mali/3146935#:~:text=The%20ECOWAS%20Commission%20lifted%20travel,a%20senior%20official%20announced%20Saturday>

¹⁷ Ndiaga Thiam and Mcallister Edward, "African Union Suspends Burkina Faso after Military Coup," February 1, 2022. Accessed July 2, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/african-union-suspends-burkina-faso-after-military-coup-2022-01-31/>.

¹⁸ Africanews, "The 7 Military Coup d'états over the Last Three Years."

¹⁹ Africa centre for strategic studies, "Guinea: December (Postponed)," January 17, 2024. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2024-elections/guinea/>.

²⁰ African Union, "Communique of the 1030th Meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the Situation in the Republic of Guinea," September 10, 2021 Accessed December 06, 2025. <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1030th-meeting-held-on-10-september-2021-on-the-situation-in-the-republic-of-guinea..>

be held in February 2024. However, Assim Goita has postponed the elections indefinitely, citing ‘technical reasons’.²¹ Meanwhile, ECOWAS has already lifted sanctions against the country. The African Union suspended Mali’s membership and participation in all its activities immediately after the second coup. The African Union’s suspension remains in place until Mali establishes a constitutional government.²²

Zimbabwe

In November 2017, President Robert Mugabe was compelled to resign amid Operation Restore Legacy, a military-orchestrated operation.²³ This event, which came to be known as a ‘military-assisted transition’, constituted a non-violent, bloodless coup d’état, enjoying public support in ousting the long-serving president.²⁴ Tendi points out that the Zimbabwean coup d’état resembled a military coup because, like other African military coups, it was motivated by the military’s disgruntlement with the president.²⁵ President Emmerson Mnangagwa was subsequently inaugurated as the country's president on 24 November 2017, to complete President Mugabe’s term until the 2018 election. President Mnangagwa appointed former army general Constantino Chiwenga as the first vice president. The African Union was passive in the face of the Zimbabwean coup d’état, amounting to tacit acceptance.²⁶

EFFECTS OF COUP D’ÉTAT ON WOMEN’S POLITICAL RIGHTS

The absence of women in the transitional governments

The historical marginalisation of women in African politics has unfortunately resurfaced in the context of a coup d’état.²⁷ The post-coup governments have failed to prioritise women’s political participation and representation. Coup d’état in the selected countries were “male-dominated occurrences with men serving as coup plotters, military leaders and political figures”, and subsequently reaping the benefits.²⁸ The leaders of these transitional governments were predominantly former army generals, except in Zimbabwe, where the retired army general became second in command to a civilian leader. In transitional governments, male dominance remains prevalent, particularly within the cabinet. Women’s access to ministerial positions in Africa, however, remains restricted, more so in the selected countries. Below is an illustration of women's representation in parliament and ministerial positions in selected countries in 2022. The selected countries have the highest ministerial women representation at 25.9% and the lowest at 16.1%,²⁹ while the highest percentage of women parliamentarians is 30.72%, and the lowest is 14.69%.³⁰

²¹ Africanews, “The 7 military coup d’états over the last three years”.

²² Aljazeera, “Mali Suspended from African Union, Threatened with Sanctions,” June 2, 2021. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/2/mali-suspended-from-african-union-after-second-coup-in-9-months>

²³ Blessing-Miles Tendi, “The Motivations and Dynamics of Zimbabwe’s 2017 Military Coup,” *African Affairs* 119, no. 474 (2020): 39–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adz024>.

²⁴ Pilling David, “A Year in a Word: Military-Assisted Transition,” *Financial Times*, (December 20, 2017). Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/11fb6f04-e41b-11e7-8b99-0191e45377ec>. See also International Crisis Group, “Zimbabwe’s ‘military-assisted transition’ and prospects for recovery”. Accessed May 28, 2024. Zimbabwe’s “Military-assisted Transition” and Prospects for Recovery | Crisis Group.

²⁵ Tendi, “The motivations and Dynamics of Zimbabwe’s 2017 military coup d’état”.

²⁶ Philip Roesler, “How the African Union Got It Wrong on Zimbabwe by Tacitly Supporting a de Facto Coup d’état in Zimbabwe, the AU Has Damaged the Region’s Efforts to End Politics by Force,” *Aljazeera*, December 5, 2017. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/12/5/how-the-african-union-got-it-wrong-on-zimbabwe>.

²⁷ Theresa Schroeder and Jonathan Powell, “Right ‘Man’ for the Job? The Influence of Gender on Civil–Military Friction,” *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 3 (2018): 460–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X17700390>.

²⁸ Ojo Tinuade A. and Zuva Alison, “The Untold Struggles of Women during a Coup d’état.”

²⁹ World Bank Group, “Proportion of Women in Ministerial Level Positions (%)”, *Gender Data Portal*, 2022. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sg-gen-mmst-zs?year=2022>

³⁰ Galal Saifaddin, “Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments in Africa as of 2022, by Country,” *Statista*, November 28, 2025. Accessed December 06, 2025 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248493/percentage-of-women-in-national-parliaments-in-african-countries/>.

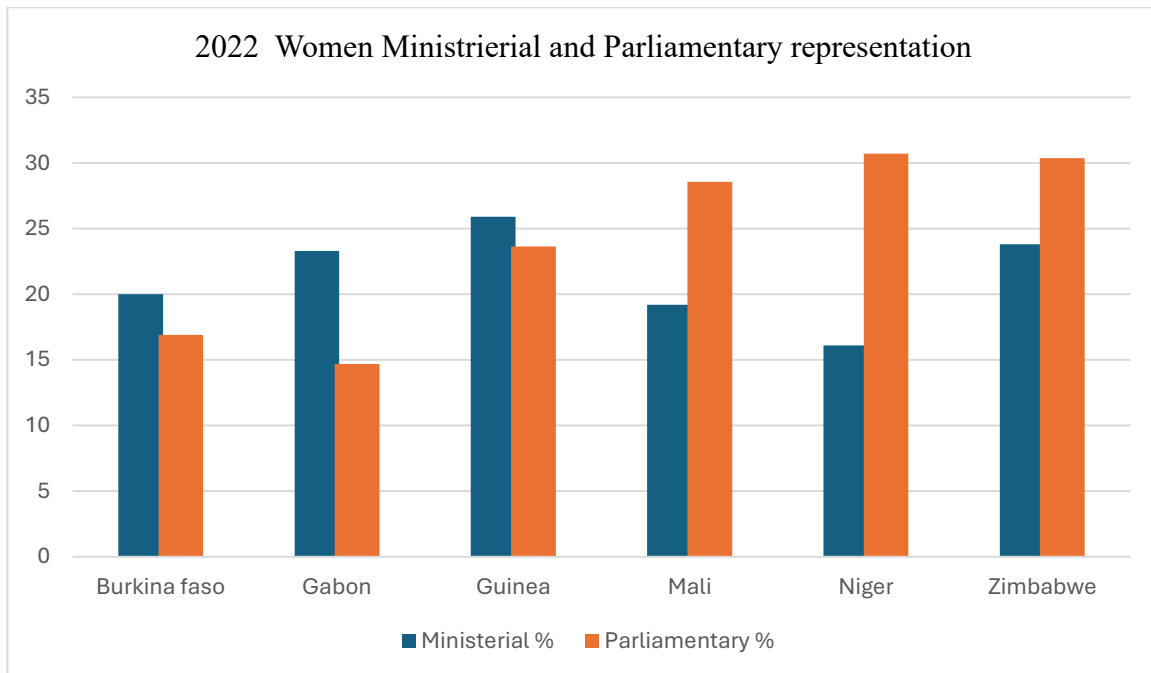


Chart 1: 2022 Women Ministerial and Parliamentary Representation

Since heads of state appoint ministers, their selection serves as a litmus test of political resolve.³¹ However, the low percentage of women in ministerial positions not only reflects the Head of State's commitment, or lack thereof, to gender equality but also raises concerns about the African Union's capacity to address women's exclusion from African politics. It also underscores the military government's reluctance to facilitate women's political participation and representation, a fundamental element of democracy in Africa. Coup d'état thus led to the marginalisation of women in political processes and the suppression of their voices.³² Regrettably, women's voices are frequently muted amidst the tumultuous landscape of conflict and political upheaval. Given the substantial centralisation of political power in the executive in African countries, the appointment of women to these positions would allow them to participate meaningfully in national politics.³³ According to Schroeder and Powell, 'states with more women in the legislature have a lower risk of a coup d'état.'³⁴

The imperative of advancing women's participation in decision-making before, during, and after coup d'état cannot be overstated. Women in leadership positions have proven indispensable in fostering peace and stability within nations.³⁵ Female representation influences a state's legitimacy because it symbolises true inclusivity and democracy. A state cannot honestly claim legitimacy if men and women lack equitable political opportunities to serve the nation.³⁶ The selected countries have fewer than 40% of women in Parliament and ministerial positions, indicating a pressing need for substantial advancement in this domain.

Coup d'état as a direct fight against women's leadership

Some coups d'état were direct attacks on women's political rights. Notably, the motivations underlying the Zimbabwean coup d'état revealed evident attempts to undermine women's political rights.³⁷ President Emmerson Mnangagwa's ascension to power commenced with the removal of the first female vice president in Zimbabwe, Dr Joyce Mujuru, in 2014. In 2017, amid a decline in his popularity and mounting political support for Mrs Grace Mugabe, the then First Lady, and a prominent figure in the ruling party's

³¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, "Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Elections on Commonwealth Africa: Achieving 50:50 by 2030," 2018. Accessed December 11, 2025. <https://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/book/128>.

³² Ojo and Zuva, "The untold struggles of women during a coup d'état."

³³ Leonardo R. Arriola and Martha C. Johnson, "Ethnic Politics and Women's Empowerment in Africa: Ministerial Appointments to Executive Cabinets," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 2 (2014): 495–510, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12075>.

³⁴ Schroeder and Powell, "Right Man for the job? The influence of gender on civil-military friction", 461.

³⁵ Ojo and Zuva, "The untold struggles of women during a coup d'état."

³⁶ Schroeder and Powell, "Right Man for the job? The influence of gender on civil-military friction", 462.

³⁷ Tendi, "The motivations and Dynamics of Zimbabwe's 2017 military coup d'états" 39.

factional disputes, who was perceived as a potential contender for the presidency, the Zimbabwean coup d'état unfolded.³⁸ Therefore, the Zimbabwean coup d'état was allegedly precipitated by the fight against Mrs Grace Mugabe, indicative of the deliberate impediments to women's political agency in Africa.³⁹

Democracy Compromise

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Inter-Parliamentary Union assert that the underrepresentation of women relative to their share of the population violates the principles of democracy.⁴⁰ The recent surge in coups d'état in Africa has led to what Diamond describes as a democratic recession.⁴¹ The apparent consequence of these coups d'état on democracy is the removal of democratically elected presidents, as seen in all the selected countries.⁴² The core institutions of African states often lack the resilience to withstand authoritarian manipulation and resist military intervention.⁴³ In some cases, a coup d'état not only ousts the president but also dismantles democratic institutions. For example, in August 2020, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali was toppled, and the National Assembly and constitutional court were dissolved and replaced by the military junta.⁴⁴ Democratic practices and democratic institutions are vital to women's participation in politics. Overall, democracy is undermined when these institutions cease to exist. The former United States President, Mr Joe Biden, expressed concern about African coup d'état and their impact on democracy during the 2023 general debate of the United Nations General Assembly.⁴⁵

Conversely, some argue that certain coups d'état are an attempt to uphold democratic principles and remove failing governments to achieve socio-economic benefits, particularly when regional organisations fail to address governance challenges.⁴⁶ However, in some instances, promissory coup d'état plotters promise to defend democracy, rarely lead to actual democratic outcomes and are overshadowed by their violent nature and adverse effects on citizens.⁴⁷

Experiences from numerous African countries demonstrate that radical transitions do not guarantee good governance. For example, economic and political challenges persist in Zimbabwe, where an autocratic government was toppled with public support. The agendas of military-planned coup d'état are usually far from citizens' aspirations. Armies' involvement in coup d'état is typically for personal gain, particularly in the form of material benefits that coup d'état architects stand to gain when in positions of influence in government.⁴⁸

Election Quality

Coup d'état degrades the quality of elections, limiting accountability in political governance.⁴⁹ Elections are generally regarded as a hallmark of democracy.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the quality of elections ensures an

³⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Succession Controversy of Robert Mugabe," November 13, 2025. Accessed September 16, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Mugabe/Succession-controversy#ref1252066>.

³⁹ Blair Rutherford, "(Dis-)Graceful Leadership: On Familial Logics and Politics in Zimbabwe," *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, no. 234 (2019): 625–54, <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesaficaines.26099>.

⁴⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, "*Handbook for gender-inclusive elections on Commonwealth Africa: Achieving.*"

⁴¹ Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0009>.

⁴² Ahluwalia, "African Democracy Withering? African Identities."

⁴³ Ahluwalia, "African Democracy Withering? African Identities."

⁴⁴ Emmanueal Gyimah-Boadi, Carolyn Logan, and Josephine Sanny, "Africans' Durable Demand for Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 3 (2021): 136–51, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0039>.

⁴⁵ Oketola Dayo, "Biden Condemns African Military Coups, Backs ECOWAS Intervention," *Punch Newspaper*, July 8, 2023. Accessed December 06, 2025. https://Punchng.Com/Biden-Condemns-African-Military-Coups-Backs-Ecowas-Intervention/#google_vignette.

⁴⁶ Ndubuisi Ani C., "Coup d'état Resurgence in Africa: The Pitfalls of a Regional Response," *Accord* (2021). Accessed July 7, 2025. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/coup-resurgence-in-africa-the-pitfalls-of-a-regional-response/>.

⁴⁷ Albrecht, Koehler, and Schutz, "Coup Agency and Prospects for Democracy."

⁴⁸ Barka Habiba B. and Ncube Mthuli, "*Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups d'états a Never-Ending Phenomenon?*", African Development Bank, (2012). Accessed May 28, 2024. https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/economic_brief_political_fragility_in_africa_are_military_coups_detat_a_never_ending_phenomenon.pdf.

⁴⁹ George C. Mbarra and Suzanne Graham, "Dissecting the Impact of Recent Coup d'états in Africa on Democracy and Good Governance," *African Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (2023): 1–17.

⁵⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, "*Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Elections on Commonwealth Africa: Achieving 50:50 by 2023*" 17.

acceptable standard of democracy. Coup d'état jeopardise the quality of elections because it instils fear in women concerning their participation in elections and undermines the electoral process.

Violence Against Women

The issue of violence against women in politics poses a significant obstacle to the involvement and retention of women in political spheres.⁵¹ The impact of coup d'état on African women has raised important concerns about the prevalence of violence against women. The media has identified numerous violations of women's rights that occur during coup d'état, including gender-based violence, sexual assault, unwanted pregnancies, and domestic abuse.⁵² Given the extreme violence associated with coups d'état, the political landscape becomes highly volatile for women's participation. Consequently, fewer women are willing to seek public office due to fears of abuse and violence, including sexual harassment from male counterparts within their political parties or from other sectors such as opposition parties and communities.⁵³ Women's vulnerability is exacerbated by their limited access to resources and employment, which has been an ongoing challenge.⁵⁴

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS

Paragraph 181 of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action emphasise the importance of women's equal involvement in decision-making, not only as a democratic principle but also to ensure gender equity and equality in policymaking.⁵⁵ This section examines the extent to which the selected countries are legally obligated to accord women their political rights. The discussion on legal frameworks begins with international legal frameworks, followed by regional frameworks, and then the sub-regional and domestic Constitutions of the selected countries.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The obligation of selected countries to uphold women's political rights originates from the UDHR.⁵⁶ Although the UDHR is not a convention, it constitutes part of binding international customary law and binds selected countries. Article 21 (1) of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives." Subsection (3) of the same article recognises the importance of universal and equal suffrage in contemporary governance. The UDHR affirms that everyone has political rights, including women, and that women can therefore participate in African politics on an equal footing with men.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The ICCPR echoes the UDHR's sentiments. Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees all citizens the right to vote and to stand for election. The ICCPR further links political rights to self-determination in Article 1 (1).⁵⁷ Paragraph 2 of General Comment No. 25 further elucidates the linkage between Articles 1 and 25 by stating that while Article 1 gives people the right to choose their political status freely, Article 25 allows them to participate in the process of selecting it.⁵⁸ Article 25, therefore, gives citizens the right to participate in public affairs by either electing their representatives or competing for public office. Paragraph 7 of General Comment No. 25 emphasises that Article 25 guarantees the right of all citizens, both women and men, to take part in public affairs as voters or as candidates for elections.

⁵¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, "Handbook for gender-inclusive elections on Commonwealth Africa: Achieving 50:50 by 2023." 17.

⁵² Ojo and Zuva, "The untold struggles of women during a coup d'état."

⁵³ Commonwealth Secretariat "Handbook for gender-inclusive elections on Commonwealth Africa: Achieving 50:50 by 2023" 17.

⁵⁴ Ojo and Zuva, "The untold struggles of women during a coup d'état."

⁵⁵ United Nations Women, "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action." Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>, 1995.

⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english..>, 1948.

⁵⁷ United Nations General Assembly, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," 1966. Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

⁵⁸ United Nations Committee on the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, "General Comment No. 25: The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service (Art 25)" 1996. Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1996/en/28176>.

International Conventions on the Rights of Women

Two international conventions specifically address women's political rights. Firstly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in Article 7, provides that:

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure that women, on equal terms with men, have the right (a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.⁵⁹

Secondly, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW) provides that women are entitled to vote and be elected to public positions without discrimination.⁶⁰ Articles I and II provide the following:

Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.

Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.⁶¹

From these articles, there is a clear mandate for selected countries to ensure that women participate in elections by choosing their representatives, contesting incumbents for political positions, and representing others in political bodies.

African Charter on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol)

The Maputo Protocol is considered the most defining, ground-breaking, and transformative protocol on African women's rights.⁶² It comprehensively covers women's political rights, reflecting its broad scope and impact.⁶³ In Article 9, the Protocol provides that:

States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that:

- a) Women participate without any discrimination in all elections;
- b) Women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes.
- c) Women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes.

2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.⁶⁴

Article 5 of the Protocol calls for affirmative action as a key strategy to increase women's political participation. In the case of *Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights v Nigeria*, the African Commission outlines that the extent of African countries' responsibilities towards any right in the Charter is fourfold: respect, protect, promote, and fulfil.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ United Nations, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)," *General Assembly Resolution 34/180*, December 18, 1979. Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>.

⁶⁰ United Nations General Assembly, "Convention on the Political Rights of Women" 1951. Accessed May 24, 2024. https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20am/ch_xvi_1p.pdf.

⁶¹ United Nations General Assembly, "Convention on the Political Rights of Women."

⁶² Chimbi Joyce, "Taking Stock of Two Decades of Trailblazing Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa", Disco Digital Media, Nairobi: Inter Press Service, August 9, 2023. Accessed May 28, 2024. <https://www.globalissues.org/news/2023/08/09/34456>.

⁶³ Chimbi, "Taking Stock of two decades of Trailblazing Protocol on women's Rights in Africa,"

⁶⁴ African Union, "Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa", 2003. Accessed May 28 2024. <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>.

⁶⁵ *Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights v Nigeria*, 15th Annual Activity Report [in Decisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on Communications 2002–2007, IHRDA, Banjul, (2008). Accessed July 26, 2025. <https://achpr.au.int/en/decisions-communications/social-and-economic-rights-action-center-serac-and-center-economic-15596>.

African countries established the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).

To strengthen democracy in the region, African countries established ACDEG in 2007. The preamble of the ACDEG emphasises the importance of achieving and upholding democracy and good governance in Africa.⁶⁶ Women's political participation is integral to democracy and good governance; hence, Article 29 mandates enhancing women's full and active involvement in decision-making and all structures of governance.⁶⁷

Article 23(5) of the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (AU Charter on Democracy) forbids "[a]ny amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government." Article 14 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance provides that.

State Parties shall strengthen and institutionalise constitutional civilian control over the armed and security forces to ensure the consolidation of democracy and constitutional order. State Parties shall take legislative and regulatory measures to ensure that those who attempt to remove an elected government through unconstitutional means are dealt with in accordance with the law. State Parties shall cooperate to ensure that those who tried to remove an elected government through unconstitutional means are dealt with in accordance with the law.⁶⁸

Article 23 of the AU Charter on Democracy stipulates that any illegal methods used to gain or maintain political power by unseating a democratically elected government constitute an unconstitutional change of government and shall attract appropriate sanctions by the Union. This corroborates the Declaration of Unconstitutional Change of Government, which was updated in Accra in 2022 (The Declaration).⁶⁹ In paragraph 21, the Declaration states that it aims to create a conducive environment for women's political participation during coups d'état. The African Union, in paragraph 1 of the Declaration, commits to supporting democratically elected governments through sanctions. This provision illustrates that the AU can utilise sanctions in addressing unconstitutional changes of government in the region. The AU's use of sanctions and refusal to recognise post-coup governments may help deter coups in Africa.⁷⁰

However, the AU's reliance on sanctions has been critiqued for prioritising regime protection over human security. This is because the AU's sanctions do not consistently achieve the desired political results. For instance, in August 2020 and September 2021, embargoes were imposed on Mali and Guinea, respectively, following coups d'état in those countries. The embargoes had unintended consequences because these measures garnered sympathy and support for the military among the populace.⁷¹ The use of sanctions as a stand-alone strategy is therefore ineffective in reinstating constitutional order in countries that have experienced coups d'état. Sanctions do not address the root causes and drivers of coup d'état.⁷² For this reason, the AU has faced criticism for its perceived failure to take decisive action in addressing uprisings across the African continent.⁷³ In some cases, the AU would not take preventive measures and would only react after the uprisings had already happened.⁷⁴ In Sudan, for instance, the AU condemned the army for overthrowing President Omar Al-Bashir. Yet, it refrained from denouncing President Omar Al-Bashir for leading the country to a state of unrest.⁷⁵ Furthermore, these sanctions lack gender specificity in their framework or implementation, failing to advocate for women's inclusion.

⁶⁶ African Union, "African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance," 2007. Accessed July 26, 2025 <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-democracy-elections-and-governance>.

⁶⁷ African Union, "African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance," 2007 Article 29 provides that: 'State Parties shall recognise the crucial role of women in the development and strengthening of democracy. State Parties shall create the necessary conditions for full and active participation of women in the decision-making processes and structures at all levels as a fundamental element in the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture. State Parties shall take all possible measures to encourage the full and active participation of women in the electoral process and ensure gender parity in representation at all levels, including legislatures.'

⁶⁸ African Union, "African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance" 2007.

⁶⁹ African Union, "Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa Update," 2022. Accessed July 10, 2025. <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/declaration-on-unconstitutional-changes-of-government-in-africa..>

⁷⁰ Chin and Kirkpatrick, "African Coups in the COVID-19 Era: A Current History." 1.

⁷¹ Mbara and Graham, "Dissecting the Impact of Recent Coup d'états in Africa on Democracy and Good Governance." 91.

⁷² Mbara and Graham, "Dissecting the Impact of Recent Coup d'états in Africa on Democracy and Good Governance." 91

⁷³ Ani C. Ndubuisi, "Coup d'état Resurgence in Africa: The Pitfalls of a Regional Response." 259.

⁷⁴ Ndubuisi, "Coup d'état Resurgence in Africa: The Pitfalls of a Regional Response." 259.

⁷⁵ Ndubuisi, "Coup d'état Resurgence in Africa: The Pitfalls of a Regional Response." 259.

Countries under study have either acceded to or ratified the CEDAW and the ICCPR. Their approach to African instruments is generally positive, with only Niger and Gabon not having ratified the ACHPRW and ACDEG, respectively. This signifies that the selected countries' legal obligation, under international and regional instruments, to ensure women's political rights is in effect. The following table illustrates the extent of ratification of global and regional instruments by the selected countries.

Country	CEDAW ⁷⁶	ICCPR ⁷⁷	WCPR ⁷⁸	ACHPRW ⁷⁹	ACDEG ⁸⁰
Burkina Faso	▪	▪	▪	✓	✓
Gabon	✓	▪	✓	✓	X
Guinea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mali	✓	▪	▪	✓	✓
Niger	▪	▪	✓	X	✓
Zimbabwe	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key

✓	Ratified
▪	Acceded
X	None

Sub-regional Legal Frameworks

The selected countries are located in various regions of Africa. Four of the selected countries, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Guinea, are in West Africa; Gabon, in Central Africa, and Zimbabwe, in Southern Africa. This section aims to highlight the obligations of the selected countries towards women's rights within their respective sub-regional frameworks.

West Africa

The West African community's principal regulatory body is ECOWAS, which was established in May 1975. While ECOWAS's initial goal was to improve the economic conditions of the countries in the Eastern community of Africa through the establishment of a West African Economic and Monetary Union, ECOWAS's focus today is broader, encompassing the regulation of social, political, educational, cultural, and security domains, among others.⁸¹ In 2001, ECOWAS enacted the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS Governance Protocol). Article 2(3) of the ECOWAS Governance Protocol explicitly provides that:

Women have equal rights with men to vote and be voted for in elections, to participate in the formulation of government policies and their implementation, and to hold public offices and perform public functions at all levels of governance.⁸²

Member states are mandated to implement measures to ensure the realisation of women's political rights on an equal footing with men. Article 15(4) requires the involvement of women in the election processes,

⁷⁶ United Nations, "Human Rights Treaty Bodies, Ratification Status Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," Accessed March 17, 2025. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en.

⁷⁷ United Nations, "Human Rights Treaty Bodies, Ratification Status for International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," Accessed, March 17, 2025. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en.

⁷⁸ United Nations, "Human Rights Treaty Bodies, Ratification Status for International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

⁷⁹ African Union, "List of Countries Which Have Signed, Ratified/Acceded to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance" 2025. Accessed March 17, 2025. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36384-sl-African_Charter_On_Democracy_Elections_And_Governance.

⁸⁰ African Union, "List of Countries Which Have Signed, Ratified/Acceded to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance."

⁸¹ Traore Djeneba, "Challenges and Prospects of ECOWAS and Presentation of Activities and Research Work of West Africa Institute," *Praia- Cabo Verde*, February 12, 2021. Accessed December 06, 2025. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332820488_Challenges_and_Prospects_of_ECOWAS_Presentation_of_the_Activities_and_Research_Work_of_the_West_Africa_Institute_WAI.

⁸² Economic Community of West African States, "Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance," 2001. Accessed July 26, 2025. <https://caselaw.ihrda.org/entity/gnhvkzf0aw9et1dhc96n7b9?file=1511950497010yuekmch6f7ju507uh9pidaemi.pdf&page=2>.

requiring their participation in electoral observer or supervisory missions.⁸³ Article 40 indirectly advances women's political rights by acknowledging the correlation between women's welfare and peace and development in society.⁸⁴

In 2016, ECOWAS developed the Gender and Election Strategic Framework (ECOWAS Gender Framework).⁸⁵ The primary objective of the ECOWAS Framework is to promote women's political participation and representation in democratic processes, as well as their role in electoral processes.⁸⁶ Despite the existence of these instruments, the political representation of women in West Africa is about the lowest in the world. As of April 2016, West African countries ranked at the lower end of the global ranking for women's representation in approximately 190 national parliaments.⁸⁷ Moreover, ECOWAS's impact in addressing unconstitutional changes of government has been weakened by the recent withdrawal of countries known for instigating coups d'état in Africa, such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.⁸⁸

Central Africa

In October 1983, the Central African states formed the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and Gabon is among the party states.⁸⁹ ECCAS has traditionally focused mainly on establishing an economic community among Central African states, and this has not directly benefited women's political rights in the region.

Southern Africa

In Southern Africa, significant efforts have been made to advance women's inclusion in politics. Paragraph H (ii) of the Declaration on Gender and Development laid the foundation for this initiative, setting a goal of achieving 30% representation of women in decision-making roles by 2005.⁹⁰ Building on this commitment, the SADC countries introduced the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2008 (SADC Protocol). The SADC Protocol also includes specific provisions for women's political participation. Article 13 of the SADC Protocol requires states to ensure the equal participation of women in decision-making by implementing policies, strategies, and programs that empower women to participate effectively in leadership.⁹¹ Furthermore, the SADC enacted a gender Policy, which, in paragraph 4.2, set a target for women's inclusion in decision-making positions at 50% by 2015.⁹² Although Forere and Stone view the provisions of the SADC Gender Protocol as resembling those in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the setting of targets makes a distinct contribution to women's political discourse in the region.⁹³ Among the selected countries, Zimbabwe has ratified the SADC Protocol. This reinforces Zimbabwe's commitment to upholding and promoting women's political rights in alignment with regional and sub-regional instruments.

⁸³ Economic Community of West African States, "Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance."

⁸⁴ Economic Community of West African States, "Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance."

⁸⁵ Economic Community of West African States, "Gender and Election Strategic Framework," 2017. Accessed December 06, 2025. <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Ecowas-Brochure-English.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Economic Community of West African States, "Gender and Election Strategic Framework."

⁸⁷ Economic Community of West African States, "Gender and Election Strategic Framework."

⁸⁸ Gbadamosi Nosmot, "Sahel Military Regimes Cement Break from ECOWAS: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger Ignore Calls to Remain as They Seek to Exit the West African Bloc", July 10, 2024. *Foreign Policy's Weekly Africa Brief*. Accessed December 06, 2025. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/07/10/sahel-mali-burkina-niger-coups-ecowas/>.

⁸⁹ Economic Community of Central African States, "Treaty Establishing the Economic Community of Central African States" 1983. Accessed July 11, 2025. https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/economic-community-of-central-african-states/#Treaty_Establishing_the_Economic_Community_of_Central_African_States.

⁹⁰ Southern African Development Community, "Declaration on Gender and Development," 1997. Accessed July 11, 2025. <https://www.sadc.int/document/declaration-gender-development-1997>.

⁹¹ Southern African Development Community, "Protocol on Gender and Development," 2008.

⁹² Southern African Development Community, "Gender Policy," Accessed July 11, 2025. https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SADC_GENDER_POLICY_-_ENGLISH.pdf, 2025.

⁹³ Malebakeng Forere and Lee Stone, "The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development: Duplication or Complementarity of the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights?," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 434–58.

Constitutions of the selected countries and Women's rights to political Participation

The selected countries also derive the obligations regarding women's political rights from their national Constitutions. Constitutions of Burkina Faso,⁹⁴ Guinea,⁹⁵ Mali⁹⁶, and Zimbabwe⁹⁷ prohibit any form of unfair discrimination against women on the grounds of political affiliation or status. Among the mentioned constitutions, the most recent is Burkina Faso's, which was amended on 12 January 2024 to extend the transitional government's term.⁹⁸ Although Burkina Faso's Constitution is a product of the current military government under Captain Ibrahim Traore, like the previous Constitution, it recognises equality rights and, in Article 13, maintains political rights.⁹⁹ However, the process of adopting this Constitution received much criticism from civil society and legal experts.¹⁰⁰ Guinea's Constitution, in Articles 2 and 3, also provides for political rights, including the right to vote and to form or join a political party. Zimbabwe has the most elaborate Constitution on women's rights.¹⁰¹ Notably, Zimbabwe's Constitution, apart from providing for political rights in Section 67, grants women equal political rights with men in Section 80. Furthermore, Zimbabwe is among the African countries that have implemented mandated quotas of 60 women in parliament and 30% in local government councils.¹⁰² Niger's constitution contains an equality clause, which, however, does not encompass political affiliation or opinion as a ground to prohibit unfair discrimination. Furthermore, the wording of the provision does not provide room for further grounds of discrimination.¹⁰³ The Constitution of Gabon does not incorporate an Equality Clause, although it grants equal political rights to both men and women.¹⁰⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the ratification of international instruments by most of the selected countries, the adoption of the Maputo Protocol over 20 years ago, and the adoption of Constitutions compliant with women's political rights, these countries continue to struggle to implement meaningful changes to enhance women's participation in the political arena. Women in Africa still face considerable exclusion from formal political processes and participate variably in other societal decision-making activities. According to a United Nations report published in September 2022, current trends indicate it could take 140 years for women to attain equal representation in positions of power and at least 40 years to reach parity in national parliaments. For democracy to establish a sustainable presence in Africa, the AU must revisit negotiations and develop strategies to promote women's political engagement, even within governments formed through illegitimate means. Coup d'état significantly impacts women's political participation; there is a pressing need to enhance women's visibility in African politics through the following recommendations.

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- ⁹⁴ Government of Burkina Faso, "Burkina Faso 1991 (rev. 2015) Constitution". Accessed July 11, 2025. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2015. Article 1 provides that: Discrimination of all sorts, notably those founded on race, ethnicity, region, color, sex, language, religion, caste, political opinions, wealth and birth, are prohibited.
- ⁹⁵ Government of Guinea, "Guinea 2010 Constitution" Accessed December 11, 2025. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guinea_2010. Article 8 prohibits discrimination between men and women on several grounds including political affiliation and sex.
- ⁹⁶ Government of Mali, "Mali Constitution 1992". Accessed July 11, 2025. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mali_1992. Article 2 provides that: 'All Malians are born and live free and equal in their rights and duties. Any discrimination based on social origin, colour, language, race, sex, religion or political opinions is prohibited.
- ⁹⁷ Government of Zimbabwe, "Constitution Amendment No. 20," (2013). Accessed July 7, 2025. https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Constitution%20of%20Zimbabwe%20Amendment%20%28No.%2020%29.pdf. Section 56(3) prohibits discrimination against all citizens on grounds including political affiliation, sex, gender, and marital status. Accessed July 7, 2025. Zimbabwe_2017.pdf.
- ⁹⁸ Sôg Mé Dabir Samson M., "Burkina Faso's Constitutional Reforms: Disputed Legitimacy versus Decided Legality," March 29, 2024. Accessed on September 17, 2024. <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/burkina-faso%E2%80%99s-constitutional-reforms-disputed-legitimac>.
- ⁹⁹ Government of Burkina Faso, "Burkina Faso 1991 (rev. 2015) Constitution"
- ¹⁰⁰ Sôg Mé Dabir Samson M., "Burkina Faso's Constitutional Reforms: Disputed Legitimacy versus Decided Legality".
- ¹⁰¹ Government of Zimbabwe, "Constitution Amendment No. 20," Section 17(1)(a) requires the state to promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society based on equality with men. Section 67 (1) provides that every Zimbabwean citizen has the right to free, fair and regular elections for any elective public office established in this Constitution or any other law, and to make political choices freely. Section 80(10) provides women with equal political opportunities as men.
- ¹⁰² Government of Zimbabwe, "Constitution Amendment No. 20," Section 124(1) (b). See also .Government of Zimbabwe, "Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act 2021". Accessed July 7, 2025. <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/4956>
- ¹⁰³ Government of Niger, "Constitution" (2010 Rev 2017) Article 8 assures all equality before the law without distinction of sex, or of social, racial, ethnic or religious origin. Accessed on September 17, 2024. Niger_2017.pdf.
- ¹⁰⁴ Government of Gabon, "Constitution" (1991 Rev 2011).

Mandatory 50/50 male-to-female executives in Transitional Governments

The aftermath of a coup d'état typically involves negotiations led by regional bodies and the coup leaders, culminating in the establishment of a transitional government within a specified timeframe. In the context of these transitional governments, it is recommended that they be structured to achieve gender balance, with an equal representation of women and men in ministerial and other decision-making roles.

Prosecution of the Army Generals

The primary role of the military is to safeguard the nation from external threats. It is crucial to address the unlawful interference of military personnel in the governance of their respective countries through legal means. Therefore, a well-defined procedure for prosecuting incumbent leaders and their military leaders should be established, accompanied by more stringent penalties.

Gendered sanctions

The AU and other regional bodies in the African continent have been imposing economic sanctions on unconstitutional governments that would not help women's inclusion in politics. It is therefore recommended that regional bodies consider imposing sanctions with provisions that encourage the inclusion of women's economic empowerment, enabling them to campaign for political positions.

Female Army Generals in African countries

Among the selected countries, none has ever had a female army general. It is essential to acknowledge that while instances of female army generals orchestrating unconstitutional changes in government cannot be discounted, such circumstances could increase the likelihood of a female leader governing the country. This is due to the prevailing trend of army generals ascending to the presidency, thereby presenting a greater prospect for a female individual to assume leadership.

Preventive measures as opposed to reactivation

The AU needs to demonstrate political commitment to conflict prevention instead of only responding to crises.

Ratification of international and regional instruments.

It has been revealed that some of the selected countries have not ratified certain international and regional frameworks. Niger and Burkina Faso have ratified only two of the five discussed international and regional instruments, followed by Mali and Gabon, which have ratified three. This call can be extended to other African countries that have not ratified these instruments. Ratifications demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing women's political participation. They can also help strengthen the constitutional mandate when these instruments are domesticated.

Amendment of the Constitution

It has been highlighted that some selected countries have constitutions that do not explicitly guarantee equality rights in the political sphere, and some do not guarantee political rights at all. Niger and Gabon serve as examples in this regard. This situation warrants amendments to include the relevant provisions.

CONCLUSION

The concept of women's political rights requires clear participation and representation within democratic governance. The unconstitutional change of government completely omits these essential democratic aspects, openly violating women's rights. Excluding women from transitional governments in parliamentary and ministerial roles highlights a troubling culture of male dominance and violence against women. This marks a setback in the global effort to empower women in politics. The AU must promote gender-diverse leadership transitions and guarantee fair representation in transitional governments to support women's political empowerment. Additionally, the AU and other regional organisations must take firm action to bring leaders of coup d'état, mainly military generals, to justice, while implementing targeted gender-specific sanctions.

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