

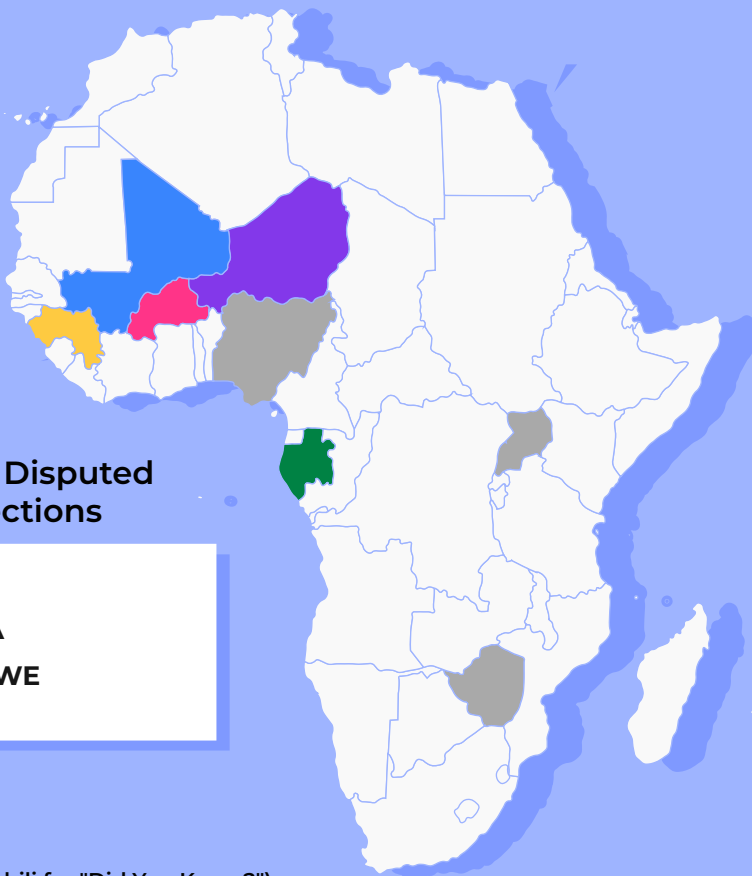


# IPSS

## UNAJUA

### Presidential Elections and Coups

Five West and Central African countries have experienced coup attempts within two years of a problematic election (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon). In Niger, the March 2021 coup attempt failed but the July 2023 attempt was successful, surpassing the two-year mark by 7 months.



#### Other Disputed Elections

**NIGERIA**  
**UGANDA**  
**ZIMBABWE**

#### MALI

Election (March 2020)  
Coup (May 2021)

Time Gap  
**14 months**

#### GUINEA

Election (October 2020)  
Coup (September 2021)

Time Gap  
**11 months**

#### BURKINA FASO

Election (November 2020)  
Coup (June 2022)

Time Gap  
**19 months**

Election (November 2020)  
Coup (September 2022)

**22 months**

#### NIGER

Election (December 2020)  
Coup (March 2021)

Time Gap  
**3 months**

Election (December 2020)  
Coup (July 2023)

**31 months**

#### GABON

Election (August 2023)  
Coup (August 2023)

Time Gap  
**0 month**

(Unajua is Swahili for "Did You Know?")



## KEY CONCERNS OF THE ELECTION

- ▶ Credibility of the election
- ▶ Repression and Intimidation by the incumbent via the threat or actual use of Force
- ▶ Disenfranchisement
- ▶ Distrust in the electoral umpire and judiciary (in case of election petitions)

[All the above were manifested in diverse and (sometimes) similar forms in the affected countries]

## COMMON CHALLENGES

- ▶ Access to social infrastructure/amenities
- ▶ Corruption
- ▶ Poor economy
- ▶ Foreign Interest/accusations of foreign economic and political interference
- ▶ Governance challenges
- ▶ Governments' lack or low degree of responsiveness to expression of dissatisfaction by citizens.
- ▶ Insecurity and insurgency
- ▶ Mismanagement of resources
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Shortage/limited access to basic needs (food, water, shelter)
- ▶ Freedom and human rights concerns
- ▶ Unemployment

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

- ▶ Key concerns of the elections do not receive their deserved attention (on the premise of ACDEG and other related frameworks) as a significant number of citizens of these affected countries would prefer.
- ▶ Citizen perceptions of AU/RECs' response to, and prevention of problematic elections have come under scrutiny as questions emerge on whom and whose interests they represent, as well as their responsiveness.
- ▶ Narratives that coup-prone countries were not practicing democracies continue to grow, questioning the validity of “democratic backsliding” in the affected region.
- ▶ There has been civilian support for juntas, minimal or no resistance to the coups and bloodshed (compared to the pre-2010s coup era).
- ▶ The responses of the international community and relevant institutions, particularly the AU/RECs, suggest that the depth and spread of anti-democracy narratives were/are underestimated.
- ▶ What democracy means to a significant number of citizens in the countries that have experienced coups (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon) is not in alignment with what AU/RECs and other external actors conceive as democracy. Hence, calls for and emphasis on “return” to democracy is counter-effective.
- ▶ Findings from primary sources (in Niger, for instance) reveal that the main drivers of intrastate disparities are socioeconomic and sociopolitical discontent. The democracies that citizens are asked to return to are largely associated with poverty; lack of access to economic opportunities; shrunk civic space; kleptocratic elites and political leaders; exploitation of resources by external actors who are believed to benefit from it at citizens' detriment, and governments' lack of responsiveness to citizens' immediate needs, amongst others. In essence, the experiential link between democracy and development is weak, or inexistent. Thus, a return to democracy is interpreted as a return to socioeconomic problem(s) rather than progress towards the solution (and not associated with democratic ideals and/or the progress democracy promises).
- ▶ Coup leaders have exploited these issues for popularity and public legitimacy.