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# Nigeria at the Brink: A Comparative Assessment of Governance, Security and Development in Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the interconnected challenges of governance, security, and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso within the broader context of West African political instability and democratic transition. While Ghana has maintained relative political stability and democratic consolidation, Nigeria continues to grapple with insurgency, banditry, corruption, and institutional fragility, whereas Burkina Faso has experienced repeated military coups, violent extremism, and state collapse in several regions. The study adopts a comparative political economy framework anchored on the theories of state fragility, governance, and human security. Using qualitative comparative analysis and secondary data from scholarly journals, reports from international organizations, and government publications, the paper investigates how governance quality influences security outcomes and developmental performance. Findings reveal that weak institutions, corruption, elite capture, and poor service delivery significantly undermine national stability in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, while Ghana's relatively stronger democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms have contributed to improved governance and socio-economic outcomes. The study concludes that governance effectiveness remains central to sustainable development and national security in West Africa. It recommends institutional reforms, anti-corruption measures, regional security cooperation, and inclusive development policies as critical pathways toward stability.*

**Keywords:** assessment of governance, security, development in Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso

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## INTRODUCTION

West Africa has become one of the most politically volatile regions in the contemporary international system due to recurring governance crises, insecurity, democratic decline, and socio-economic underdevelopment. Among the states facing these challenges, Nigeria and Burkina Faso represent critical

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examples of fragile governance systems threatened by violent extremism, political instability, and developmental stagnation. In contrast, Ghana has emerged as one of Africa's relatively stable democracies with stronger institutional resilience and comparatively better governance indicators.

Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest economy and most populous country, faces persistent insecurity arising from terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, separatist agitations, farmer-herder conflicts, and widespread corruption. The activities of groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have severely weakened state authority in several northern regions. Simultaneously, poor governance, unemployment, poverty, and infrastructural decay continue to hinder national development.

Burkina Faso has witnessed dramatic political deterioration following repeated military coups in 2022 and escalating jihadist insurgencies linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The inability of civilian governments to contain insecurity contributed significantly to military intervention in politics, resulting in democratic reversal and worsening humanitarian crises.

Conversely, Ghana has maintained democratic continuity since 1992, demonstrating comparatively effective governance, peaceful electoral transitions, and stronger institutional accountability. Although Ghana also faces economic pressures and security concerns, its political stability distinguishes it from many neighboring states.

This study comparatively examines governance, security, and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso to determine the extent to which governance quality shapes national stability and developmental outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The relationship between governance, security, and development has become increasingly significant in understanding state stability in Africa. Nigeria and Burkina Faso continue to experience severe governance deficits manifested through corruption, weak institutions, insecurity, poverty, and declining public trust in government. These conditions have contributed to insurgency, military intervention, and socio-economic stagnation ( Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012 ).

Despite abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria faces rising insecurity and developmental challenges that threaten national cohesion. Burkina Faso has similarly descended into instability due to weak governance and state incapacity. In contrast, Ghana's relatively stable democratic institutions and governance practices appear to have contributed to greater political stability and developmental progress.

The problem this study addresses is the need to understand why some West African states experience persistent instability while others maintain relative resilience despite similar colonial histories and socio-economic conditions.

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Nigeria, despite being Africa's most populous state and largest economy, continues to struggle with terrorism, armed banditry, separatist agitations, corruption, unemployment, and weak governance structures (Ake, 1996; Rotberg, 2004). The rise of Boko Haram and other violent non-state actors has intensified insecurity and weakened public confidence in government institutions (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Similarly, Burkina Faso has experienced severe political instability manifested in repeated military coups, violent extremism, humanitarian crises, and institutional collapse. The inability of civilian governments to effectively respond to insecurity contributed significantly to democratic breakdown and military intervention in politics (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Conversely, Ghana has maintained democratic stability since 1992 through relatively stronger institutions, peaceful electoral transitions, judicial independence, and effective governance mechanisms (Fukuyama, 2014). Although Ghana faces economic and security pressures, its institutional resilience distinguishes it from several states within the sub-region.

This study comparatively examines governance, security, and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso with the aim of understanding how governance quality shapes political stability and developmental outcomes in West Africa.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of this study is to comparatively assess governance, security, and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.

#### **Specific objectives are to:**

1. Examine the relationship between governance and security in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.
2. Assess the impact of insecurity on socio-economic development in the three countries.
3. Compare democratic institutions and governance effectiveness across the selected states.
4. Identify the factors responsible for political instability and underdevelopment.
5. Recommend policy measures for improving governance and national stability.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does governance affect security and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso?
2. Why has Ghana maintained relative political stability compared to Nigeria and Burkina Faso?
3. What role do weak institutions and corruption play in state fragility?

4. How does insecurity undermine socio-economic development in the selected countries?
5. What policy strategies can strengthen governance and stability in West Africa?

### **Research Hypotheses**

H1: Weak governance institutions significantly contribute to insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

H2: Countries with stronger democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms are more likely to achieve political stability and development.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **State Fragility Theory**

This study adopts State Fragility Theory as its primary analytical framework. The theory explains how weak state institutions, poor governance, corruption, and lack of legitimacy create conditions for insecurity and underdevelopment (Rotberg, 2004).

According to the theory, fragile states fail to perform essential functions such as maintaining security, delivering public services, enforcing laws, and protecting citizens. Such failures create opportunities for insurgent groups, military interventions, and criminal networks to flourish (Herbst, 2000).

Nigeria demonstrates several features of state fragility through institutional corruption, insecurity, and governance deficits. Burkina Faso also reflects state weakness resulting from violent extremism and repeated coups. Ghana, however, illustrates relatively stronger institutional capacity and democratic consolidation (Diamond, 2008).

The framework is useful because it links governance quality directly to security and developmental outcomes.

#### **Conceptual Clarifications**

##### **Governance**

Governance refers to the processes, institutions, and mechanisms through which political authority is exercised and public resources are managed for societal development (World Bank, 1992).

##### **Security**

Security involves the protection of lives, property, institutions, and territorial integrity from internal and external threats.

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## **Development**

Development refers to improvements in economic growth, living standards, healthcare, education, political participation, and human welfare.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employs a qualitative comparative research design. Data were obtained from secondary sources including: Academic journals, Books, Government publications, Reports from the United Nations, World Bank reports, Transparency International publications and African Development Bank reports. Comparative analysis was used to identify similarities and differences among the three countries.

## **Comparative Assessment of Governance, Security and Development**

### **Governance Assessment**

#### **Nigeria**

Nigeria faces significant governance challenges including corruption, electoral irregularities, weak institutions, and poor public service delivery. Corruption remains deeply institutionalized despite anti-corruption initiatives by agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Joseph, 1987).

Political patronage, ethnic politics, and elite domination continue to undermine democratic governance. Public distrust in government institutions has increased due to insecurity and economic hardship (Ake, 1996).

#### **Nigeria: Crisis of Scale and Governance**

#### **Economic Decline and Structural Weaknesses**

Nigeria's economy, heavily dependent on oil, has struggled with diversification, inflation, and unemployment. Despite its large GDP, per capita income remains low, and poverty levels are high. The mismanagement of resources and corruption exacerbate these challenges (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013).

#### **Insecurity and State Legitimacy**

The proliferation of armed groups—ranging from insurgents in the northeast to bandits and separatists—has significantly weakened Nigeria's security architecture. The inability of the state to guarantee security undermines its legitimacy (Acharya, 2014).

#### **Democratic Erosion**

Although Nigeria maintains a formal democratic structure, electoral irregularities, elite capture, and weak institutions have eroded public trust (Joseph, 1991).

## **Ghana**

Ghana has experienced peaceful democratic transitions since 1992 and is often considered a model of democratic governance in Africa. Stronger electoral institutions, judicial independence, media freedom, and civil society participation have contributed to political stability (Diamond, 2008). .

Although corruption and economic challenges remain concerns, Ghana's governance institutions are relatively more effective and accountable than those of Nigeria and Burkina Faso (World Bank, 2024).

### **Ghana: Stability Amid Economic Constraints**

#### **Democratic Consolidation**

Ghana is widely regarded as one of Africa's most stable democracies, characterized by peaceful transfers of power and relatively strong institutions (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015).

#### **Economic Management**

While Ghana faces debt and inflation challenges, it has demonstrated comparatively better fiscal discipline and policy consistency than Nigeria.

#### **Institutional Strength**

Ghana's institutions—particularly its judiciary and electoral commission—have contributed to political stability and governance effectiveness.

## **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso has experienced severe political instability, including military coups and democratic breakdown. Weak governance institutions and state incapacity have undermined effective administration (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The inability of civilian governments to address insecurity and socio-economic grievances facilitated military takeovers and weakened democratic governance.

### **Burkina Faso: State Fragility and Military Intervention**

#### **Security Collapse**

Burkina Faso has experienced severe insecurity due to jihadist insurgencies, leading to widespread displacement and humanitarian crises.

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## **Military Coups and Political Instability**

The recurrence of coups (notably in 2022) reflects institutional weakness and declining civilian authority (International Crisis Group, 2023).

### **Governance Deficits**

Weak state presence in rural areas and limited economic opportunities have exacerbated instability.

### **Security Assessment**

#### **Nigeria**

Nigeria faces multidimensional security threats including: Terrorism in the Northeast, Armed banditry in the Northwest, Kidnapping, Farmer-herder conflicts, Oil militancy in the Niger Delta, Separatist agitations in the Southeast (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP have displaced millions and weakened state authority (UNDP, 2024).

#### **Ghana**

Ghana remains comparatively secure despite occasional political tensions and emerging concerns about spillover effects from Sahelian extremism. Effective intelligence systems and stable institutions have contributed to maintaining internal stability (Fukuyama, 2014).

#### **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso has become one of the epicenters of violent extremism in the Sahel region. Armed insurgent groups control parts of the country, resulting in mass displacement, humanitarian crises, and state fragmentation (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The military's repeated seizure of power reflects deep dissatisfaction with government responses to insecurity.

### **Security Architecture and Violence Dynamics**

Security is the most decisive variable shaping state legitimacy across the three cases.

#### **Nigeria: Diffuse and Multi-Regional Insecurity**

Nigeria faces complex, multi-layered insecurity: Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and separatist agitations. These overlapping threats overwhelm state capacity and create a "security vacuum," particularly in rural areas (North, D. C. 1990).

#### **Ghana: Relative Security Stability**

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Ghana maintains low levels of internal conflict, benefiting from effective policing, intelligence coordination, and absence of large-scale insurgencies. This stability enhances investor confidence and institutional legitimacy.

#### Burkina Faso: Insurgency and State Collapse

Burkina Faso is at the epicenter of the Sahelian jihadist crisis, with large portions of territory outside state control. The rise in civilian casualties linked to both insurgents and state forces illustrates a breakdown of lawful authority (Fukuyama, F. 2014; International Crisis Group, 2023).

#### **Comparative Insight**

Nigeria: High but fragmented insecurity

Ghana: Low, manageable security threats

Burkina Faso: Extreme, systemic insecurity

#### **Development Assessment**

##### **Nigeria**

Despite oil wealth, Nigeria experiences widespread poverty, unemployment, inflation, and infrastructural deficits. Human development indicators remain poor due to corruption, poor policy implementation, and insecurity (World Bank, 2024).

##### **Ghana**

Ghana has achieved relatively higher levels of political stability and socio-economic progress. Investments in education, democratic governance, and institutional reforms have contributed to improved development indicators (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

##### **Burkina Faso**

Persistent insecurity and political instability have severely hindered development in Burkina Faso. Humanitarian crises, displacement, and weak economic performance continue to worsen living conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

**Comparative Analysis**

Indicator:

Nigeria	Ghana	Burkina Faso
Political instability	Political stability	Military-dominated
Fragile democracy	Stable democracy	Weak and aid-dependent
Large but unstable economy	Economic Performance	Partially stable economy
Weak and aid-dependent	Institutional Strength	Moderate, relatively stable
High insecurity	Severe Security	Security
Governance weak	Stronger	Coercive Governance

Source: Authors conceptualization

Nigeria’s paradox lies in its resource wealth and regional influence juxtaposed with poor governance outcomes. Unlike Ghana, which leverages institutional strength, and Burkina Faso, whose fragility is overt, Nigeria’s crisis is more insidious—masked by its size and potential.

**Structural State Capacity and Fragility**

State capacity—defined in terms of authority, legitimacy, and service delivery—remains the most critical variable distinguishing the three countries.

Nigeria exhibits deep structural fragility, particularly in its inability to monopolize the use of force and provide basic public goods across its territory. Empirical studies highlight widespread insecurity (banditry, insurgency, communal violence) and weak governance responses, leading to the privatization of security by citizens. This aligns with Osaghae’s conceptualization of weak states characterized by limited territorial control and legitimacy crises (Joseph, R. 1987).

Ghana, by contrast, demonstrates relatively high state resilience. While not entirely immune to governance deficits, it remains outside the category of fragile states and sustains stronger administrative capacity and legitimacy. Its decentralized governance structure enhances local-level service delivery, reinforcing institutional trust (North, D. C. (1990).

Burkina Faso represents extreme fragility, marked by the erosion of both authority and legitimacy. The state’s inability to control territory has facilitated insurgent expansion, while military coups have further weakened institutional continuity. Recent data even indicate that state forces themselves contribute significantly to civilian casualties, reflecting institutional breakdown (Fund for Peace. 2024).

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### **Comparative Insight**

Nigeria: Hybrid fragility (formal state strength, functional weakness)

Ghana: Managed stability (institutional resilience despite constraints)

Burkina Faso: Collapsed authority (high fragility and coercive governance)

### **Economic Structures and Development Trajectories**

#### **Nigeria: Resource Curse and Volatility**

Nigeria possesses the largest economy among the three but suffers from structural distortions. Heavy dependence on oil revenues exposes the economy to external shocks, resulting in inflation volatility (over 20%) and weak diversification. Despite high aggregate GDP, per capita income remains low, reflecting inequality and poor wealth distribution ([www.worlddata.info](http://www.worlddata.info)).

#### **Ghana: Managed Liberal Economy**

Ghana's economy is more diversified and institutionally managed, with strong contributions from agriculture, services, and extractive industries. Its long-term economic management—characterized by relatively open markets and stable policies—has supported sustained growth and poverty reduction, despite recent fiscal pressures (Sala-i-Martin, X., & Subramanian, A. 2013).

#### **Burkina Faso: Low-Income Structural Constraints**

Burkina Faso's economy is agrarian and aid-dependent, with limited industrialization and low per capita income (approx. \$850 annually). Structural underdevelopment, compounded by insecurity, constrains economic growth and state revenue generation ([www.worlddata.info](http://www.worlddata.info)).

### **Comparative Insight**

Nigeria: High potential, low efficiency (resource curse dynamics)

Ghana: Moderate potential, higher efficiency (policy coherence)

Burkina Faso: Low potential, structurally constrained economy

### **Political Systems and Governance Quality**

Nigeria: Electoral Democracy with Weak Institutions

Nigeria operates a formal democratic system but is undermined by elite capture, corruption, and weak rule of law. Political competition often reinforces patronage networks rather than institutional development.

Ghana: Consolidated Electoral Democracy

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Ghana represents one of Africa's most successful cases of democratic consolidation, characterized by peaceful transitions of power and credible electoral institutions. However, clientelism persists at local levels (North, D. C. 1990).

Burkina Faso: Military Dominance and Political Instability

Burkina Faso has experienced repeated coups, reflecting institutional fragility and declining civilian control. Governance is increasingly militarized, limiting democratic accountability.

### **Comparative Insight**

Nigeria: Procedural democracy, weak governance outcomes

Ghana: Substantive democracy, stronger institutionalization

Burkina Faso: Authoritarian instability (military-led governance)

### **Human Development and Quality of Life**

Human development indicators further illustrate divergence:

Nigeria records low life expectancy ( $\approx 54$ – $55$  years) and high poverty levels ([www.worlddata.info](http://www.worlddata.info)).

Burkina Faso performs similarly or worse, with extremely weak health systems.

Ghana consistently outperforms both in education, healthcare access, and infrastructure, contributing to better overall welfare ( Centre for Democracy and Development, 2026).

Energy security studies reinforce this pattern, identifying Ghana as the best-performing country in governance and service delivery, while Nigeria struggles with infrastructural instability and Burkina Faso with systemic deficits (Sala-i-Martin, X., & Subramanian, A. 2013).

### **Regional Power and Geopolitical Implications**

From a neorealist perspective, Nigeria's relative decline has implications for regional power hierarchy:

Nigeria's weakening internal cohesion reduces its capacity to act as a regional hegemon.

Ghana emerges as a normative leader, particularly in governance and democracy.

Burkina Faso's instability contributes to regional insecurity, especially in the Sahel.

The withdrawal of Sahel states from ECOWAS underscores the fragmentation of regional order and the limits of collective security frameworks ([www.businesspost.ng](http://www.businesspost.ng)).

**Synthesis: Typology of State Trajectories**

Dimension:

Nigeria	Ghana	Burkina Faso
State Capacity=		
Weak but complex	Relatively strong	Collapsed in parts
Economic Model=		
Resource-dependent	Diversified	Agrarian
Security=		
Fragmented threats	Stable	Severe insurgency
Governance=		
Electoral but ineffective	Democratic and functional	Military-dominated
Development Outcome=		
Low relative to potential	Moderate and improving	Very low

Source: Authors conceptualization

Summarily, the comparative evidence demonstrates that Nigeria’s crisis is not simply a function of underdevelopment but a failure of governance relative to capacity. While Burkina Faso’s fragility is overt and Ghana’s stability is institutionalized, Nigeria occupies a precarious middle ground characterized by latent fragility masked by scale.

This condition reflects what may be termed “paradoxical power decline”—a state with significant material capabilities but diminishing functional effectiveness. Without structural reforms in governance, security, and economic diversification, Nigeria risks converging toward deeper fragility rather than ascending to stable regional leadership. This upholds the hypotheses raised that weak governance institutions significantly contribute to insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. While Countries with stronger democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms like Ghana, are more likely to achieve political stability and development.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings reveal a strong relationship between governance quality, security, and development outcomes.

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First, countries with stronger democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms tend to experience greater political stability and socio-economic progress. Ghana's democratic resilience demonstrates the importance of institutional continuity, credible elections, and effective governance structures (Diamond, 2008).

Second, weak governance significantly contributes to insecurity and underdevelopment. In Nigeria and Burkina Faso, corruption, poor leadership, and institutional weakness have weakened state legitimacy and enabled violent non-state actors to thrive (Rotberg, 2004).

Third, insecurity negatively affects development by discouraging investment, disrupting education, destroying infrastructure, and increasing humanitarian crises (Collier, 2007). Nigeria and Burkina Faso have lost substantial economic opportunities due to persistent violence and instability.

Fourth, military intervention in politics often emerges where civilian governments fail to ensure security and economic stability. Burkina Faso's repeated coups illustrate how governance failure can erode democratic legitimacy and public trust (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Finally, the study finds that governance reform is indispensable for sustainable development and national stability in West Africa.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study comparatively examined governance, security, and development in Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. The findings demonstrate that governance quality plays a decisive role in shaping security conditions and developmental outcomes.

While Ghana has achieved relative democratic stability through stronger institutions and accountability mechanisms, Nigeria and Burkina Faso continue to struggle with insecurity, corruption, weak governance, and socio-economic challenges.

The study concludes that without effective governance reforms, insecurity and underdevelopment will continue to threaten stability in West Africa.

## **Recommendations**

1. Governments should strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law.
2. Anti-corruption agencies should be empowered and insulated from political interference.
3. Security sector reforms should improve intelligence gathering and community policing.
4. Governments should prioritize youth employment and poverty reduction programs.
5. Regional cooperation through Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should be strengthened to combat terrorism and political instability.

6. Investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure should be prioritized.
7. Civil society organizations and the media should be empowered to promote accountability and transparency.

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