

**The Conflictual Politics of Cowing the Opposition by Ruling
Parties in Selected West African States**

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Abstract

This paper vigorously investigated the conflictual politics of cowing the opposition by ruling parties in selected West African states. Specifically, the study sought to; identify the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies. The study is anchored on authoritarian resilience theory. The study adopted the qualitative research style and content analysis approach was deployed for the study. The instrument for data gathering was a secondary source of data. Findings shows that politically motivated prosecutions and co-optation and internal fragmentation of opposition parties among others are the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies. The study recommends that; the Judiciary of respective national government in West Africa should as a matter of urgency step up in their constitutional

duties of interpretation of laws and ensure that no one is prosecuted unjustly or based on factional or political vendetta as to avert advance conflict and anarchy within the states and Electoral Commissions, should take the lead in ensuring protection of internal party democratic mechanism and discourage ruling party interferences that usually jeopardizes the unity of opposition political parties.

Keywords: Conflictual, Politics, Opposition, ruling parties, West African, States

Introduction

The political landscape of West Africa has been shaped by decades of colonial legacy, military coups, civil unrest, and transitional democracies. While many countries in the region have adopted democratic constitutions and regularly conduct elections, the true essence of democracy especially the existence and functionality of a viable opposition remains fragile (Adebanwi, 2020). In most West African states, the ruling parties often manipulate the political space to retain power at all costs, marginalizing dissenting voices and opposition parties. This tendency has created a culture of intolerance that undermines democratic consolidation. In several instances, the opposition is not treated as a legitimate alternative but as an existential threat to be subdued (Nwankwo, 2021).

The notion of cowing the opposition refers to a strategic suppression that involves intimidation, manipulation of legal frameworks, and sometimes outright violence to neutralize political challengers. In West Africa, ruling parties often exploit state institutions such as the judiciary, police, and electoral bodies to silence opposition figures and parties. This undermines

the checks and balances that are crucial for democracy and instead promotes authoritarian resilience masked in democratic processes (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). The persistent harassment of political opponents erodes citizen confidence in governance and deters political participation (Okereke, 2022).

Many West African states, including Nigeria, Guinea, Togo, and The Gambia (under Yahya Jammeh), have experienced various forms of political repression targeted at opposition figures (International Crisis Group, 2020). In Nigeria, for instance, opposition leaders have been subjected to spurious criminal charges and indefinite detentions, especially during election seasons. Similarly, in Guinea, the ruling elite has used constitutional amendments to elongate tenure, sparking deadly protests by opposition groups (International Crisis Group, 2020). These practices reveal a pattern where electoral democracy exists without substantive democratic norms (Osei-Tutu, 2021).

What exacerbates this crisis is the weakness of democratic institutions and the lack of political will to protect opposition rights. Often, electoral commissions are not independent, security forces are politicized, and the judiciary lacks autonomy. These institutional weaknesses allow ruling parties to act with impunity in silencing dissent (Fombad, 2018). The absence of internal party democracy within opposition parties themselves also limits their ability to provide credible alternatives, thereby playing into the hands of dominant regimes (Barka & Ncube, 2019).

Moreover, international bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union have often responded tepidly to issues of opposition suppression. Their interventions are sometimes seen as symbolic or reactive rather than strategic and preventive. For

instance, while ECOWAS played a role in ending Yahya Jammeh's reign in The Gambia, it has largely remained silent in other countries where similar political repression persists (Omeje & Adebayo, 2020). This lack of consistent regional pressure emboldens ruling parties to continue undermining political opposition (Babatunde, 2021).

The socio-political consequences of cowing the opposition are far-reaching. It leads to political apathy among citizens, increases the likelihood of election-related violence, and stunts democratic development. When citizens perceive that elections are rigged or opposition parties are powerless, they may resort to violent alternatives or disengage from the political process entirely (Mehler, 2020). This condition creates a vicious cycle where authoritarianism is normalized under the guise of electoral politics (Jinadu, 2019).

In light of these issues, it becomes crucial to investigate the conflictual politics surrounding the suppression of opposition in West African states. Understanding the strategies used by ruling parties and the institutional complicity involved is essential for charting a pathway to democratic resilience in the region. A comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon would not only expose the anti-democratic tendencies of incumbents but also inform regional policy reforms and civic advocacy aimed at promoting political inclusivity (Edozie, 2022). The current study, therefore, is grounded in the need to interrogate how and why the opposition continues to be cowed across West Africa, despite decades of democratic experimentation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the formal adoption of democratic systems across West African States, which guarantees the protection of the opposition political parties in providing coherent balanced critique of the actions and inactions of the ruling political party, this has been espoused as the acceptable ideals and superior arguments in the last three decades of democratic experiments in States of West Africa has lend credence to this fact. However, there has been a change in the narrative as the tide of opposition intimidation by ruling parties takes Centre stage. This has resulted in persistent practice of cowing the opposition by ruling parties which undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of democratic governance in the region. Tactics such as arbitrary arrests, abuse of state security forces, manipulation of electoral processes, and media suppression are often deployed to stifle dissent and neutralize political challengers. These actions have led to increased political apathy, violent protests, weakened institutions, and declining public trust in governance. While several studies have examined electoral violence, authoritarianism, and regime survival in Africa, there remains a significant research gap in understanding the systematic and institutionalized mechanisms through which ruling parties in West Africa suppress opposition under the guise of democracy. Moreover, few comparative studies have explored how these practices vary across countries or how regional bodies like ECOWAS respond to them. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by critically analyzing the conflictual strategies used to cow the opposition in selected West African states and assessing their implications for democratic consolidation in the region.

Objective of the Study

To identify the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies.

Research Question

What are the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies

Literature Review

Conceptualization of Conflictual Politics

Conflictual politics refers to the persistent struggle among political actors or parties driven by incompatible goals, ideologies, or interests, often manifesting in confrontational and adversarial engagements rather than cooperative dialogue (Chaturvedi, 2021). Ake (2024) asserted that conflictual politics is a pattern of political interaction characterized by antagonism, power contestation, and efforts to dominate or eliminate opposing views rather than accommodate them within a pluralistic framework. Oladipo (2025) opined that conflictual politics emerges when the ruling elite deliberately stoke divisions, manipulate institutions, or marginalize dissenting groups to maintain political control, thereby deepening democratic instability. Obioma (2022) described conflictual politics as a deviation from constructive political competition, where the political arena becomes a battlefield of exclusion, repression, and ideological hostility.

Conflictual politics refers to the persistent and often antagonistic struggle between political actors or institutions over control of power, state resources, or ideological dominance. In

many democracies, particularly in West Africa, this conflict transcends healthy political competition and takes the form of systemic intimidation, manipulation of democratic institutions, and targeted suppression of opposition. The phenomenon often emerges in contexts where democratic norms are fragile, and where ruling elites are unwilling to cede power through legitimate means. Thus, rather than fostering dialogue and consensus-building, politics becomes a zero-sum game where opponents are viewed as enemies to be neutralized rather than competitors to be engaged (Oloruntoba, 2020).

The dynamics of conflictual politics in West Africa are shaped by colonial legacies, weak institutions, and personalized rule. Many post-independence African leaders inherited authoritarian state structures, and instead of transforming them into participatory democracies, they preserved these systems to entrench their rule. As a result, politics in many West African states is dominated by patronage networks and clientelism, with the ruling party using state machinery to suppress dissenting voices and weaken opposition parties (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). These practices lead to recurring political tensions, electoral violence, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.

Another dimension of conflictual politics involves the instrumentalization of legal and security institutions. Ruling parties often weaponize the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, police, and military forces to harass or incarcerate opposition leaders and civil society activists. This creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, discouraging active political participation and free expression. Consequently, political conflict is no longer mediated through constitutional means but through coercion and manipulation. This growing authoritarian tendency undermines

the checks and balances necessary for democratic governance (Abutudu, 2021).

Conceptualization of Cowing the Opposition

Cowing the opposition refers to the systematic intimidation, suppression, and weakening of dissenting political voices by a ruling party to retain political dominance and eliminate electoral competition (Nwosu, 2020). Ogundele (2021) asserted that cowing the opposition involves the deliberate use of state power, security forces, and legal instruments to discredit, arrest, or silence rival political actors and parties. Musa (2025) opined that this practice is often manifest in politically motivated charges, media blackouts, and regulatory clampdowns targeted at opposition figures who challenge the ruling authority. Adeyemi (2022) described cowing the opposition as a violation of political freedoms, where ruling elites manipulate state institutions to erode dissent and weaken democratic engagement.

Cowing the opposition refers to the deliberate use of coercive, manipulative, or suppressive tactics by a ruling government or party to weaken, silence, or completely eliminate political rivals. It represents a deviation from the principles of democratic pluralism, where opposition parties are expected to function freely, act as a check on the ruling elite, and provide alternative governance ideas. In many West African democracies, this concept has manifested through unlawful arrests, media blackouts, surveillance, and the manipulation of laws to target opposition figures, thereby creating a hostile political environment for dissenting voices (Afolabi, 2020).

The process of cowing the opposition often involves the strategic deployment of state resources and institutions such as

the police, judiciary, electoral commissions, and intelligence services to serve partisan purposes. These institutions, rather than acting neutrally, are frequently co-opted to harass opposition leaders, deny them access to political platforms, or delegitimize their credibility in the public eye. The use of “anti-corruption” campaigns selectively against opposition figures while shielding allies of the ruling party exemplifies this trend. Over time, such practices distort the level playing field required for genuine democratic competition and entrench authoritarianism under the guise of legality (Okonkwo, 2021).

The implications of cowing the opposition are far-reaching. It weakens democratic accountability, reduces electoral integrity, and increases the risk of political instability and violence. In the absence of a viable and empowered opposition, ruling parties tend to consolidate unchecked power, leading to governance failures and the marginalization of alternative voices. Scholars have emphasized the need for reforms that guarantee the protection of political rights, independence of institutions, and media freedom to counter this growing phenomenon. Strengthening civil society, international monitoring, and judicial autonomy are also key to curbing the authoritarian drift observed in many West African democracies (Usman & Tamba, 2023).

Conceptualization of Ruling Party

According to Okereke (2022), ruling party refers to the political party that holds the majority in the national legislature and/or controls the executive arm of government. In democratic systems, the ruling party emerges through periodic elections and is responsible for forming government, setting policy agendas,

and administering public institutions. Its mandate is derived from the electorate and is ideally limited by constitutional checks and balances. However, in several West African states, ruling parties often extend their influence beyond governance, dominating political discourse and entrenching themselves in power through undemocratic means (Abdulai, 2020).

In practice, the ruling party in many West African democracies exercises significant control over the state apparatus, including public institutions like the police, judiciary, electoral bodies, and national media. This consolidation of power enables it to shape policy, manipulate electoral processes, and restrict political space for opposition parties. Rather than serving as a temporary vehicle for public service delivery, the ruling party is often perceived as synonymous with the state, blurring the lines between party and government—a pattern characteristic of neopatrimonial political systems (Obadare & Olorunfemi, 2021).

The Conflictual Politics of Cowing the Opposition by the Ruling Party in West African States

The practice of cowing the opposition by ruling parties in West African states is a growing concern that reflects a deeper crisis of democratic governance. Rather than embracing inclusive politics, many ruling parties perceive opposition figures as threats to their political survival. This has led to the adoption of various suppressive tactics such as harassment, unlawful arrests, denial of access to media, and restriction of political participation. These actions not only undermine democratic consolidation but also create a hostile environment where political rivalry is framed as

warfare rather than competition. The result is a political culture deeply entrenched in conflictual dynamics, where dominance, not dialogue, becomes the standard mode of governance (Yahaya, 2021).

Conflictual politics thrives in environments where institutions lack independence and where political elites see power as an end in itself. In West Africa, state institutions such as the judiciary, electoral bodies, and the police are often manipulated by ruling parties to neutralize opposition voices. For instance, opposition rallies are frequently disrupted under the pretext of maintaining public order, while ruling party events proceed unchallenged. This abuse of state power breeds mistrust among the populace and reduces the legitimacy of the democratic process. Such politically motivated repression has been documented in countries like Benin, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire, where opposition figures have been detained or exiled (Nkereuwem, 2023).

This hostile political climate has a detrimental effect on citizen participation. When the electorate sees the opposition being consistently repressed, many begin to withdraw from active political engagement, fearing reprisal or feeling powerless. Over time, voter turnout declines, and the opposition becomes fragmented and weakened. The ruling party, in turn, consolidates power through manipulated electoral outcomes and constitutional amendments, as seen in Guinea and Togo. This cycle of repression and apathy threatens the very foundations of democracy, replacing competition with coercion and fostering political instability (Mensah, 2022).

While civil society organizations, regional watchdogs, and international observers occasionally raise alarms, their impact is often minimal due to weak enforcement mechanisms and the complex web of political alliances in the region. ECOWAS and the African Union have sometimes issued condemnations but rarely follow up with substantive interventions. Meanwhile, local advocacy groups are constrained by restrictive laws, limited funding, and security threats. This leaves opposition parties vulnerable and unable to mobilize effectively, as their activities are systematically curtailed by those in power (Kouassi, 2020).

Case Study

The 2020 Presidential Election in Guinea

In 2020, Guinea experienced a politically charged environment marked by a highly contentious presidential election. The ruling president, Alpha Condé, had secured a controversial third term after pushing through a constitutional amendment that allowed him to extend his presidency beyond the two-term limit. This move sparked widespread protests from opposition groups, who viewed it as a violation of democratic principles. The opposition, led by figures such as Cellou Dalein Diallo, argued that the ruling party's manipulation of the constitution was an attempt to consolidate power and undermine the political space for competition (Soumah, 2021).

In response to opposition protests, the government deployed security forces to suppress dissent, leading to violent clashes. The ruling party utilized state-controlled media to discredit opposition leaders, accusing them of inciting violence and attempting to destabilize the country. Opposition rallies

were often met with force, and several opposition leaders were arrested or intimidated into silence. Additionally, there were reports of electoral fraud during the vote, with opposition parties claiming that ballots were tampered with and votes were falsified (Barry, 2020). Despite these efforts, the election proceeded, with Alpha Condé securing a controversial victory, but the legitimacy of the election was widely questioned both domestically and internationally.

The aftermath of the election left Guinea in a state of political tension, with continued opposition protests and calls for political reform. The international community, including the African Union and the European Union, expressed concerns about the fairness of the election process. Civil society organizations within Guinea also raised alarms about the increasing authoritarianism of the regime. This case highlights the ways in which ruling parties in West Africa use constitutional manipulation, media control, and violent repression to suppress opposition voices and maintain political power (Toure, 2020).

Nigeria's 2019 General Elections

Nigeria's 2019 general elections provide a clear example of the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), using various strategies to suppress opposition in the lead-up to the polls. The opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by Atiku Abubakar, accused the ruling party of deploying state resources to intimidate opposition supporters and influence the electoral process. In the months leading up to the elections, there were widespread reports of security agencies being used to intimidate opposition leaders, including unlawful detentions, threats, and harassment of activists and voters. For instance, opposition

strongholds were often heavily policed, while pro-APC regions experienced relatively less scrutiny (Akinwumi, 2019).

The ruling party also faced allegations of electoral fraud, with opposition parties claiming that there was widespread vote rigging, ballot box snatching, and manipulation of election results. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), though seen as relatively independent in its role, was accused of being slow to act on allegations of fraud and not fully ensuring a level playing field for all political actors. Some opposition leaders were also restricted from campaigning in certain regions, and political rallies were interrupted by security forces, effectively limiting the ability of the opposition to mobilize voters (Okafor, 2019).

Despite these efforts, the opposition parties did not relent in their efforts to contest the election results. Atiku Abubakar challenged the results in court, but the election tribunal upheld the victory of President Muhammadu Buhari. This case underscores the extent to which ruling parties in Nigeria manipulate electoral processes, use security forces to intimidate opposition members, and rely on media narratives to suppress dissent. It also highlights the importance of legal challenges and civil society in contesting undemocratic practices (Olufemi, 2019).

The 2018 Presidential Election in Cameroon

Cameroon's 2018 presidential election serves as another example of how a ruling party can suppress opposition in a politically volatile context. President Paul Biya, who had been in power for over 35 years, sought re-election despite widespread criticism of his governance, including accusations of human rights abuses, corruption, and lack of political reforms. The opposition parties,

led by Maurice Kamto and other prominent figures, pushed for change and rallied around a platform that promised greater democratization. However, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) used several tactics to ensure that opposition forces were marginalized (Fombo, 2019).

One of the primary strategies employed by the Biya government was the use of military and police forces to intimidate opposition supporters. Opposition rallies were banned or violently dispersed, and opposition leaders were often arrested or placed under house arrest, particularly in the lead-up to the election. Maurice Kamto, the leading opposition figure, was arrested in January 2019 following his declaration that he had won the election. The authorities used the judicial system to silence opposition leaders, charging them with insurrection and rebellion, and sending a chilling message to others who dared to challenge Biya's rule (Mambou, 2019).

The international community, including the African Union and the European Union, criticized the electoral process in Cameroon, but the Biya government maintained a tight grip on power. The electoral process was marred by reports of ballot stuffing, restricted media access for opposition candidates, and lack of transparency in the election results. Despite these practices, Biya was declared the winner, continuing his autocratic rule. This case demonstrates how state institutions, including the military and judiciary, can be used in tandem by ruling parties to suppress political opposition, undermining the integrity of elections and perpetuating authoritarian rule (Mambou, 2019).

The 2016 Presidential Election in The Gambia

The Gambia's 2016 presidential election provides an interesting case of the political conflict between a long-standing ruling party and a dynamic opposition. The incumbent president, Yahya Jammeh, had been in power since 1994 after seizing control through a coup. In December 2016, Jammeh lost his re-election bid to opposition leader Adama Barrow. Although Jammeh initially conceded defeat, he quickly reversed his position and refused to hand over power, claiming electoral fraud. This led to a political standoff and calls for the suppression of the opposition, with Jammeh using both the military and legal tactics to maintain his grip on power (Hassan, 2017).

Jammeh's government used various strategies to suppress opposition voices throughout the election process. Opposition candidates faced extreme intimidation, with threats of violence, imprisonment, and harassment. Journalists critical of the government were silenced, and media outlets were restricted. Security forces were used to block opposition rallies, and the ruling party leveraged the country's security apparatus to instill fear among voters and prevent the opposition from organizing effectively. The ruling party also utilized state-run media to broadcast propaganda that portrayed Jammeh as the sole legitimate leader, further undermining the credibility of the electoral process and discrediting the opposition (Diallo, 2017).

In the face of international pressure and the prospect of military intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Jammeh ultimately agreed to leave office in January 2017. This case highlights the persistence of ruling parties in using both coercion and manipulation of state institutions to maintain power. It also underscores the critical

role of regional and international actors in facilitating democratic transitions, as well as the vulnerability of opposition movements in West Africa to state repression (Sesay, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on Authoritarian Resilience Theory, developed by Gerschewski (2013). Authoritarian Resilience Theory was developed by Gerschewski (2013), which posits that authoritarian regimes or parties can persist and adapt despite significant internal and external pressures for democratization. This theory is germane and particularly relevant and applicable in critical understanding of the behaviour of ruling parties in many West African states, where governments employ both coercive and strategic tactics to suppress opposition and maintain power. Ruling parties often utilize a combination of legal, economic, and institutional mechanisms to legitimize their control while simultaneously stifling dissent. For instance, they manipulate the media, control electoral processes, or manipulate laws to disadvantage opposition parties. Authoritarian resilience is marked by the ability of the ruling party to adapt and endure, even when there is a public call for democratic reforms, presenting the illusion of democracy while safeguarding their hold on power (Gerschewski, 2013).

Application of the Theory to the Study

The deployment of the Authoritarian Resilience Theory in this paper is critically relevant as it shows the interplay and mobilization of State resources in negatively influencing the internal and external activities of the opposition political parties

as to ensure their fragmentation and weaken its coordination which affects its strength in challenging the albatros policies of the ruling political party. This is particularly the situation with most states in West Africa under review. The theory finds visible logical expression in the research theoretical conceptualization and deployment. The theory synchronizes effortlessly in the study as authoritarian powers within the disposal of ruling political parties are channeled towards cowing the opposition to ensure they are incompetent in standing against the political actions of the ruling party.

Methodology

Research Design

Research design describes the structural procedure to be followed, and or specifies the systematic steps to be taken in carrying out a given research (Piate. 2015). This study adopted the descriptive-historical research design. This design was considered appropriate because it gives a better and deeper understanding to phenomenon on the basis of an in-depth study of the phenomenon.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were derived from secondary source of data collection. Secondary source include archival works such as encyclopedia, textbooks, journal articles, magazines, internet and other library materials related to the subject matter of the study.

Method of Data Analysis

Data for this study were analyzed qualitatively in line with the research question and contents analysis approach was deployed.

Results and Discussion of Findings

What are the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies?

Weaponization of State Security Forces: One of the most common tactics used by ruling parties in West Africa to suppress opposition is the strategic deployment of police and military forces against rival political actors. State security forces are often used to intimidate, arrest, or disrupt the activities of opposition parties, especially during election periods or protests. These institutions, which are supposed to be neutral and serve the public, are frequently politicized to serve partisan interests. Opposition rallies are routinely broken up under the guise of maintaining law and order, while ruling party events are allowed to proceed unimpeded. For example, in Guinea and Nigeria, opposition members have been detained without trial or charged with treason for criticizing the government, effectively silencing dissent and creating a climate of fear that stifles political engagement (Ibekwe, 2022). Notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria has been inundated by the current tide of insecurity in recent time particularly (Oguwuike ,& Udeh, 2024),which most times party Politics funnels unrest.

Restriction of Media Access and Free Speech: Controlling the narrative is another potent tool used by ruling parties to silence the opposition. Through media censorship, ownership control, and restrictive laws like cybercrime or sedition acts, governments curtail opposition voices in both traditional and digital spaces. State-owned media are typically biased in favor of the ruling

party, while private media that provide coverage to opposition figures are harassed or shut down. In countries like Benin and The Gambia (prior to democratic reforms), independent journalists and bloggers have been arrested for publishing anti-government content. This curtails citizens' access to diverse political views and allows the ruling party to dominate the public discourse unchallenged (Oluwaseun, 2023).

Judicial Harassment and Politically Motivated Prosecutions:

Ruling parties also use the judiciary as a tool for political suppression by instituting legal actions against opposition members. Often, courts are used to delay or prevent opposition candidates from contesting elections through disqualification, prolonged litigation, or politically motivated charges like corruption or treason. While accountability is necessary, selective prosecution raises concerns about fairness and the abuse of judicial power. In Sierra Leone and Senegal, for example, prominent opposition leaders have been jailed or disqualified from elections under dubious legal grounds, undermining their chances and weakening public trust in the justice system's independence (Mensah & Koulibaly, 2020).

Co-optation and Internal Fragmentation of Opposition Parties:

Another subtle but effective strategy is the co-optation of opposition leaders through patronage, appointments, or financial inducements. Ruling parties often entice key figures within opposition parties to defect or become passive through offers of political positions or material benefits. This weakens the opposition from within, creating divisions and loss of credibility among opposition members. Once fragmented, opposition parties struggle to form a united front, making it easier for the

ruling party to dominate the political space. This strategy has been used in countries like Burkina Faso and Mali, where the political landscape is characterized by shifting alliances and weakened opposition coalitions (Abdoulaye, 2019).

Discussions of Findings

For the objective, the study sought to identify the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies. The study posited that weaponization of state security forces, restriction of media access and free speech, judicial harassment and politically motivated prosecutions and co-optation and internal fragmentation of opposition parties among others are the major strategies employed by ruling parties to suppress opposition voices in West African democracies. However, previous studies in juxtaposition with this study shows sharp contrast with this study, an interrogation on one party system will negate the need to cow any opposition. Therefore, opposition parties depicts plurality of choices for electorate in democratic political arrangement and ruling parties are usually desperate to remain in power and therefore seeks to crush dissenting voices using various means as captured in our findings.

Conclusion

The conflictual politics of cowing the opposition by ruling parties in West African states highlights a critical aspect of the region's democratic struggles. Throughout the case studies and the analysis, it becomes evident that ruling parties in these states often resort to various strategies to suppress opposition,

including manipulation of state institutions, violent repression, media censorship, and electoral fraud. These actions undermine the democratic process and perpetuate political instability, limiting the effective functioning of opposition parties and hindering the development of robust, competitive democracies in West Africa. The challenges faced by opposition parties are exacerbated by the entrenchment of political elites who often use state resources to maintain their grip on power, thus preventing meaningful political change and consolidation of democracy in the region.

Despite the efforts of opposition parties and civil society to challenge these practices, the resilience of ruling parties and the manipulation of political structures often lead to the erosion of democratic principles. The role of international organizations, such as ECOWAS and the African Union, becomes crucial in these contexts, as they provide pressure for political transitions and aid in reducing the severity of state repression. However, the need for comprehensive reforms, strengthened democratic institutions, and greater political accountability remains paramount to ensure that the region moves toward a more democratic future. The ability of opposition parties to overcome these systemic challenges will ultimately determine the political trajectory of West African states and their capacity to foster democratic consolidation.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the research, the study recommends that; the Judiciary of respective national government in West Africa should as a matter of urgency step up in their constitutional duties of interpretation of

laws and ensure that no one is prosecuted unjustly or based on factional or political vendetta as to avert advance conflict and anarchy within the states and Electoral Commissions, should take the lead in ensuring protection of internal party democratic mechanism and discourage ruling party interferences that usually jeopardizes the unity of opposition political parties.

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