



The Melancholies of Failing States in the Global South: A Glimpse at West Africa and the Sahel Region

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Abstract: This study interrogates the phenomenon of state failure within the global south, situating its analysis against the governance trajectories of the global north, where institutional integrity, equitable application of the rule of law, and the prioritization of public service over personal gain are more firmly entrenched. Particular emphasis is placed on West Africa and the Sahel region, where recurrent triggers of state fragility including systemic corruption, protracted civil and domestic conflicts, economic decline, institutional weakness, erosion of sovereignty, and diminished legitimacy in both domestic and international spheres have undermined developmental progress. Comparative references are drawn from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, highlighting the persistence of predatory governance structures that consolidate resources among narrow elites while perpetuating widespread poverty. By critically examining these dynamics, the paper seeks to elucidate the long-term developmental implications of state failure and to propose contextually grounded strategies for restoration, with special attention to institutional strengthening, conflict resolution, and the re-establishment of public trust in governance across West Africa and the Sahel.

Keywords: State failure, governance, corruption, institutional weakness, legitimacy, sovereignty, development trajectories

INTRODUCTION

The literature on 'state failure' has got substantial consideration across the social sciences in modern times (Di John, 2010). In the framework of socio-economic or socio-political development, we examined how countries in the global north prioritizes public service against individual benefits, fight against corruption or grafts and build public trust, impress equality in the dispensation of the principles of the law and provide vital social services to its citizens as against countries in the global south. However, we also examined specifically the factors responsible for failed states in West Africa and the Sahel region and the strategies that can be employed by these failed states for restoring them. However, we also drew critical references to variables of developing countries in Africa and Latin America and some rogue countries in Asia that over the decades have had leaders and predatory governments that thrived in grand corruption and prioritized personal gains over public service such that small amount of the public elites enjoys the country's resources than the majority of the people living in abject poverty.

Nevertheless, this paper seeks to address the painstaking factors that are responsible for failed states in the global south taking into consideration the effect these factors have on the development trajectory of these countries in the long-run. Therefore, the paper pays much attention to countries in West-Africa and the Sahel region to examine which ones amongst them are characterized by the major triggers of failed states such as widespread corruption, civil conflict and elongated domestic conflicts, economic decline, weak institutions, loss of domestic and international legitimacy, loss of sovereignty as a result of outside involvement with foreign interest. On the other hand, the paper aims to conclude with effective strategies for restoring failed states with special emphasis on countries in West Africa and the Sahel region.

THE UNSCRUPULOUS FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR FAILED STATES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The global south has countries that are economically regressive, technologically backward, politically unstable and mostly depend on global north countries for economic support. On the other hand, the global north are countries that are economically developed such as countries in North America, Europe and so on. Today, public perceptions is that the world economy functions as a meritocracy where countries that have good markets, strong institutions, as well as a committed work ethos become rich and successful, while countries that lack these qualities, or which are shambled by corruption and bad governance practices, continue to be poor (Golub, 2013). The map below gives a clear representation of continents in the global north and south divided by the Brandt line as shown below.

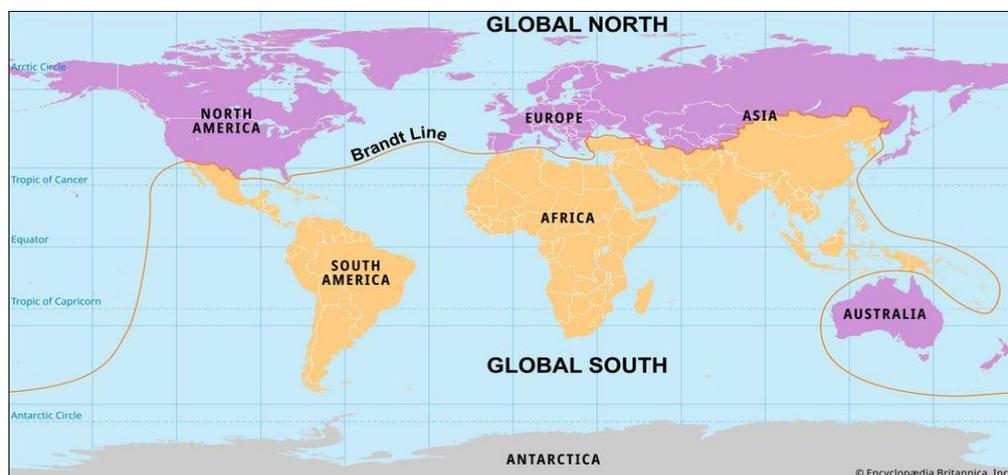


Figure 1: A Map Showing a common Depiction of the Global North and the Global South, as Divided by the Brandt Line

Source: Miles Kenny

Apart from natural inequalities in terms of resources amongst countries in the global north and south, economically, other countries or societies are more developed than others especially countries in the global south due to widespread corruption, elongated domestic and civil conflicts, economic decline, weak institutions, loss of domestic and international legitimacy and loss of sovereignty as a result of too much foreign interference.

For example, the Sahel region has been confronting constant challenges connected with its high prevalence of poverty, exposure to severe weather conditions, weak institutions as well as political exclusion (Raga, Lemma & Keane, 2023), these challenges have been worsened by the surge of extremist activities that have resulted to political instability and hostility in addition to internal displacement in the region.

Widespread Corruption

No doubt, there is widespread corruption and poor governance practices such as the fight against corruption in West Africa, the Sahel countries and Africa in general which form part of the global south countries. The Sahel is distinguished by permeable borders, prevalent poverty, weak governance, besides the existence of several armed groups (Surazu & Stefanović-štambuk, 2023). Table 1 below shows the Corruption Perceptions index for West African and Sahel countries from 2020 to 2024

Table 1: West African and Sahel Countries (Global South underdeveloped/developing countries) Corruption Perceptions Index 2020-2024

Country	2020 Score	2020 Rank	2021 Score	2021 Rank	2022 Score	2022 Rank	2023 Score	2023 Rank	2024 Score	2024 Rank
Benin	41	83	42	78	43	72	43	70	45	69
Burkina Faso	40	86	42	78	42	77	41	83	41	82
Cape Verde	58	41	58	39	60	35	64	30	62	35
Ivory Coast	36	104	36	105	37	99	40	87	45	69
Gambia	37	102	37	102	34	110	37	98	38	96
Ghana	43	75	43	73	43	72	43	70	42	80
Guinea	28	137	25	150	25	147	26	141	28	133
Guinea-Bissau	19	165	21	162	21	164	22	158	21	158
Liberia	28	137	29	136	26	142	25	145	27	135
Mali	30	129	29	136	28	137	28	136	27	135
Niger	32	123	31	124	32	123	32	125	34	107
Nigeria	25	149	24	154	24	150	25	145	26	140
Senegal	45	67	43	73	43	72	43	70	45	69
Sierra Leone	33	117	34	115	34	110	35	108	33	114
Togo	29	134	30	128	30	130	31	126	32	121
Chad	21	160	20	164	19	167	20	162	21	158
Mauritania	29	134	28	140	30	130	30	130	30	130
Sudan	16	174	20	164	22	162	20	162	15	170

Source: Corruption Perceptions Index Global Scores

Figure 2 gives an illustration of the trend of corruption perceptions index ranking of West Africa and countries in the Sahel region from 2020-2024. The data distribution shows that Cape Verde, Ghana, Senegal and Mauritania demonstrates a consistent trend of improvement in the ranking and the fight against corruption over the years under review while Benin and Burkina Faso maintained the trend with slight improvement. Sudan, Nigeria,

Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Chad maintained a constant upward trend suggesting not much improvement in the fight against corruption.

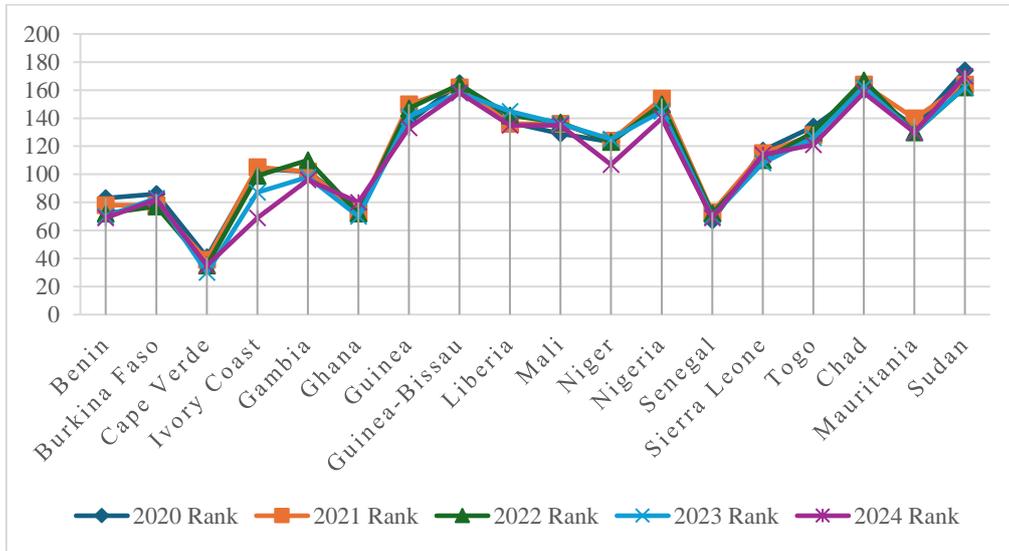


Figure 2: West African and Sahel Countries (Global South) Corruption Perceptions Index Ranking 2020-2024

Source: Corruption Perceptions Index Global Scores

Figure 3 below shows that Sudan was ranked 170th position as the most corrupt country in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index ranking, followed by Chad and Guinea-Bissau. Nigeria, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Togo scoring very low and ranked high as the most corrupt countries in West Africa. On the other hand, Cape Verde, Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Gambia did well in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index ranking.

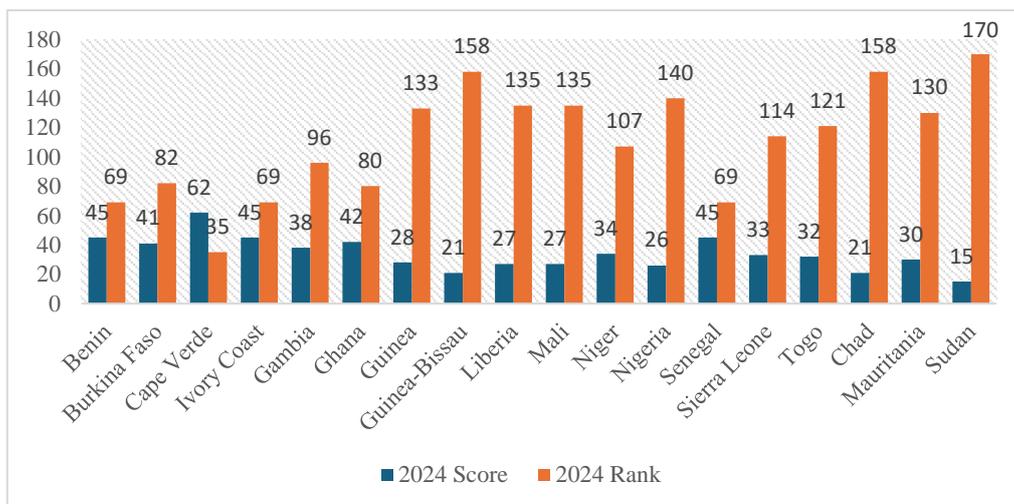


Figure 3: West African and Sahel Countries (Global South) Corruption Perceptions Index Ranking 2024

Source: Corruption Perceptions Index Global Scores

Table 2 below shows a trend of corruption perceptions index scores and ranking from 2020 to 2024 of global north (developed) countries. The spread of data in the table below shows that Scandinavian and countries from the Nordic region performed very well in the CPI scores from 2020-2024 while the United States of America dropped 4 places in the 2024 CPI rankings. Besides, Germany and Canada dropped 6 and 3 places respectively in the 2024 CPI rankings while Australia and Iceland improved with 4 and 9 places respectively and the United Kingdom, Finland and Denmark maintained the same score and position in 2023 CPI index.

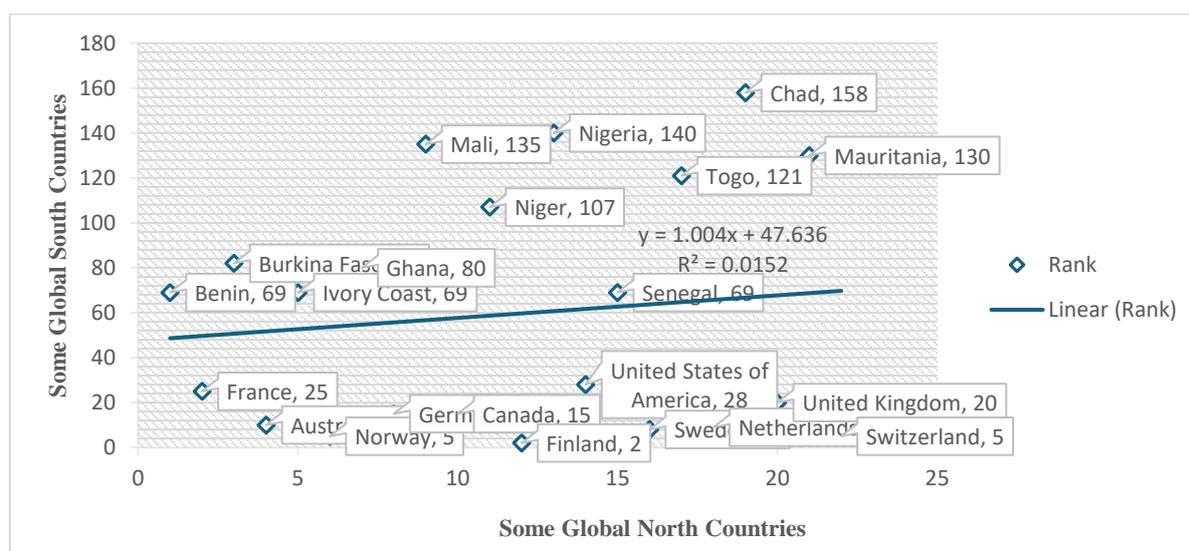
Table 2: Some Global North Countries Corruption Perceptions Index 2020-2024

Country	2020 Score	2020 Rank	2021 Score	2021 Rank	2022 Score	2022 Rank	2023 Score	2023 Rank	2024 Score	2024 Rank
United States of America	67	25	67	27	69	24	69	24	65	28
Germany	80	9	80	10	79	9	78	9	75	15
Canada	77	11	74	13	74	14	76	12	75	15
Sweden	85	3	85	4	83	5	82	6	80	8
Australia	77	11	73	18	75	13	75	14	77	10
Norway	84	7	85	4	84	4	84	4	81	5
Finland	85	3	88	1	87	2	87	2	88	2
Netherlands	82	8	82	8	80	8	79	8	78	9
France	69	23	71	22	72	21	71	20	67	25
Denmark	88	1	88	1	90	1	90	1	90	1
United Kingdom	77	11	78	11	73	18	71	20	71	20
Japan	74	19	73	18	73	18	73	16	71	20
Switzerland	85	3	84	7	82	7	82	6	81	5
Belgium	76	15	73	18	73	18	73	16	69	22
Austria	76	15	74	13	71	22	71	20	77	10
Iceland	75	17	74	13	74	14	72	19	77	10
New Zealand	88	1	88	1	87	2	85	3	83	4
Ireland	75	17	74	13	77	10	77	11	77	10

Source: Corruption Perceptions Index Global Scores

The graph below shows a linear relationship between countries in the Global North and Global South in terms of Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), and it is denoted by the equation $y=1.004x+47.636$. However, the x axis denotes countries from the Global North while the y axis represents countries from the Global South region. The equation and slope or coefficient of the equation (1.004) suggest a positive correlation between the two regions as every unit of increase in the CPI score of x (Global North countries) there will be a corresponding increase of approximately 1.004 units in the CPI score of y (Global South Countries). This suggest that as developed countries in the global north improve their CPI scores, developing nations in the global south will follow the trend and this may be largely due to improvement in government practices such as the fight against corruption in developed countries in the global north and this could have wave effect of accommodating such transformations by global south developing countries. Moreover, another reason could be practicing governance towards global standards such as transparency as well as accountability by both regions.

Consequently, the above interpretation of the slope could suggest several socio-economic and socio-political factor undercurrents such as policy development in the two regions, international cooperation in fighting corruption and other socio-economic factors for instance, foreign aid, trade relations, climate change effects, technological transfer and so on that contribute to varying perceived levels of corruption across various regions. Furthermore, the overall implication could be that improvement in the CPI scores in global north countries which are wealthier could have a direct positive impact on developing countries in the global south region. In contrast, non-improvement of the CPI scores in global north countries could have negative effects on global south countries vice versa, for instance, the intercept of the equation 47.636 denotes the expected value of variables associated with y (countries in the global south) when x=0 (if there are no influence from global north countries). This could be a situation where global north countries do not contribute to global metrics as a result of poor CPI scores, therefore, the baseline metric representing measures such as governance practices, transparency and accountability etc specific to developing countries in the global south might be approximately 47.636. The scatter diagram below shows the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) relationship between some Global North and South Countries.



The Corruption Perceptions Index Relationship between Some Global North and South Countries

Civil Conflict and Elongated Domestic Conflicts

Some countries in West Africa and the Sahel region such as Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali have been affected by civil conflict and elongated domestic conflicts that has backpedalled most of the economic gains of these countries. After independence, there continued to be rebel movements in many African countries (Garba & Garba, 2005).

Sierra Leone for little over 10 years of its history, experienced a disastrous domestic war that led to socio political as well as economic stagnation (Asangna, 2017). The ruthless civil carnage started in Sierra Leone in 1991 and was blamed mostly on the bad governance

practices such as widespread corruption in public institutions by the then APC government of Siaka Proben Stevens and Joseph Saidu Momoh who govern Sierra Leone from 1985 until the military coup in 1992. From the beginning Sierra Leone has been a side-illustration of the scene of security in West Africa (Hirsch, 2001). The emergence of the civil conflict in Sierra Leone brought about breakdown in the rule of law, increased accounts of human right abuses, incidences of civil disobedience, enormous social and economic challenges, extreme poverty that endure even today 23 years after the end of the conflict in 2002. Peace was achieved in 2002, by the involvement of British troops which led to the rapid downfall of the Revolutionary United Front (Collier & Duponchel, 2013). Nevertheless, Sierra Leone remain to be a country overwhelmed by serious glitches of high unemployment, infrastructure challenge, very unreliable service provision, as well as corruption besides inadequate control of the diamond sector continue to be critical matters (Silberfein & Conteh, 2006).

Consequently, the civil war in Ivory Coast started in 2002 the very year the end of the war was declared in Sierra Leone. Ivory Coast experienced a military takeover in 1999, plus two religious-based civil conflicts (Akim, 2018). The first civil war took place between 2002 and 2007 and the second between 2010 and 2011. A bloody uprising within the military led to the demise of the former military ruler Guei as well as hundreds of Ivorians, that were part of the civil war in September 2002 (Woods, 2003). While the civil conflict in Sierra Leone lasted for 11 years, the civil conflict in Ivory Coast lasted for 7 years with post-elections violence from 2010 to 2011 that had huge socio-economic harm on the country. The conflict in Ivory Coast is a consequence of engrained cleavages spinning around ethnicity, nationality as well as religion (Ogwang, 2011).

On the other hand, Nigeria which is the biggest economy in Africa have had several domestic conflicts including the insurgency of Boku Haram in the Northeast region of the country. The Boku Haram insurgency which started in 2009 have resulted to widespread violence, displacement of especially in the Northeast region as well as humanitarian crises. Political analysts say apart from ideology Nigeria's civil conflicts and tensions could be attributed mostly to ethnic and cultural differences besides the issue of resource control especially in the Niger Delta region. Nigeria has managed to sustain a volatile post-war peace, since the mid-1990s, there has been enduring violence as well as insurrection in the Niger Delta region with a repeated call for autonomy and/or domestic control of oil resource (Oyefusi, 2007). Subsequently from 2000 when civilian government got hold in Nigeria, the country has faced conflict in the Niger Delta around control of oil fields besides oil wealth (Howell et al, 2020).

Guinea have had governance challenges over the years leading to widespread violence and political unrest that caused several deaths and governance infractions in the country. These political unrests and violence though cannot be considered as war but have had negative effects on governance systems in a country that has witnessed several coups and counter-coups over the years. Guinea also had to deal with the inheritance of regional conflict in the Manor River Basin. The government of Guinea attained its retribution, in turn, by backing the LURD rebels who used Guinea to throw their strikes on Liberia (Silberfein & Conteh, 2006).

Niger is faced with huge challenge of spillover of insurgency by Boku-Haram and extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in her neighbouring countries of Nigeria and Mali. Burkina Faso and Mali are still struggling with huge insecurity and instability caused by jihadist

groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Burkina Faso and Tuareg separatist in Mali. Violent as well as extremist activities in the Sahel region are most frequent in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso (Raga, Lemma & Keane, 2023). The Sahel is a region known for terrorist activities besides, these countries of the Sahel region in West Africa, Mali, Niger as well as Burkina Faso have had pouches of terrorist activities previously before the present Islamist-attributed terrorist (Debrah, 2021).

Over the years, the Western Sahel has become the focal point of an awfully fastly rising Islamist-led insurgency (Cincotta & Smith, 2021). Current conflicts in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, including northern Nigeria are statistically probable to endure, at certain level, in 2040-2045 (Cincotta & Smith, 2021). Today, with the existing armed conflict in the Sahel region causing thousands of displaced people, the condition seems more worrying than ever before (Alou, 2022).

Economic Decline

The Sahel regional economies are solidly engrained in agriculture, plus animal husbandry (Sissoko et al, 2011). Poverty and economic hitches, in this region, can be conferred at the socio-political as well as geographical levels (Alou, 2022). However, the list of the poorest countries in the world currently is surpassed by countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Sule, 2016). In addition, the deficiency of economic opportunities, public goods as well as services, plus weakened institutions in countries, has established an opening for the expansion of jihadist intrusion (Raga, Lemma & Keane, 2023).

Consequently, the slowdown of the world economy and the challenges associated with globalization as well as the socio-economic posture towards globalization by anti-globalists such as Donald J. Trump, the current 45th and 47th President of the United States of America is having huge negative rippling effects on the economies of poor countries in the Global South. The period Jan-June of 2008 witnessed the economies struggling with high global prices of crucial commodities whereas the period July-Dec 2008 saw extraordinary financial distress in the key economies, which occasioned highly unsettling capital outflows from developing markets trailed by global slowdown of uncommon severity as well as speed (Bhaskaran, 2009). For example, there has been a traditionally major global shift in production and manufacturing from global North to global South, changing the economic geography of the world (Gray & Gills, 2016). The contentious thesis of delinking, or the world economy disconnecting from the American economy and reconnecting to developing economies, obtains rising validation (Pieterse, 2012).

Until recently, despite its massive size and population, West Africa's economy and strategic position was of little interest to the international community (Sahel & West Africa Club, 2009) it was mostly known for its natural disasters, internal conflicts and poverty. Conflicts in west Africa and the Sahel region has resulted to state fragility in most of these countries which obviously affects economic development. State fragility plays an important part in the conversation surrounding economic development (Ndah, 2025), the Sahel region demonstrates various characteristics linked with fragility, inducing authors to define it as facing a fragility predicament. Inapt institutions are a key reason of state fragility (Kaplan, 2008),.

Weak Institutions

Historians have argued that wars can generate large impacts on both national and local institutions (Bellows & Miguel, 2009). Weak institutional environments are therefore productive ground for the development of gaps between policies on paper as well as policies in practice that are tough to remedy, even by reform-inclined governments (as Traps, nd.). Some of these institutional structures are non-existent or weak or poorly devised and implemented in less developed countries (Bardhan, 2000).

In several third world countries, the rule of law as well as the protection of property rights is so far emergent, and politicians and bureaucrats misuse their powers. Various economists have lately argued that it is weak institutional structures that are the central causes of underdevelopment for the reason that the character of institutions is the factor of all the proximate causes of development such as investment, education, trade and so forth (Centre for Elites, nd) . In a lot of third world countries the operation of both the state as well as the market is sidestepped by pervasive politicians and government officials (Rahman, 2010).

The United States and other governments have frequently asserted that threats to international peace and security often come from the world's weakest states (Rice & Patrick, 2008). Failed states in Liberia as well as Somalia have now affected millions of people to suffer severely, besides there is every suggestion that the major government system is failing in other African countries (Herbst, 1996). Weak states face material and structural disadvantages that influence their behaviour in regional and international politics (Hasan, 2024). Additionally, weaker states tend to adopt standards that favour the powerful, expecting for imminent protection. Although states do provide services, the service delivery approach of states is deceptive for badly performing developing countries undertaking reform (Khan, 2004) the critical aspect of state failure has been the lack of sufficient political as well as institutional capacity in developing countries to help hasten a robust transformation. Numerous development efforts have failed for the reason that countries lack institutions with the capacity to maintain their economic policies (Graham, 2002). Good institutions definitely matter; besides bad institutions can echo the death warrant of development even in promising environments (Sachs, 2003).

Loss of Domestic and International Legitimacy

Legitimacy offers an important key to comprehending the rigidities in the current global order (Clark, 2003). Notwithstanding International Relations scholars' exceptional attention in questions of legitimacy, minor consideration has been given to the notion of international crises of legitimacy (Reus-Smit, 2007). Khan argued that domestic legitimacy is a vital aspect that must be considered to elucidate security concerns of states (Khan, 2009). However, it is also argued that the exploration for legitimacy by state leaders gives a situation in which international conflict happen (Khan, 2009).

For a long time, the international system of states was unable to cope with the interdependence of societies and the increase of unintentional effects of economic or social activities (Zürn, 2004). Colonial legacies have ingrained dictatorial governance as well as economic abuse, leading to in long-term unease (Haruna, 2024). After a quarter of a century of political freedom it is apparent that prevalent legitimacy centered on national self-

determination is a deceptive classification of international legitimacy in areas of the developing countries as well as undoubtedly in sub-Saharan Africa (Jackson, 1986).

Loss of Sovereignty as a Result of Outside Involvement with Foreign Interest

The notion of sovereignty, though formally universal, is executed with relativism (de Paula, 2025). Although Senegal has access to the Atlantic Ocean, Mali, Burkina Faso as well as Niger are non-coastal, very deprived, and share the identical colonial history, that of the French majestic misrule (Alou, 2022). France's empire was superimposed upon the existing dynamics in the agropastoral meeting ground of the desert edge (Cooper, 2018). Notwithstanding independence, neo-colonial impacts continue, grinding down sovereignty as well as upsurging dependency, mainly from France (Haruna, 2024), French interfering in domestic matters, military presence, besides resource abuse increase anti-French views plus volatility, making them more prone to overthrows.

Some researchers have argued that, even though external factors influenced the struggles in Africa, the dilemma of underdevelopment in Africa is fundamentally internal (Sule, 2016), such internal factors comprise issues of bad leadership besides corruption, political instability, governance, terrorism and violent conflicts. More hypothetically, researchers have justified concentrating on the bigger powers for the reason that they exercise more influence on the global system, then there is need to comprehend their behavior to understand the world in general (Snidal et al., 2024).

States cannot be required to run from the outside (Kaplan, 2008), global action should be primarily about enabling domestic processes, about maximizing local capacities, in addition to complementing domestic actions, with the intention that local people can form governance arrangements suitable to their environments. What is more striking with the involvement of foreign interests in most countries in the global south is the extent to which the national laws or rules are compromised during civil conflicts by foreign agents or partners that intervenes to usher in peace for political stability in these countries. Foreign armies on a home country's land, peace operations can contest the sovereignty of a state as well as are under specific pressure to be authenticated (Sabrow, 2017).

Effective Strategies for Restoring Failed States with Special Emphasis on Countries in West Africa and the Sahel Region

The consequences of the terrorist attacks on the US on September 11, 2001 the Western world has become ever more worried with 'failed states' in the global south (Bøås & Jennings, 2019). Evidently, one major factor responsible for failed states in West Africa and the Sahel region in the global south has been political instability, arm conflict, insurgency and to a large extent terrorism and a fight to eliminate or better still limit these factor will be laudable to restore these failed states. Since 2002, the United States has expended over a billion dollars in the Sahara-Sahel, to strategies as well as launch security, counterterrorism plus institution-building programmes, as the Sahel is regarded as the second African front of the War on Terror (Baldaro, 2017). Whether in the aftermath of internal conflict or foreign military involvement, the reform of public institutions in failed states has become a vital priority of the international community (Englebert & Tull, 2008).

The international community should pay attention much more evenly on strengthening the developing state as well as improving its domestic legitimacy, instead of advancing democracy (François & Sud, 2006). The international community should develop methods of 'neo-trust territory' so as to get involved to build states (Di John, 2010). Nurturing self-sufficing, domestically driven governing structures that is, linking the state with citizens is the only approach to kickstart development in crumbling state (Kaplan, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discourse on state failure underscores the critical importance of governance, institutional strength, and equitable socio-economic development in shaping the trajectory of nations, particularly within the global south. The analysis reveals that while countries in the global north have largely succeeded in prioritizing public service, combating corruption, and fostering trust in institutions, many states in West Africa and the Sahel remain vulnerable to systemic challenges such as entrenched corruption, prolonged conflicts, economic decline, and weakened legitimacy. These conditions perpetuate cycles of instability and poverty, often exacerbated by external interference and predatory leadership. However, the path to restoration lies in strengthening institutions, promoting transparency, ensuring inclusive development, and rebuilding public trust strategies that, if effectively implemented, can gradually reverse the decline and set these states on a sustainable course toward stability and progress.

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