
A SYSTEMS-LEVEL ATLAS

AFRICA

VOLUME III

Modern States and Political Architectures

Post-Colonial State Formation · The African Union, AfCFTA & the
Regional Blocs · Conflict Systems & Security Landscapes · Law,
Governance & Institutional Capacity

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About This Volume

AFRICA: AN ENCYCLOPEDIC REFERENCE — 2026 EDITION

Volume III of an eight-volume reference work compiled and edited by Marie-Soleil Seshat Landry and published by Landry Industries Inc. under the Marie Landry's Spy Shop imprint, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada.

Volumes I and II established the continent's physical platform and its deep human history, ending with the colonial rupture. **Volume III takes up the modern state:** how Africa's fifty-odd countries were formed out of the colonial partition, the continental and regional institutions they have built (and, in one live case, are dismantling), the conflict systems that strain them, and the uneven capacity of their governing institutions. More than any earlier volume, this one concerns the present moment — and the present moment in African politics is unusually turbulent.

A NOTE ON CURRENCY AND CITATION INTEGRITY

This volume is heavily current-events dependent, and political facts change quickly. Every figure here — displacement totals, ratification counts, conflict casualties, governance scores — was verified against an identifiable public source at the time of writing (June 2026) and is keyed to the numbered *References*. Readers consulting this volume later should treat fast-moving conflict and institutional data as a snapshot and re-verify against the cited primary sources. As throughout the series, no source text is reproduced verbatim; contested figures (war death tolls above all) are given as the reported ranges rather than as single certainties.

Series architecture:

I — FOUNDATIONS · II — CIVILIZATION LAYERS & HISTORICAL SYSTEMS (*PUBLISHED*)

III — MODERN STATES AND POLITICAL ARCHITECTURES (*THIS INSTALLMENT*)

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VOLUME THREE

Modern States and Political Architectures

Dozens of nations born in a single generation, inheriting borders they did not draw; a continental union and a single market built atop them; and, cutting against the integrationist grain, a bloc fracturing in real time amid the worst security crisis in decades. This volume maps the African state as it actually functions in 2026.

1. Post-Colonial State Formation
2. Regional Blocs and Continental Governance
3. Conflict Systems and Security Landscapes
4. Law, Governance, and Institutional Capacity

CHAPTER NINE

Post-Colonial State Formation

The modern African state was born in a rush. Within roughly two decades, dozens of new nations emerged from the colonial partition — inheriting borders they had not drawn, bureaucracies built to extract, and economies pointed outward toward former metropolises.

Decolonisation reshaped the political map of the continent faster than almost any comparable transformation in modern history. At the close of 1950, only a handful of African states were independent — Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and white-minority-ruled South Africa. A decade later the continent was unrecognisable, and the institutions, borders, and internal tensions established in that compressed founding period still define African politics today.

The Independence Waves (1950s-1970s)

Ghana's independence in 1957 made it the first sub-Saharan colony to break free, and the floodgates opened three years later. 1960 is remembered as the "Year of Africa": seventeen countries gained independence in that single year — fourteen from France, two from Britain, and one (the Congo) from Belgium — bringing the number of free African states to roughly twenty-seven by year's end.^{[1][2]} One historian captures the resonance precisely: Africans regard 1960 much as Americans regard 1776.^[3] Most of the continent was independent by the end of the 1970s; later additions came through distinct routes — Zimbabwe (1980), Namibia (1990), Eritrea (1993), and majority rule in South Africa (1994). The newest state of all is South Sudan, which seceded from Sudan in 2011 to become the continent's fifty-fourth recognised country.^{[1][3]}

Military Regimes and Cold War Proxy Structures

Independence rarely delivered stable democracy. Within years, coups proliferated across the continent, and one-party states became the norm as founding leaders consolidated power. Africa also became a theatre of the Cold War, with the superpowers backing rival regimes and insurgencies. The Congo is the archetype: after independence in 1960 the country fell into crisis, and Colonel Joseph Mobutu seized power with covert American support intended to block Soviet influence.^[3] Similar proxy dynamics played out in Angola, the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere, militarising politics and propping up client governments whose legitimacy rested on external patronage rather than popular consent.

Nation-Building versus Ethnic Federalism

Because colonial borders had been drawn without regard to the peoples they enclosed (Volume II, Chapter 8), the new states faced a foundational problem: how to forge single nations from populations that shared no common language, history, or prior political unit. Different states answered differently. Many pursued centralised, often single-party “nation-building,” suppressing sub-national identities in the name of unity. Others experimented with federalism organised around ethnic or regional lines — Nigeria most prominently, and later Ethiopia, whose constitution made ethnicity the basis of its federal structure. The tension between centralisation and accommodation of diversity remains unresolved and underlies many of the conflicts examined in Chapter 11.

The Administrative Inheritance

Beneath the new flags, much continued unchanged. The post-colonial state inherited the colonial administrative apparatus, European-derived legal codes, colonial languages as the language of government, and — most consequentially — an economic structure engineered for export to the former metropole rather than for internal development or intra-African exchange. Independence transferred sovereignty without transforming these inherited structures, and the gap between formal political freedom and continued structural dependency is the central tension that the economic volume (Volume IV) takes up in detail. The work of building genuinely independent states, in other words, did not end in 1960; in important respects it had only begun.

CHAPTER TEN

Regional Blocs and Continental Governance

Africa has bet heavily on integration — a continental union, the world's largest single market, and a dense web of regional blocs. Yet at the very moment that bet is being scaled up, one of its oldest pieces is being torn apart.

Continental and regional integration has been a defining ambition of post-colonial Africa, rooted in the pan-African idea that unity could deliver the economic and political weight that individual states lack. That ambition is institutionalised today in the African Union, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and a set of regional economic communities — an architecture now being tested by both its greatest project and its sharpest crisis.

The African Union

The African Union, established in 2002 as the successor to the Organisation of African Unity (founded 1963), is the continent's overarching political body, with 55 member states and headquarters in Addis Ababa. Its long-term vision is set out in Agenda 2063, a fifty-year development blueprint adopted to guide the continent toward integration and prosperity.^{[4][6]} The AU maintains a peace-and-security architecture and has adopted the practice of suspending member states whose governments seize power by coup. Its limitations are equally real: weak enforcement powers, heavy dependence on external funding, and a recurring gap between continental declarations and national action.

The African Continental Free Trade Area

The flagship project of Agenda 2063 is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Signed in Kigali in March 2018, it entered into force in May 2019, and trading under its regime formally commenced on 1 January 2021.^[4] By number of participating countries it is the largest free-trade area in the world, linking some 1.3 billion people with a combined GDP estimated at around 3 to 3.4 trillion US dollars.^{[6][7]} The agreement targets the elimination of tariffs on 90 percent of goods, rising to at least 97 percent over time, alongside protocols on services, investment, and digital trade.^[4]

AFCTA: FROM AMBITION TO EXECUTION

- 54 of the African Union's 55 members have signed the agreement; Eritrea is the lone holdout.^[5]
- As of January 2026, 49 of 54 members (roughly 90 percent) had deposited instruments of ratification.^[6]
- A Guided Trade Initiative, begun in 2022, has piloted real trade among a growing set of members to test the system in practice.^[5]
- Five years in, analysts increasingly frame the central challenge as one of *execution* — customs, infrastructure, and rules-of-origin implementation — rather than political ambition.^[6]

The Regional Economic Communities

Beneath the continental level sit the regional economic communities, recognised as the building blocks of African integration: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, founded 1975), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Horn, among others. These blocs vary widely in cohesion and capacity, and their overlapping memberships have long complicated the integration agenda.

The ECOWAS-Sahel Rupture

The most consequential development in African regional governance in a generation is unfolding in West Africa. Following a wave of military coups — Mali (2020 and 2021), Burkina Faso (twice in 2022), and Niger (July 2023) — the three Sahelian juntas formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in September 2023, upgrading it to a confederation in July 2024.^{[9][10]} On 29 January 2025, after a year-long standoff, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger formally withdrew from ECOWAS — the most significant crisis in West African regional integration since ECOWAS was founded in 1975.^[8]

The break was triggered above all by ECOWAS's heavy-handed response to the 2023 Niger coup — sweeping sanctions and the threat of military intervention — which the juntas experienced as both ineffective and an affront to their sovereignty, compounded by long-standing grievances over the CFA franc and perceived French influence within the bloc, and by ECOWAS's failure to help them counter jihadist insurgency.^{[8][10]} The AES has stood up a joint 5,000-strong military force and, in a pointed assertion of independence, begun issuing its own biometric identity documents to replace ECOWAS passports.^{[10][11]} The episode is a striking counter-current: even as the AfCFTA pools sovereignty continent-wide, the Sahel states have chosen issue-based security alignment over geographic eco-

conomic integration — a reminder that Africa's integrationist trajectory is contested, not inevitable.^[8]

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Conflict Systems and Security Landscapes

Africa's conflicts are not random violence but systems — driven by contested resources, weak state reach, and transnational insurgent networks. Several of them are, in 2026, at their most destructive in a generation.

The continent's security landscape is best read structurally. Wars cluster where valuable resources meet weak institutions; insurgencies spread along ungoverned borderlands; and external actors amplify local conflicts. Two theatres — eastern Congo and the Sahel — dominate the present picture, alongside the catastrophe in Sudan examined throughout this volume.

Resource-Linked Conflicts and Eastern Congo

The link between mineral wealth and violence — the “resource curse” — runs throughout African conflict, from Niger Delta oil to the diamonds that once funded wars in Sierra Leone and Angola. Its paradigm case today is the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the mineral-rich Kivu provinces have drawn in regional armies and proxy militias for three decades. The M23 rebellion — part of the Alliance Fleuve Congo and, according to UN experts, backed by thousands of Rwandan troops with de facto control over the group (a charge Kigali denies) — escalated dramatically in early 2025.^{[19][17]} In January 2025 M23 seized Goma, the North Kivu capital of around two million people, followed weeks later by Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, and by Uvira in December; the rebels established parallel administrations in the territory they hold.^{[18][17]}

EASTERN DRC: CONFLICT AND FRAGILE DIPLOMACY

- M23 first rebelled in 2012 and was reactivated by Rwanda around 2022; UN experts report thousands of Rwandan soldiers operating in the DRC.^[19]
- A US-mediated peace agreement between the DRC and Rwanda was initialled in June 2025 and signed by both heads of state in December 2025.^[17]
- A parallel, Qatar-mediated Doha framework addresses the M23 rebellion directly; both tracks remain fragile amid continued fighting.^{[18][17]}
- In March 2026 the United States sanctioned the Rwanda Defence Force for violations of the accords.^[20]
- The UN Security Council extended the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission to December 2026 as fighting persisted.^[18]

The Sahel: Global Epicentre of Terrorism

The Sahel has become the deadliest theatre of terrorism on Earth. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index, the region accounted for roughly 19 percent of terrorist attacks worldwide but 51 percent of all terrorism-related deaths in 2024, up from 48 percent the year before, with Burkina Faso the single most affected country for a second consecutive year.^[21] Pentagon-backed research from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies counted nearly 24,000 terrorism-related fatalities across Africa in 2025, a 24 percent rise, with the Sahel alone accounting for almost 9,826.^[22] The principal armed groups are the al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM — assessed as among the deadliest terrorist organisations in the world — and the Islamic State’s Sahel Province (formerly ISGS), alongside ISWAP and Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin.^[23]

This violence is tightly bound to the political rupture of Chapter 10. The juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger justified their coups partly by their predecessors’ failure to contain the insurgency; yet the subsequent withdrawal of French and UN forces and a pivot toward Russian military partners coincided with rising, not falling, violence, which is now spilling into coastal states such as Benin and Togo.^{[23][21]} The UN reports that extremist violence has shuttered more than 14,800 schools and 900 health facilities across the region.^[23]

Maritime Piracy and Chokepoints

Africa’s waters frame two strategic maritime theatres. In the Gulf of Guinea — historically linked to Niger Delta oil and onshore insurgency — piracy has fallen sharply, from 84 incidents in 2020 to around 21 in 2025, thanks to the Nigerian Navy’s Deep Blue programme and coordinated regional and international patrols; yet the gulf still accounts for

the large majority of the world's crew kidnappings.^{[24][25]} Off the Horn, Somali piracy — long suppressed by naval deterrence — showed renewed reach in 2023–2025 amid the turmoil in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, underscoring the strategic sensitivity of the Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint through which much global trade passes.^[24]

Peacekeeping in Retreat

The era of large UN stabilisation missions in Africa is closing. The MINUSMA mission departed Mali at the junta's insistence at the end of 2023, and MONUSCO in the DRC is on a drawdown trajectory even as its mandate was extended to December 2026 in response to the M23 crisis.^[18] The vacuum is being filled unevenly — by regional arrangements such as the AES joint force, by external security partners including Russian formations, and by ad hoc coalitions — raising hard questions, returned to in Volume VII, about who provides security in Africa, and on what terms.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Law, Governance, and Institutional Capacity

Beneath constitutions and elections lies the harder question of capacity: whether states can actually deliver justice, services, and accountability. The continental scorecard is genuinely mixed — with real development gains undercut by a decade of declining security and shrinking democratic space.

Governance in Africa resists single-sentence summary. The continent contains both some of the world's better-governed small states and some of its most fragile, and the aggregate trend conceals sharply divergent national trajectories. What the best available measures agree on is a bifurcation: progress in human and economic foundations, set against deterioration in security and democratic participation.

Legal Pluralism

Most African legal systems are plural by design. Inherited statutory law — built on European civil-law or common-law foundations (Volume II, Chapter 8) — operates alongside customary law and, in many states, religious law, particularly in matters of family, inheritance, and land. This layering can extend justice into communities the formal system never reaches, but it also produces jurisdictional conflict and uneven rights protection, and the integration of customary and statutory systems remains an unresolved governance challenge across much of the continent.

Corruption as a Structural Problem

By the most widely used global measure, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest-scoring region in the world. It averaged 33 out of 100 in 2024 — with 90 percent of countries scoring below 50 — and slipped to an average of 32 in the 2025 index, in which only four of the region's 49 countries scored above 50.^{[26][27]} The continent's strongest performers, such as Seychelles, Botswana, and Cabo Verde, score respectably, while conflict-ravaged states including Somalia and South Sudan rank among the most corrupt anywhere.^[27] Crucially, the problem is best understood as structural rather than individual: it reflects state capture, patronage networks, and weak accountability institutions, and Transparency International explicitly links it to weak democracy and armed conflict.^[27]

Democratic Trajectories and the Governance Scorecard

The most authoritative African-led measure of governance, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), assembles 322 variables across four categories for all 54 countries. Its 2024 edition, covering the decade 2014–2023, found that overall continental governance progress stalled and effectively halted in 2022: substantial gains in human and economic development were undercut by deterioration in the security and democratic landscape.^[28] Every security-and-rule-of-law sub-category declined over the decade, and more than 77 percent of Africa's population now lives in a country where security and participation are worse than they were in 2014.^[28]

A BIFURCATED DECADE (IBRAHIM INDEX, 2014–2023)

- Overall continental governance was essentially flat — a score near 49 out of 100 in 2023, barely changed over the decade — as gains and losses cancelled out.^[28]
- Human development and economic foundations improved; security, rule of law, and democratic participation declined.^[28]
- The junta-led states that left ECOWAS — Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger — saw security deteriorate roughly five times faster than in countries that remained in the bloc.^[29]
- Trajectories diverge sharply: alongside the decliners, a set of countries — among them Seychelles, Côte d'Ivoire, and The Gambia — posted real, sustained governance gains.^[28]

Digital Governance

One area of genuine forward momentum is the digitisation of the state. Across the continent, governments are rolling out biometric identity systems, e-government services, and digital public infrastructure — building on the mobile-first character of African economies examined in Volume VI. The promise is leapfrogging: skipping legacy bureaucratic systems to deliver services and identity at scale. The constraints are real too — gaps in connectivity, data capacity, and data protection — and the same digital tools that improve service delivery can also extend state surveillance.

The institutional story of modern Africa is therefore neither the failure caricatured abroad nor an unqualified success. It is a bifurcation: measurable advances in what states deliver in health, education, and economic opportunity, set against a decade-long erosion of security and democratic space that has left the aggregate governance trend essentially flat. Which of those vectors prevails — development momentum or democratic and security decline — is among the central questions carried forward into the economic, geopolitical, and future-trajectory volumes that follow.

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END OF VOLUME III — MODERN STATES AND POLITICAL ARCHITECTURES

Volume IV — *Economic and Resource Systems* — continues the reference in the next installment.