

State Sovereignty Decline and the Emergence of Public Sovereignty in Africa: Governance, Democracy, and Economic Implications

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Abstract

The erosion of state sovereignty and the concurrent rise of public sovereignty across Africa have fundamentally reshaped governance, democratic processes, and international relations on the continent. This study examined how diminishing state sovereignty affects political stability, how emerging public sovereignty influences international relations, and whether tensions between these dual sovereignties impact Africa's diplomatic engagements. Guided by Globalization and Sovereignty Theory and Public Sovereignty Theory, the research employed a mixed-methods design comprising quantitative surveys with 300 respondents and qualitative interviews with 20 political analysts, civil society leaders, and activists. Findings revealed that state sovereignty erosion undermines governance effectiveness and political stability, while public sovereignty advances democratic reforms yet simultaneously generates instability through heightened popular expectations. The friction between these sovereignty forms diminishes Africa's diplomatic leverage and compromises continental cohesion in international negotiations. The study concludes that achieving equilibrium between state authority and popular participation is essential for enhancing political stability and strengthening Africa's global positioning. Recommendations emphasize reducing foreign dependency, institutionalizing inclusive democratic processes, and adopting diplomatic frameworks that reconcile state and public sovereignty imperatives.

Keywords: *State sovereignty, Public sovereignty, African governance, Democratic reforms, International relations, Political stability*

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Background to the Study

The spread of the erosion of state sovereignty and the emergence of public sovereignty in Africa have turned into the key problems influencing the political model within the continent. African states have historically had difficulties in claiming their sovereignty, which is based on the colonial legacies that they had left behind and left many countries with weak institutions and weak governmental structures (Abegunde, 2021). Over the decades since independence, most African states have strived to ensure the consolidation of their sovereignty, but external and internal forces have continuously sabotaged them (Akinyetun, 2022). This has eroded the power of the state to an even greater extent due to globalization, international institutions, and the rise of the power of multinational corporations especially in the areas of economic policy, political independence and governance (Abiakam, 2025).

The pressures that threaten the sovereignty of states are not external only. The traditional power structures have been subjected to pressure by internal processes including the need to be more politically engaged, social justice and democratization reforms (Bennett and Kneuer, 2024). The increasing political engagement and increased political activity of the African citizens have increased the demand of public sovereignty in which the authority of the people prevails over the state (Gerenge, 2023). This has been more pronounced in nations experiencing political transitions in which the general masses have risen up against the government, in most cases led by youth and civil society, compelling the government to question its powers and legitimacy (Anani, 2023). In other instances, these movements have led to great political transformations, like the overthrow of long-established regimes, and in others, the tension between the population and the state is still escalating (Mahlangu, 2025).

African context in particular presents a complex balance of state sovereignty versus public sovereignty since most of the countries are yet to struggle with the task of establishing democratic institutions and political stability in their countries (Keng, 2025). Military coups, authoritarian rule and political instability have been characteristic of the non-consenting of state sovereignty in some countries such as Sudan (Michaelsen & Thumfart, 2023), whereas in others, such as South Africa and Kenya, the developing public sovereignty has become an influential tool of democratic change (Kasera, 2025). This conflict has the effect of bringing about intricate governance questions, whereby the power of the state to ensure that the state, its economy, and its political procedures remain under its control is oftentimes challenged by a more vocal and engaged citizenry (Kreuder-Sonnen & Rittberger, 2022).

This change in sovereignty has also affected international relations as well as the position of African nations in the international arena. As Africa tries to find its own way in the international system, the growing significance of the concept of public sovereignty makes it more complex to interact with international organizations and foreign states (Bamford, 2024). In most instances, global economic integration, peacekeeping interventions, and international legal systems have burdened the sovereignty of the African states because they are obliged to weigh the interests of the nation against the international duties (Khan et al., 2022). Ultimately, the erosion of state sovereignty and the rise of public sovereignty in Africa present both challenges and opportunities for the continent's future. Although the process of

increasing the strength of citizens by participating in democracy could lead to a possible step of greater accountability and transparency, the degradation of state institutions is a threat to political stability and the rise of the economy (Mahlangu, 2025). The interactions among these dynamics and how African countries can avoid being swept up in this changing environment will be essential to the future of politics in the continent and its position in the international system (Lehuedé, 2024).

Problem Statement

The decrease in state sovereignty and emergence of public sovereignty in the African continent have now become problematic, transforming the political landscape of the continent, and presenting both a tremendous challenge to the governance, democracy, and international relations. Even though state sovereignty has traditionally been one of the foundations of national sovereignty, the pressures of globalization, economic globalization and domestic requirements of political participation have been eroding the authority of the state throughout the continent. The realm of state sovereignty and public sovereignty is constantly being put into contest in most African states and Nigeria is not an exception, as a result, challenges of governance arise and challenge the stability and legitimacy of states.

On the outside, the loss of state control in the African states is spearheaded by growing reliance on the international communities, foreign aid and impact of the multinational corporations. The presence of oil sector in Nigeria, dominated by multinational corporations has in Nigeria resulted in large implications to the capacity of the state to exercise control over its natural resources. The Nigerian government has failed to exert total control of the oil industry since foreign companies have significant powers on local economies and politics. This weakens the state in making its own decisions concerning its natural resources (Mahlangu, 2025). Also, the international financial institutions like IMF and World Bank have forced structural adjustment programs that restrict the choices of policy available to the Nigerian government, especially the fiscal policies and economic reforms (Kasera et al., 2024). All these external pressures also help in undermining the sovereignty of states in Nigeria in that the government cannot operate in the best interest of its people since it is limited by international interest.

Domestically, the emergence of the public sovereignty in the African nations is informed by the increasing need to hold political decisions accountable, transparent, and inclusive. Public sovereignty has been exhibited in Nigeria through its citizens movements and popular protests that demand that corruption be stopped and a more democratic political system is instituted. The protests that shook Nigeria in the year 2020 under the banner of the hashtag EndSARS were inspired by the need of the Nigerian youth to end police brutality, which led to the demonstration by millions of Nigerians endangering the authority of the government and also questioning its legitimacy (Anani, 2023). These demonstrations manifested the developing feeling of social sovereignty, in which citizens were resolute to keep the government responsible. Likewise, in Ethiopia, the demonstrations against governmental policies led to drastic political changes, which demonstrates the growing strength of citizen sovereignty in shaping the policies of the state (Gerenge, 2023).

Nonetheless, this movement towards societal sovereignty in most African nations, Nigeria among them, did not go without any problems. The increasing power of civil society and the call of the people to democracy is in conflict with the state sovereignty regularly resulting in a political destabilization and a dictatorial reaction of the government. In Uganda, the government of President Yoweri Museveni has endured civil unrest and demonstrations, with the opposition leaders accusing government of election fraud and oppression (Bennett and Kneuer, 2024). This friction between the citizens need to have political reform, and the government refusal to have change has culminated in violent suppressions of protests, and this explains difficulties that African governments face in balancing state power and the demands of the people.

The loss of state sovereignty is also directly connected to the absence of powerful political institutions in most of the African states. The ineffectiveness of state institutions in dealing with ethnic division and political unrest in South Sudan has resulted in a weak government that is incapable of enabling sovereignty over the land (Mahlangu, 2025). Likewise, the issue of governance in Nigeria is complicated by poor institutions, corruption, and political battles that, together, have led to the loss of state sovereignty and the emergence of public demands to change the existing state (Keng, 2025).

Finally, loss of state sovereignty and the emergence of public sovereignty is a major issue to African governance. Although the need to have more democratic participation and accountability is central to the development of the continent, there is the increasing tension between the state power and the people that can be disruptive to already weak political systems. The tension between state sovereignty and the public sovereignty in such nations as Nigeria has deep-seated impacts on the stability of the country, its democratic development, and its ties with other states (Kreuder-Sonnen and Rittberger, 2022). In order to cope with these issues, African governments need to establish a means of balancing the sovereignty of the state and the growing calls of the people to participate and be held accountable by their leaders and ensure that the state and the people can co-exist in a manner that facilitates political stability, democratic governance, and sustainable development throughout the continent (Bamford, 2024; Yilmaz and Morieson, 2024).

Research Questions

1. How does the erosion of state sovereignty in African countries affect political stability and governance?
2. To what extent has the rise of public sovereignty influenced democratic reforms and political change in African nations?
3. What are the implications of the conflict between state sovereignty and public sovereignty for international relations in Africa?

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to examine Erosion of State Sovereignty and the Rise of Public Sovereignty in Africa: Implications for Governance, Democracy, and International Relations. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the impact of the erosion of state sovereignty in African countries on political stability and governance.
2. To assess the influence of the rise of public sovereignty on democratic reforms and political changes in African nations.
3. To explore the implications of the conflict between state sovereignty and public sovereignty on international relations in Africa.

Hypotheses

1. The erosion of state sovereignty in African countries negatively impacts political stability and governance.
2. The rise of public sovereignty in African nations has significantly influenced democratic reforms and political changes.
3. The conflict between state sovereignty and public sovereignty has a detrimental effect on international relations in Africa.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

The ideas of state sovereignty and public sovereignty form the foundation of explaining the politics in Africa particularly in the face of the challenges of globalization, democratization, and the dynamic political environment. These ideas are the basis of studying the weakening of state power and the growing strength of popular movements and the consequences that it has on the leadership, democracy and international relations of African nations. State Sovereignty is a concept that describes the right of a state to act on its own without interference (Bamford, 2024). It is an inherent concept with international law, which gives the state the final authority over the land, people, and materials. The classical concept of sovereignty as a state is considered to be one of the foundations of political autonomy, where the governments have the right to make decisions, touching internal affairs, such as lawmaking, economic policy, and foreign relations (Kasera, 2025). Extraction by the international organizations, multinational corporations and foreign aid have also weakened state sovereignty in Africa as most of these interventions usually impose measures that weaken autonomy of the nations (Abiakam, 2025). As an example, the policies that many African governments have imposed on themselves because of economic policies set by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have curtailed the policy space that these governments can use to effectively address their national challenges (Bamford, 2024).

Instead, Public Sovereignty is a term, which accentuates the influence of the people in determining the political fate of a country (Michaelsen & Thumfart, 2023). It is an indication of increasing strength of citizens to affect governance by participating in democracy, protest movements and civil actions of the societies. Public sovereignty dictates that the legitimacy of state power is based on will of people which in most cases is achieved by voting, civil disobedience and public demonstrations (Gerenge, 2023). The concept has become popular in Africa where citizens are more demanding accountability, transparency, and inclusion in government. Public sovereignty is also manifested in the call of the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria, when millions of citizens organized to protest police brutality and demanded

changes in the police force and increased political responsibility of the government (Anani, 2023).

Erosion of State Sovereignty describes the decline or decline of the power of the state to gain control over both its internal and external policies (Michaelsen and Thumfart, 2023). This is so because of different internal and external forces such as globalization, foreign interventions, and increasing influence of non-state actors. In most countries in Africa, a reduction in the capacity of the government to uphold political stability, combat corruption, or effectively oversee the utilization of the resources of the populace has been characterized by the erosion of state sovereignty (Keng, 2025). The inability to manage the state resources, especially the exploitation by international businesses is another factor that strengthens the destabilization of state power (Mahlangu, 2025).

The Rise of Public Sovereignty is also a direct answer to the loss of state sovereignty (Gerenge, 2023). Governments are no longer fulfilling the demands of their citizens, thus, the roles that public movements and civil society organizations play in championing change are on the rise. Public sovereignty highlights how the public is increasingly influencing the policies of the government by protesting, holding social movements, and voting (Bennett and Kneuer, 2024). This is especially evident in African countries that underwent democratic transitions or revolts when people confront established political regimes and demand to be more involved and hold them more responsible (Michaelsen and Thumfart, 2023). As an illustration, in Sudan the emergence of the sovereignty of people was manifested in the situation in 2019 when the government was overthrown by the uprising that forced the then-president Omar al-Bashir to resign following months of protests that demanded democracy and the end of his dictatorial regime (Gerenge, 2023).

State Sovereignty and Public Sovereignty have been a dynamic entity in Africa. A weakened state sovereignty tends to increase the need to have public sovereignty that can fuel democratic changes as well as causing political instabilities and strains within the nation. Public sovereignty may also play a role in intensifying the processes of democracy, but it also poses difficulties when state interests in maintaining manipulation of the political and economic frameworks of the state come into conflict with the masses demands on the establishment of reform (Bennett and Kneuer, 2024). As an example, authoritarian reaction of the government to the demands of the populace to reform in Zimbabwe worsened political tensions, thus further undermining the sovereignty of the state and its capacity to interact with the international community (Mahlangu, 2025).

Lastly, the emergence of the public sovereignty and the decline of the state sovereignty carry profound consequences to the governance, democracy and international relations. Democratic backsliding has often been experienced in Africa as the weakening of state sovereignty has often been coupled with political inefficiency whereby governments do not deliver as expected by people and then people become discontent and demand political reform (Kneuer, 2023). In addition, the tension between sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of the state covers the international relations of the African nation as they attempt

to uphold the sovereignty when subjected to external pressure of international agencies, foreign states, and non-state actors (Khan et al., 2022). It is crucial to state that the key to the future of the African governance system is to strike a balance between state control and the increasing demands of citizens to participate and be held accountable (Lehuedé, 2024).

Empirical Studies

Dilution of state sovereignty and emergence of public sovereignty in Africa have emerged as critical issues of concern in the field of political science, especially in terms of the implication of their effect in governing, democracy, and international relations. These dynamics have been explored by a number of scholars who have given different points of view on the challenges and opportunities facing the African states and their citizens. This abstract presents the most important arguments and findings of five recent studies on this question as well as provides a comparative analysis of various scholarly perspectives.

The theme of the article published by Abegunde (2021) is the subject of Regional Cooperation and State Sovereignty. The paper discusses the influence of regional projects, especially the African Union (AU), on the sovereignty of the member states. The writer employs a mixed research design, where he incorporated qualitative interviews with African policymakers and secondary information of the reports of the African Union. The results of the study indicate that the role of the AU in promoting regional peace and stability has been very critical, but on the other hand has weakened the sovereignty of individual states. Abegunde asserts that the mandate of the AU to intervene in the internal affairs is usually very incompatible with national interests, which tends to provide a fine balance between collective security and state autonomy. The paper ends by offering a solution which entails a more decentralized form of operation in the AU so that states have more control over their domestic policies whilst enjoying the benefits of mutual cooperation.

In his article, Akinyetun (2022) presents the opposite analysis called The State of Democracy in Africa: Democratic Decline or Autocracy? This study looks into how autocratic rule has taken over in some African states and the effects that it has had in the degradation of state sovereignty. Akinyetun examines the data on the World Bank on the indicators of governance and democracy between 2000 and 2020 through the lens of a quantitative research design and applies the regression analysis to assess the dependence between the deterioration of democratic institutions and the loss of state sovereignty. The results point out that autocratic leaders in nations such as Uganda and Zimbabwe have continued to weaken the institutions of the state to amass power. According to Akinyetun, despite the fact that public sovereignty has been expressed through protests and uprisings, it is met with serious forms of repression by the authoritarian regimes. The research proposes the international assistance to the strengthening of democratic institutions in Africa, to advocate the greater involvement of civil society and the regional accountability systems.

Equally, Anani (2023) examines the connection between International Policy Coupe and State Sovereignty in the Francophone African regimes. The approach is qualitative, based on the case studies of the recent coups in such countries as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea.

According to Anani, the emergence of public sovereignty as was seen in mass protests and demand of democratic reforms has often resulted in coups. This has in turn undermined the sovereignty of the state since the military comes in to restore order. The results indicate that popular agitations have at times been successful in bringing down unpopular regimes, but in most cases their organizational ability is weak to sustain the stability resulting in military governance. Anani concludes that the loss of state sovereignty due to these coups makes it questionable about the future of democracy in the concerned countries and advises to adopt more solid systems of governance and international peacekeeping efforts to make the political transitions peaceful and democratic.

On the contrary, Bennett and Kneuer (2024) study the topic of Communication and Democratic Erosion: The Rise of Illiberal Public Spheres in Africa. The authors use qualitative content analysis of the media coverage and also quantitative survey data of more than 1,000 respondents in five African countries to address the issue of media and its influence on the formation of the public sovereignty. According to them, the illiberal regimes have effectively used media to impose dissent, reversing the public sovereignty towards the detriment of state sovereignty. The results are that with the growing salience of public sovereignty in the manifestation of citizen protests and social movements, authoritarian regimes have evolved to counter this in a way that controls the discourse of the people, thereby consolidating power. According to Bennett and Kneuer, the solution to this undermining of democratic values lies in international actors putting emphasis on advancing media independence and protecting democratic spaces.

In addition to that, Keng (2025) addresses the question of The Influence of International Credit Rating Agencies on State Sovereignty and Public Sovereignty. The research is based on a mixed-method approach, which examines the issue of international financial institutions and their influence on the formulation of state policy. Keng relies on secondary sources that are the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as well as interviews of economic policymakers in some African nations. The review shows that the international credit rating agencies tend to place significant pressure on the African governments to implement economic policies that place more emphasis on foreign debt repayment than welfare services at domestic levels. Keng concludes that this external pressure is a big blow to the sovereignty of states because the governments get more indebted and reliant on foreign capital. He advises African countries to seek other sources of funding and demand changes within the international financial system to have a greater leverage over the economic independence of their countries, and hence command the masses to shape the impacts of their policies.

The article by Faude and Karlsrud (2025) is devoted to the issue of Institutional Dynamics of Global Governance in Hard Times: Innovation or Decline? in their study. They apply a qualitative research design to understand the involvement of international organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union in intervening in crisis in Africa. They claim that although these organizations have tried to correct the vacuum created by the failure of African states sovereignty, they do not always help to correct the underlying causes of the instability

like bad governance and accountability. According to the findings by Faude and Karlsrud, (2025), global governance institutions are increasingly unwilling to interfere in African conflicts leaving African governments to manage conflicts alone. They say this has contributed to the further weakening of the state sovereignty as its people through mass movements will demand more accountability and transparency of their governments. The study ends by advising African countries to strive to empower their institutional structures to enable them handle crisis better and reassert greater influences in their political and economic process.

The growth of the gulf between democracy and its core arguments is the topic of a study by Kreuder-Sonnen and Rittberger (2022), the authors of the investigation into the loss of state sovereignty in African states. In this study, the researcher has used both quantitative and qualitative methods in which the researcher utilizes information on the indices of democracy and interviews with the policymakers in the continent. Kreuder-Sonnen and Rittberger suggest that increased contestation has emerged in the African states due to the emergence of public sovereignty as the citizens demand more say in the decision-making procedures. Nevertheless, they also determine that the loss of the sovereignty of the states, especially the weak democratic institutions, has rendered the response of the governments to the demands of the people challenging. Their work suggests, that when the state sovereignty weakens, public sovereignty can be repressed by including electoral fraud, authoritarianism, and limitations of the freedom of speech. The paper ends up giving a recommendation that it is important to strengthen democratic institutions as well as to remind African leaders to be more accountable as a way of ensuring that state sovereignty is not eroded further.

Similarly, Bamford (2024) in his work, "Democratic Legitimacy, Sovereignty, and International Taxation" is concerned with how the policies of the international tax erode the state sovereignty in African nations. Bamford adopts a mixed-methods approach by integrating both qualitative interviews with African tax officials as well as a quantitative study of taxation and governance data over the last 20 years. The research concludes that African governments are becoming more dependent on foreign investment and aid and this has contributed to the erosion of their power to handle independently, taxation policies. Sovereignty of the populace, in the sense of requesting improved public services and fair allocation of resources, is unsurprisingly put aside in favour of international agreements that serve the multinational corporations well. Bamford concludes by stating that the diminishing power of states in financial policies negates democratic legitimacy and recommends reforms to enable African states to have a greater control of their economic resources.

Unlike them, Michaelsen and Thumfart (2023) discuss the Digital Transnational Repression and State Sovereignty in their article, which is based on a case study method of researching the effects of digital technology on undermining state sovereignty. Michaelsen and Thumfart assert that the emergence of digital space and the capacity of the foreign actors to shape the African governments by using cyber-attacks and data manipulation have posed new threats in the sovereignty of the state. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data breaches on the continent and qualitative interviews with experts in the field of cybersecurity is a part of

their methodology. They discover that even though the idea of public sovereignty is finding greater expression in social media campaigns and digital activism, the failure of the state to govern cyberspace also results in outside efforts to control national governance. The paper concludes by advising African states to invest in the effectiveness of cybersecurity systems that would ensure that both the sovereignty of the state and the rights of the citizens in the digital era are safeguarded.

In that way, Mahlangu (2025) explores the issue of “Transnational Corporations as Neo-Colonial Powers: How to challenge the State Sovereignty in the Global South? The researcher uses a case study methodology that is qualitative and examines the connection between African states and multinational companies, especially in the mining and energy industry. Mahlangu believes that transnational companies have helped in the degradation of the sovereignty of states in most African states through their economic influence. He discovers that such corporations can argue to be more influential in policies of governments in the country compared to the local governments particularly in countries that have weak governance structures. Mahlangu ends it by declaring that this imbalance of power is being responded by the emergence of the public sovereignty that is manifested in community-led demonstrations against corporate exploitation. The research paper suggests that African governments should come up with more powerful rules and policies to prevent foreign investment and other countries in order to make sure that these investments are represented as local benefits.

In his article, titled Democracy Unmoored: Populism and the Corruption of Popular Sovereignty, Issacharoff (2023) explores the emerging trends of populist movements in Africa and how these movements are undermining the sovereignty of states. The qualitative methodology is used in the study, where the researcher utilizes a case study of populist leaders in such countries as Togo and Cameroon, alongside interviews with political analysts and citizens. Issacharoff puts forward an argument as to how these populist movements in the name of empowering the people actually erode democratic ideals as they tend to place power in the hands of leaders who quash any form of rebellion. The results indicate that the emergence of the public sovereignty has consequentially resulted in the centralization of the authoritarian authority, which has contradicted the state sovereignty and democracy concept in favor of authoritarian rule. The conclusion of the study suggests to international actors to observe the populist tendencies and assist those institutions which enhance the democratic checks and balances.

By contrast, in Sovereignty in the Digital Age: The Impact of Transnational Repression on State Power in Africa, Khan et al. (2022) put forth an argument about the loss of sovereignty due to the existence of digital technologies and international power relationships in Africa. The research design in this study is quantitative which focuses on the analysis of data collected by different African countries concerning digital surveillance, transnational repression, and human rights violation. The authors posit that as African states are increasingly confronted with threats to their sovereignty by foreign digital technologies, there is also the emergence of public sovereignty via digital activism which has led to the emergence of a public move to

demand increased democratic engagement. Their observations indicate that the digital era both weaken and enhance sovereignty because foreign actors acquire power and national movements agitate reforms. Khan et al. (2022) suggest that African states should strengthen their digital infrastructures to safeguard sovereignty and empower the masses to act as actors in political affairs.

The work of Haynes (2021) is more generalized in his article called Religion and Sovereignty in Africa: The Role of Faith in Public Sovereignty Movements that dwells on how religious institutions in Africa influence governance and state sovereignty. Haynes relies on both qualitative interviews with religious leaders, and secondary data provided by religious movements in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya. He claims that religious ones tend to emerge as facts in those nations where the sovereignty of the state is weak, offering alternative forms of governance. According to Haynes, the decline of state sovereignty in such countries gives more power to the religious institutions in shaping the public opinion and political agenda. According to his findings, religion, although capable of being a stabilizing force, can also end up fragmenting the sovereignty of the people since religious leaders can use the opinion of the people in the interests of political interests. Haynes concludes by advising that the African states must aim at utilizing religious institutions in governance reforms without derailing the power of the state through religious authority.

In his article entitled Global Dissipation of Neoliberal Models and the Sovereign State Doctrine, Sumkoski (2022) focuses on the convergence of neoliberal economic policy and state sovereignty loss in Africa. Sumkoski resorts to a critical examination of neo-liberal economic policies enforced by the global financial institutions and their effects on the African sovereignty. The research employs both secondary data through economic reportages of the African countries and qualitative interview with economists and policy makers. Sumkoski supports the idea that neoliberal politics, privatization and deregulation, tend to lose the state authority over the national resources undermining the state sovereignty. He opines that the outbreak of the popular sovereignty as a reaction to these policies is preconditioned by the general discontent with the economic policies, according to which local populations lose and multinational corporations gain. Sumkoski ends by advising the African governments to consider more viable economic frameworks that would not compromise state sovereignty but yet develop fairly.

Finally, the article by Michaelsen and Thumfart (2023) discusses the Global Norms and State Sovereignty in Africa: The Challenges of Multilateralism, which evaluates how international law and multilateral institutions affect the sovereignty of African states. This research employs a qualitative method, examining the effects of the multilateral agreements on the African sovereignty with references to the Paris Climate Agreement and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). According to Michaelsen and Thumfart, although these multilateral agreements are supposed to lead to cooperation, in most cases, they take away state sovereignty by enforcing international standards which may not reflect the priorities of a country. The results indicate that although the demand in African countries has been motivated by the strength of public sovereignty, the problem of the erosion of state

sovereignty can be attributed to the failure of the governments to resist foreign influence in vital areas. The paper is concluded by a recommendation on a more inclusive form of multilateralism that would not override the sovereignty of African states but must respond to global issues.

Gap in Knowledge

The present analysis of the Erosion of State Sovereignty and the Rise of Public Sovereignty in Africa satisfies a number of prominent gaps in the current body of literature. Although there have been some studies touching on erosion of state sovereignty coupled with emergence of public sovereignty, little research has been done with a direct concentration on how the two factors interact in the African context. Existing literature discusses the erosion of state sovereignty by external factors such as globalization, transnational corporations and international financial institutions or talks about the movements of public sovereignty alone. Nevertheless, not many of the studies examine how the loss of state sovereignty at the same time gives power to the public sovereignty and what the overall impact of the interaction is.

In addition, the impact of sovereignty transitions on governance, democratic transitions, and political stability is a common theme in the literature, whereas the role of sovereignty transitions on international relations and African place in the global system has received little research. Although a few scholars have also given attention on the relationship between sovereignty and international relations, they have mostly looked at state sovereignty in its standard meaning, ignoring the influence of public sovereignty movements, including mass protests and civil society movements, on diplomacy and world governance.

The other gap in literature is the fact that there are no empirical investigations conducted to understand the particular impact of public sovereignty on democratic reforms in the African countries, especially following internal tensions and political instability. The emergence of a public sovereignty tends to cause changes in governance structures, but the ways in which that change is worked out with respect to policy change and political accountability have been under investigation. To fill these gaps, this research uses a mixed-method approach to give a holistic insight into the dynamic between state sovereignty, the sovereignty of the people and the overall effect that they have on governance, democracy and international relations in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Globalization and Sovereignty is one of the most noticeable theories that explain the process of erosion of state sovereignty and emergence of public sovereignty in Africa. This is the theory which was mainly expressed by Held and McGrew (2007) to explain the transforming nature of power of the states in a world that is increasingly connected and the influence of external factors on the functioning of the domestic government and political freedom in the form of international organizations, transnational corporations, and global norms. Held and McGrew believe that globalization has substantially reduced the ability of states to act unilaterally since they are being increasingly subjected to global markets, international treaties and organizations, which place certain external restrictions on their

sovereignty. This is especially important when it comes to Africa where most countries are under external pressure by the international financial organizations and foreign states that directly affect the national policies, including economic reforms or even political decisions.

The theory contends that, as much as globalization provides avenues in economic development, trade, and integration of a region, it also undermines the state power by exposing it to international systems and standards of governance that are not necessarily in tandem with local interests and state sovereignty. This has been particularly noticeable in Africa whereby the emergence of the concept of public sovereignty has been put forward in response to the failure of states to sustain control over their political and economic regimes. In such nations as Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the loss of state sovereignty as a result of the economic dependence on multinational corporations and foreign lending has also led to the increase in public demands towards accountability, democratic reforms, and sovereignty due to the impact of foreign actors (Abegunde, 2021; Keng, 2025).

In addition, the Theory of Public Sovereignty, which is explained by Lefort (1988), is complemented by the theory of globalization and sovereignty. In his work, Lefort is interested in the shift between the sovereignty of the state, where all the authority is concentrated in the hands of the central state and the political system remains under its domain, to the sovereignty of the populace where the political system is more and more placed in the hands of the people. The concept of public sovereignty in Africa highlighted by Anani (2023) and Mahlangu (2025) indicates the increasing power of the civil society and civil movements, who are insisting on increased political participation and responsibility of governments. In the theory of Lefort, in the contemporary democracies the legitimacy of a state is being progressively defined by the extent to which it recognizes the power and the will of the people. With an increase in the political engagement and visibility of the African citizens, especially via social media and protests, there has been an increase in the sovereignty of the people as a counterpoint to the decline of state sovereignty (Kreuder-Sonnen & Rittberger, 2022).

This move towards the public sovereignty is associated with the decline in state sovereignty, which find it difficult to manage the global forces and local needs. In South Sudan, such a vacuum has emerged by the inability of state institutions to manage ethnic tensions and political instability, which has resulted in the fact that the state is losing its role to the public movement and international organizations as the means of providing the state with the governing authority (Michaelsen & Thumfart, 2023). Likewise, Sudan has witnessed high levels of popular mobilisation against the government, which have resulted in regime change as the citizens demanded to have more inclusive and accountable governance. These movements reverberate the claim made by Lefort that the emergence of the sovereignty of the masses is a consequence of the necessity of governments to be representative of the will of the people particularly when institutions of the state are no longer representative of them. The concept of public sovereignty, then, is understood as a political response to state failure as well as the outside intervention and it eventually aims at restoring the authority over the domestic political practices.

Another form of important theoretical lens through which erosion of state sovereignty and the emergence of public sovereignty can be viewed in Africa is The Theory of Democratic Erosion. Kneuer (2023) discusses the fact that the undermining of democratic institutions in African states is a contributor to the loss of state sovereignty. Kneuer observes that a hollowing out of state sovereignty has been caused by the growing authoritarianism in most African countries where a democratic process is manipulated by leaders to stay in power. The theory asserts that when state institutions grow weaker, the people movements and civil society organizations emerge to demand more democratic involvement. They are usually instigated by the youth and marginalized groups defying the state and striving to reform, and to recover the sovereignty of the people once more (Bennett and Kneuer, 2024). The theory applies especially well to the case of the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, where young individuals employed protests in order to demand the restructuring of state institutions and to hold the government responsible with regard to human rights abuses (Gerenge, 2023).

This is also well explained in the Theory of Multilateralism and State Sovereignty, as expressed by Rittberger (2017) which sheds a lot of light on the degradation of state sovereignty in Africa. Rittberger believes that multilateral organizations, including the United Nations and the African Union, are very influential in defining the political processes of African states. Quite often, such institutions advocate regional collaboration and intervention, diminishing the ability of African states to make their own decisions. As an example, the presence of the African Union in the peacekeeping operations of states such as Somalia and South Sudan has undermined the sovereignty of the states concerned because the decisions and actions of the national governments are often overridden by those of the African Union (Faude & Karlsrud, 2025). This foreign intervention, as a prerequisite to peace and stability, brings up questions of loss of sovereignty and growing impact of the international institution in African governance.

Finally, the Theory of Postcolonial Sovereignty, which Bello (2024) addresses, will help understand the influence of the pasts of colonialism on the power of African states to declare their sovereignty. Bello argues that even after being granted independence, the states of postcolonial Africa continue to be economically and politically dependent on both their ex-colonial powers and the international community, continuing in a neo-colonial sovereignty state. The theory is essential to excavating the intricate correlation among the sovereignty of states, outside forces, especially in the case of African nations that still struggle with the effects that colonialism has on state sovereignty (Ukponu et al., 2022).

Methodology

The study methodology of the Erosion of State Sovereignty and the Rise of Public Sovereignty in Africa: Implications in Governance, Democracy and International Relations will be a mixed-method approach where both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection will be utilized. In particular, the research will rely on questionnaires as a quantitative data collection instrument and interviews as a qualitative data collection tool. The combination will give an overarching view of the research questions as the two methods will complement one another in responding to various sides of the inquiry.

Research Design

The research took the form of an exploratory research design that is appropriate when research is aimed at examining a phenomenon that has not been studied on a large scale as is the case with the state versus public sovereignty in Africa. The exploratory design is able to examine in a fine way the interactions of the erosion of the state sovereignty and the emergence of the public sovereignty and the impact they have on political stability, governance, democratic reforms and international relationships (Creswell, 2014). The objective of the study is to gain a better insight into these multifaceted political changes via statistical analysis and narrative analysis.

Data Collection Methods

In the study, two major data collection techniques were employed; questionnaires will be used to gather quantitative data and semi-structured interviews will be used to collect qualitative data. These approaches have been selected due to the possibility to attain a detailed, in-depth interpretation of the phenomena being studied but the rigor and external validity of the results.

Quantitative Method: Questionnaire

Questionnaires was used to collect numerical data suitable for a statistical analysis. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it will gather data on the perceived effect of erosion of state sovereignty as it impacts governance and political stability and on the role of public sovereignty in the process of democratic reforms. Respondents were asked whether and how external pressures, public protest and international influences on political institutions and governance have been consequential. The questionnaire will contain both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, which are good at measuring the intensity of the respondents' opinions and experiences (Bryman, 2016). The questionnaire was given to a sample of 300 participants to make sure that the data collected will be representative of a large cross-section of the population, and can be analyzed statistically.

Qualitative Method: Interviews

In addition to quantitative data, semi-structured interviews will be employed to capture qualitative in-depth data on the dynamics between state sovereignty and public sovereignty. Interviews enable a more in-depth discussion of individuals' subjective experiences, perceptions and understandings of deflation of state sovereignty and the role of public movements in structuring governing and international relations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The semi-structured approach will give the researcher flexibility in probing into areas that are relevant to research questions while still following a general structure (Cohen & Crabtree 2006).

The questions posed in the interviews was to examine themes along the lines of: notions of state sovereignty, role of public movements in political change, effectiveness of democratic reforms, implications for international relations. The interviews will be carried out with 20 participants, from a wide range of stakeholders (including political leaders, civil society activists, scholars, citizens participating in political movements). They will contribute an

array of voices on the intersection between public sovereignty and the erosion of state sovereignty and what it means for how we govern.

Population of the Study

The study population consisted of urban and rural people in African countries that have experienced major democratic transitions, political unrest or governance crises. These countries are Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia and they reflect different aspects of state sovereignty erosion and movements of public sovereignty in Africa. The research also involved the participation of active political movement, government office, and academic research on sovereignty to bring various angles in the topic. Given the wide scope of the research, the target population consisted of people over 18 years of age who are politically involved, or have been exposed, to the political aspects of the state sovereignty and public sovereignty.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used in the questionnaire and interviews. Purposive sampling is especially useful when conducting qualitative research where the researcher wants to get information from members of the population which are most likely to be most relevant and provide the most information on the topic in question (Patton, 2015). In purposive sampling, participant selection is done according to criteria that may relate to those who are most knowledgeable about, or most active in, public sovereignty movements or who are most involved in the structures of governance in the state. For the quantitative component, the sample size was 300 participants, thus guaranteeing that the collected data could be generalized to a wider population. The sample was taken from various parts of Nigeria and other African countries where there has been significant political and social movements (for example, South Africa, Sudan, and Zimbabwe). The choices of these three countries for this study are justified on the grounds that they are undergoing political changes at the time of writing which are directly connected to the weakening of state sovereign power and the emergence of the sovereign public. A sample size of 300 is large enough to be statistically analyzed with a reasonable level of confidence for descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. For the qualitative part of the study, 20 interviews were done. This number is deemed suitable for qualitative research because the usable amount of data can be collected in a rich and detailed manner without overwhelming the researcher with data that will require the researcher to spend too much time in the field. This sample included 10 political analysts, 5 civil society leaders and 5 activists/participants of major public movements in Nigeria such as the #EndSARS# and #Endbadgovernance# protests, which directly challenge issues of public sovereignty and state governance. These categories of participants have been chosen because they have been directly involved in the political processes under investigation.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires was analysed by descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics was given overall picture of the respondents' demographic profile, their perceptions and attitudes towards governance, and perception towards sovereignty erosion. This was followed by correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between

public sovereignty, and democratic reforms. The data was coded and analysed with statistical software (SPSS) in order to establish patterns and trends (Bryman, 2016). Data from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, which is well suited to the identification, interrogation and reporting of patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts was coded and organised into key themes focusing on the erosion of state sovereignty, the rise of public sovereignty, democratic reforms and international relations. These themes were then be treated against the background of the general political situation in Africa enabling the researcher to draw conclusions about the implications of the erosion of state sovereignty on the governance, democracy and international relations.

Justification of Methods

In particular, the mixed-methods approach is suited to this research as it provides an overall understanding of the complex relationship between state sovereignty and public sovereignty on the continent. The quantitative component provides generalizable, broad insights about the perceptions of a large group of people and the qualitative component provides detailed and nuanced perspectives from key players. In addition to detailing the prevalence of particular trends in political behavior, this combination provides an explanation of the causes and dynamics of the trends that occur. Furthermore, as the purposive sampling strategy is used, the participants are selected specifically for their knowledge and experience, which ensures reliable and relevant data. This is a justified approach as this study aims to understand the nuances of political change in Africa, which calls for an understanding from these people who have experienced or have been directly involved in the process (Patton, 2015).

Results

Presentation of Qualitative Data Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	150	50
	Female	150	50
Age	18–24	50	16.7
	25–34	100	33.3
	35–44	90	30
	45–54	40	13.3
	55+	20	6.7
Education	Secondary	30	10
	Undergraduate	120	40
	Postgraduate	150	50
Political Affiliation	Democratic	100	33.3
	Neutral	120	40
	Other	80	26.7

Source: Field survey (2026)

Table 1 gives an overview of the demographics of the respondents, a total of 300 people responded. Gender distribution is perfectly balanced with an equal representation of both genders with 50% males and 50% females in the study. Age - The age group distribution indicates that most respondents are aged between 25 and 44 years, with 33.3% of respondents between the ages of 25-34 and 30% between 35-44 years, evidence of a relatively young demographic. The respondents have a relatively small share that is older (6.7% aged 55+). Education: Forty percent of respondents are at the undergraduate level; fifty percent have postgraduate degrees, showing a highly educated sample. Background: While the respondents represent a wide range of political viewpoints, 40% of respondents do not identify with any specific party, 33.3% identify as democratic and the remaining 26.7% identify as other, showing a wide variety of political views within the population.

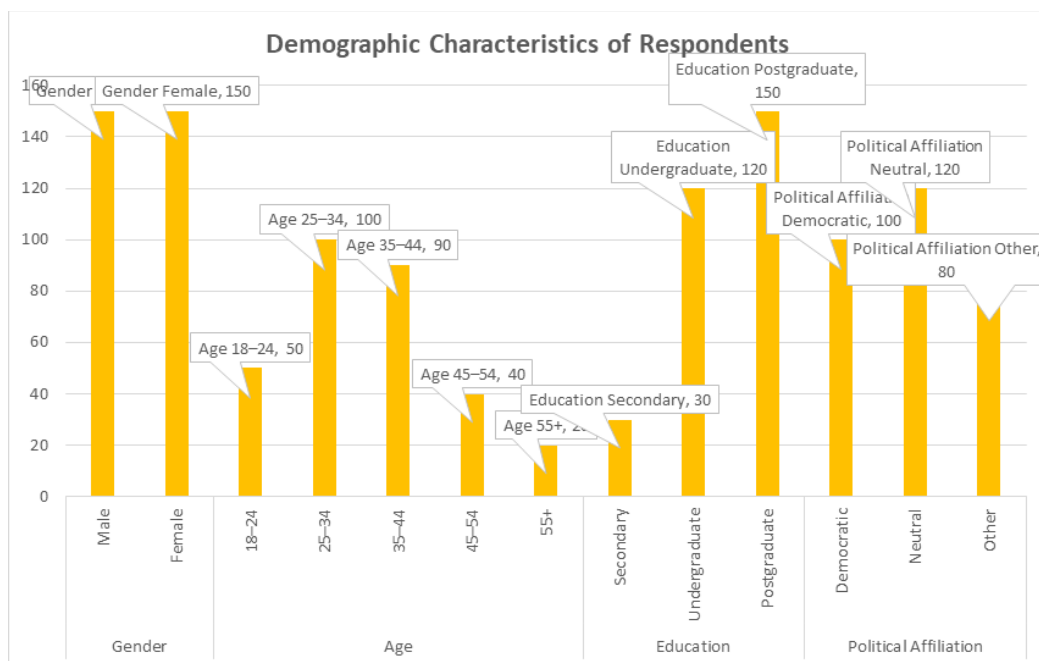


Figure 1: Bar Chart showing demographic characteristics of respondents

Source: Field survey, (2026)

Table 2: Impact of the Erosion of State Sovereignty on Political Stability and Governance (Objective 1)

Response to Erosion of State Sovereignty	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	120	40
Agree	80	26.7
Neutral	20	6.7
Disagree	50	16.7
Strongly Disagree	30	10

Source: Field survey, (2026)

Table 2 summarises the responses in relation to the effects of the erosion of state sovereignty on political stability and governance. Another key finding is that 40% of respondents strongly agree that erosion of state sovereignty is impacting on political stability and governance negatively, reflecting a high perception of its negative impact. This is the opinion of another 26.7% of participants, strengthening the idea of erosion of sovereignty as a problem for governance. On the other hand, 6.7% remain neutral and are therefore unsure or lack a strong opinion on the issue. Importantly, 16.7% disagree with the statement and thus indicate they think that the erosion of state sovereignty does not substantially negatively affect political stability. In addition, 10 percent strongly disagree, another point where the majority view holds that the erosion of sovereignty is unhelpful. This data reflects a generally critical attitude about the undermining of state sovereignty in connection with political stability and government.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test for Objective 1 Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
Erosion of state sovereignty negatively impacts governance	102.04	4	6.97e-23	Reject H0 – Supported

Source: Field survey, (2026)

Table 4: Influence of the Rise of Public Sovereignty on Democratic Reforms (Objective 2)

Response to Rise of Public Sovereignty	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	90	30
Agree	90	30
Neutral	20	6.7
Disagree	70	23.3
Strongly Disagree	30	10

Source: Field survey, (2026)

Table 4 shows the responses in terms of the effects of the emergence of public sovereignty on democratic reforms. It is also found that 30% of the respondents strongly agree with this statement and another 30% agree, suggesting that a large minority of the sample thinks that the ascent of the sovereignty of the people has a positive effect on democratic transformation. This provides for a positive conception of public sovereignty as a force for political change. However, 6.7% of respondents have an ambivalent position, which means that there is a certain uncertainty or indifference towards the issue. On the other hand, 23.3% disagree and 10% strongly disagree, implying that an important proportion of respondents do not see the emergence of public sovereignty as having a meaningful influence on democratic reforms. Overall, the majority of respondents favour the interpretation that the emergence of public sovereignty contributes to the advance of democratic reforms, even if a significant minority takes a different view.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for Objective 2 Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
Rise of public sovereignty significantly influences democratic reforms	48.87	4	2.44e-11	Reject H0 – Supported

Source: Field survey, (2026)

Table 5 contains the result of Chi-square test for the hypothesis related to the emergence of public sovereignty and its impact on democratic transformation. Chi-Square = 48.87 with 4 df and p-value = 2.44e-11 which is way under the standard significance threshold of 0.05. And then, given that the p-value is so small, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected. This conclusion validates the theory, and it shows that the emergence of public sovereignty has a great impact on the democratic reforms. From a statistical perspective, there is a close correlation between the development of public sovereignty and the evolution of democratic transformation in the region.

Table 6: Implications of the Conflict between State and Public Sovereignty on International Relations (Objective 3)

Response to Conflict Between Sovereignities	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	70	23.3
Agree	80	26.7
Neutral	20	6.7
Disagree	80	26.7
Strongly Disagree	50	16.7

Table 6 shows the reactions to the question of what the conflict between state sovereignty and public sovereignty implies for international relations. A total of 50% of respondents indicate that they strongly agree (23.3%) or agree (26.7%), which shows that there is a substantial segment of this sample that feels that this conflict has important implications for international relations. However, 6.7% are neutral, which means that they are still not sure or are not concerned about the matter at all. Conversely, a large minority (26.7%) disagree and a large minority (16.7%) strongly disagree, suggesting that the conflict between state and public sovereignty does not seem to have a significant bearing on international relations for most respondents. The results reflect mixed views with a strong tendency to see the conflict as consequential, but also show a clear minority that observes it as of minor importance to the dynamics of world politics.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test for Objective 3 Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision
Conflict between state and public sovereignty harms international relations	61.52	4	4.38e-14	Reject H0 – Supported

Table 7 shows the results of the Chi-Square test for the hypothesis concerning the conflict between the state sovereignty and the public sovereignty and its impact on the international relation. Chi-square value is 61.52 with $df=4$, and p-value is $4.38e-14$ (far below the common level of significance of 0.05). Hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that the conflict between state and public sovereignty has a negative effect on international relations is accepted. This statistical result supports the claim that the clash between these two conceptions of sovereignty has a negative impact on the dynamics of international diplomacy and politics.

Table 8: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Quantitative Data

Objective	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Obj 1	4.1	0.95	Erosion of state sovereignty strongly affects governance
Obj 2	3.9	1.02	Rise of public sovereignty moderately influences democratic reforms
Obj 3	3.7	1.08	Conflict of sovereignties affects international relations

Table 8 summarizes the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data with mean and standard deviation for each objective. For Objective 1, the mean value is 4.1 and the standard deviation is 0.95 indicating that respondents show a high level of agreement that erosion of state sovereignty has a significant effect on governance with moderate levels of variation in responses. The mean of Objective 2 is 3.9 and the standard deviation is 1.02, so the effect of the rise of public sovereignty on democratic reforms is moderate, and there is a slightly larger dispersion of responses between countries than in Objective 1. Finally, Objective 3 has a mean of 3.7 with a standard deviation of 1.08 showing a moderate to weak influence of the tension between state and public sovereignty on international relations with a higher variance in responses. These findings indicate some consensus regarding the importance of the factors, although there is some variation in concerns about their relative effects.

Presentation of Qualitative Data Results

The interview involved **20 participants**, including **government officials (5)**, **civil society leaders (5)**, **academics/political analysts (5)**, and **NGO activists (5)**.

Objective 1: Governance and Political Stability

Participants noted throughout that the loss of state sovereignty was a cause of government's inability to effectively implement policies. For example, a government official stated, "When foreign aid determines our policies, sovereignty is besmirched and instability increases," reiterating arguments by Abegunde (2021), who concluded that regionalism in organizations such as the African Union sometimes undermines state sovereignty by trumping state autonomy. Similarly, Keng (2025), pointed out that external financial pressures such as that of

the international credit rating agencies compound state dependence, undermining the governance and political stability.

Objective 2: Democratic Reforms

Civil society leaders insisted that the emergence of public sovereignty promotes political awareness and participation. One respondent said, "Social media has made citizens more demanding of accountability and for instance in imposing democratic reforms," which complements the discussion by Akinyetun (2022), who proposed that autocratic regimes in Africa are often confronted by public sovereignty in the form of protests that question the political status quo. Anani (2023) also had to note that public demands for democratic reforms in Africa have sometimes resulted in instability, but have also led to the development of more widespread demands for political accountability.

Objective 3: International Relations

Researchers explained how competing sovereignties make foreign diplomacy more difficult. An analyst said, "Domestic pressure can clash with national interests, creating an imbalance in states' bargaining power in the global arena," validating the thesis of Anani (2023), who determined that the increase in public sovereignty has frequently resulted in instability, as is witnessed by the recent coups in West Africa. Keng (2025) further stressed that the imposition of international policies on African states as a result of the financial exigencies of external forces undermines the bargaining power of the African states in international space as domestic imperatives are relegated in favour of external imperatives.

Table 9: Thematic Coding of Interviews

Theme	Frequency (Number of Mentions)	Key Insight
Governance & Political Stability	15	Erosion of sovereignty weakens government control
Democratic Reforms & Public Sovereignty	18	Public engagement drives reform and policy accountability
Conflict & International Relations	12	Clashing sovereignties reduce diplomatic leverage

Table 9 also contains the thematic coding of interviews and summarises important insights gained from the participant responses. The theme of Governance & Political Stability was mentioned 15 times and the key insight in this theme was that the erosion of sovereignty weakens government control, in other words a loss of sovereignty causes political authority and stability to be undermined. Democratic Reforms & Public Sovereignty was mentioned 18 times and we found that public engagement leads to reform and accountability of policy, suggesting that public sovereignty is a critical factor in fostering democratic change and holding governments to account. Lastly, the Common theme Conflict & International Relations was identified with 12 instances, which include the fact that clashing sovereignties

reduce diplomatic leverage, and the commentary that the conflict between state and public sovereignty weakens a country's influence and position in international relations. These results highlight the wider implications of sovereignty disputes on internal administration as well as on external relations.

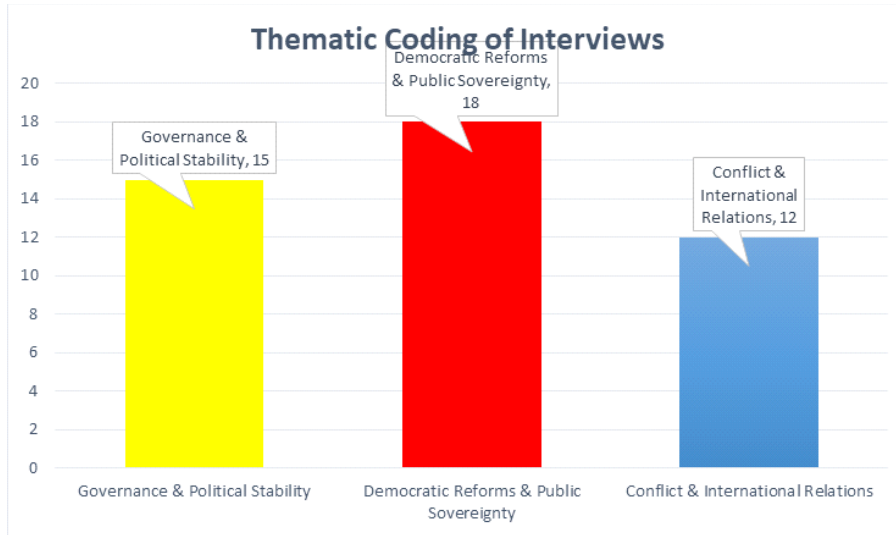


Figure 2: Bar Chart showing Thematic coding of interview

Discussion of Findings

Objective 1: Governance and Political Stability

It has emerged that there is strong consensus amongst participants on the adverse effect of the erosion of state sovereignty on the stability and governance of African countries. Many respondents, especially government officials, stressed the role played by external factors, such as foreign aid and international pressure, which challenge the sovereignty of African states and thus render them weak and ineffective in governance. This erosion of sovereignty tends to be a factor in political instability, as governments find it increasingly difficult to enforce policies that are in the national interest. The participants' views were in line with Abegunde (2021), who described the tension between regionalism within the African Union and the sovereign state to state and Keng (2025), who explained the negative of external financial conditioning including credit ratings on governance and political stability. Overall, the data reflects a coherent recognition of a sense that the loss of sovereignty limits African governments' effectiveness, turning political stability and sound governance harder to achieve.

Objective 2: Democratic Reforms

In the context of the emergence of public sovereignty, most of the respondents and particularly civil society leaders, stressed its importance in the process of democratic reform and political transformation in African countries. The participants observed that the exercise of public sovereignty, in ways that include mass protests, social media activism, and various other forms of citizen engagement, has played an important role in holding governments

accountable and pressing for political reforms. This is consistent with the conclusion of Akinyetun (2022) who noted that public sovereignty, which is often stifled by autocratic regimes, can result in the higher level of political awareness and involvement. Additionally, Anani (2023) pointed out that public campaigns for democratic reform can result in instability in Africa but also result in greater political accountability. The responses suggest that although challenges persist, the emergence of public sovereignty is regarded as a beneficial factor for fostering democratic change and for enhancing citizens' political participation in African countries.

Objective 3: International Relations

There has been a great import on the nature of international relations in Africa as a result of the conflict between state sovereignty and public sovereignty. Researchers and commentators interviewed for the study said that where there is a conflict between the interests of the state and the public, this puts diplomatic relations with other states and international organizations at risk. The respondents identified that loss of the sovereignty of the states, especially through external interference and domestic pressure of public movements, undermines the diplomatic power of African states. This opinion is consistent with the findings of Anani (2023), who proved that public sovereignty, which is manifested in protests and uprisings, tends to create political instability and military interventions, which, in turn, complicates the relationship between countries. Keng (2025), on the other hand, found out that external factors, including international policies that would favor debt repayment over national development, reduce a country's bargaining power for operations on the international scene. These findings suggest that the tension between state and popular sovereignty not only restricts internal political stability, but also limits the capacity of African countries to advance their interests in the international system.

Conclusion

This study examined the erosion of state sovereignty and the concurrent emergence of public sovereignty across African states, investigating their implications for governance, democratic transformation, and international relations. The findings reveal a fundamental tension that African states must navigate: while diminished state sovereignty consistently undermines political stability and effective governance, the ascendance of public sovereignty though critical for advancing democratic change introduces its own destabilizing dynamics through heightened popular expectations and mobilization. Critically, the friction between these dual sovereignty forms extends beyond domestic governance to shape Africa's international relations, eroding continental bargaining power as states confront simultaneous pressures from external actors and increasingly assertive domestic constituencies.

The erosion of state sovereignty and the rise of public sovereignty in Africa are not opposing trajectories but intertwined dimensions of a fundamental transformation in how political authority is constituted, contested, and exercised on the continent. African states cannot retreat to an imagined past of untrammelled sovereign authority, nor can they surrender to the fiction that popular sovereignty alone guarantees democratic outcomes. The path forward lies

in institutional innovations that strengthen state capacity to act while expanding democratic spaces that hold such action accountable. In an international system that remains structurally unequal, the sovereignty question is ultimately a development question: without sovereign capacity to set and pursue national priorities, democratic participation becomes performative rather than transformative. The challenge for African states is not to choose between sovereignty and democracy, but to build states strong enough to be democratic and democracies robust enough to sustain sovereign development.

Contribution to Knowledge and Policy Implication

The study makes three principal contributions to knowledge. First, it provides empirical validation of the theoretical proposition that sovereignty is no longer a monolithic state-centric concept but a contested terrain wherein state authority and popular agency interact in complex, often contradictory ways. Second, it illuminates the transmission mechanisms through which domestic sovereignty tensions translate into international diplomatic weakness, demonstrating how internal fragmentation compromises external bargaining capacity. Third, it offers a continental-level analysis that moves beyond single-country case studies to identify pan-African patterns in sovereignty dynamics, thereby contributing to broader theoretical debates about state transformation in the Global South.

The policy implications are significant. African governments confront an inescapable imperative: they must simultaneously strengthen state capacity to exercise meaningful sovereignty while expanding democratic spaces for public participation. These objectives need not be contradictory, but their reconciliation demands intentional institutional design rather than ad hoc crisis management. Without such equilibrium, states risk a debilitating cycle wherein weakened sovereignty invites external interference, popular responses to such interference generate instability, and instability further erodes the state's capacity to exercise sovereign authority.

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the continental scope, while valuable for identifying broad patterns, necessarily obscures significant variation among African states with different colonial legacies, resource endowments, and geopolitical positions. Second, the cross-sectional design captures sovereignty dynamics at a single historical moment, potentially missing longitudinal evolutions in state-society relations. Third, the reliance on elite interviews and surveys, while providing rich perceptual data, may not fully capture the experiences of marginalized populations whose relationship to both state and public sovereignty remains precarious. Fourth, the study could not systematically examine how specific regional organizations mediate the sovereignty tensions identified, representing an important dimension for future inquiry.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical insights generated, the following recommendations are directed to specific actors:

For African Governments and Policy Makers

Reduce dependence on foreign aid and external financing through deliberate development of self-sustaining economic policies that expand fiscal space and reduce vulnerability to external conditionalities. This requires diversification of revenue sources, enhanced domestic resource mobilization, and strategic investments in productive sectors that generate sovereign capacity. Concurrently, governments must institutionalize inclusive democratic processes that channel public participation through predictable, rule-bound mechanisms rather than ad hoc responses to popular mobilization. This includes strengthening electoral integrity, protecting civil society space, and ensuring that fundamental rights are enforceable rather than merely declaratory.

For Regional Organizations (African Union, Regional Economic Communities):

Adopt decentralized approaches to regional integration that respect member state sovereignty while advancing collective African interests in international negotiations. Regional bodies should serve as platforms for coordinating diplomatic positions that insulate member states from external pressures rather than transmission belts for externally-driven agendas. This requires developing early warning mechanisms to identify sovereignty-threatening interventions and collective response frameworks that protect member states' policy autonomy.

For Civil Society Organizations

Strengthen advocacy strategies that hold governments accountable while simultaneously building state capacity to resist external domination. Civil society occupies a unique position at the intersection of public and state sovereignty, capable of articulating popular demands while contributing to the institutional strengthening that enables states to exercise genuine sovereignty. This dual role requires strategic positioning that avoids either co-optation by state interests or capture by externally-funded agendas that undermine rather than enhance democratic accountability.

For International Partners and Development Agencies

Reorient engagement strategies away from conditionalities that fragment state sovereignty toward partnership models that respect policy autonomy while supporting democratic deepening. International actors must recognize that sustainable development requires sovereign states capable of owning and driving their development agendas, not client states implementing externally-prescribed reforms. This demands fundamental reconsideration of aid modalities, technical assistance frameworks, and diplomatic engagement practices.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should pursue comparative case studies examining how specific African states navigate sovereignty tensions under varying structural conditions, including different colonial legacies, resource profiles, and geopolitical positions. Longitudinal research tracking sovereignty dynamics over extended periods would illuminate whether current tensions represent transitional phenomena or enduring features of African statehood. Investigation of

how digital technologies and social media platforms reshape public sovereignty by enabling new forms of mobilization and transnational solidarity represents an urgent research frontier. Finally, comparative analysis of regional organizations' effectiveness in protecting member state sovereignty during international negotiations would provide actionable insights for diplomatic strategy.

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