



POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA SINCE THE 2010s: LEGAL CHALLENGES AND REFORM IMPERATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Though Africa contributes the least to the overall global emissions count, it is among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Mitigation and adaptation depend on effective climate governance. This involves formulation of laws, policies, strategies and institutions to drive climate action nationally, regionally or across the continent under the African Union (AU) and in collaboration with the United Nations (UN). However, political instability has made it harder for good climate policy to work. Adopting the doctrinal legal research methodology, this work analyses the challenges of political instability and climate governance in Africa. It was revealed that most African nations are parties to international climate change treaties and have committed themselves to their implementation nationally. They have gone ahead and developed climate policies, strategies and plans and have also submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions to the UN. It was further observed that since the 2010s, several African states have experienced periods of political instability. Military coups, insurgencies, civil conflicts, and other security challenges in countries such as Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have posed significant challenges to governance, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable development. The paper revealed that this has had significant challenges and consequences for climate governance in Africa. The paper concluded recommending that strengthening accountability and transparency in governance, promoting peacebuilding and enhancing regional cooperation are the ways good climate governance can be achieved in Africa.

KEYWORDS: Politics, Instability, Climate, Governance, Africa

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century,¹ leaving huge implications for environmental sustainability, economic development and human security.² As a result, since the 2010s, after the advent of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992,³ the Kyoto Protocol⁴ and the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, there has been increased global and regional attention to climate change, reflected

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¹ P Kumari, 'Climate Change and Environmental Degradation: Emerging Challenges and Future Concerns' *Journal of Global Resources* [2026] (12) (1) 166-172. H Sarun, 'Climate Change in the 21st Century: Scientific Evidence, Risks, and Adaptation Pathways' *Journal of Agriculture and the Environment* [2025] 1 -6.

² P G Kumar, 'The Climate Crisis: Impact on living beings and Consequences across the Globe' *International Journal of Global Science Research* [2026] (13) (1) 8931-8939.

³ United Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992

⁴ Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC 1997. <<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-kyoto-protocol>> Accessed 10th May 2026.



in frameworks such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015,⁵ Nationally Determined Contributions emanating therefrom,⁶ the African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032),⁷ Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Climate Strategy 2022-2050,⁸ East African Community (EAC) Climate Change Policy,⁹ Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Action Plan For Implementation of the Central Africa Gender Responsive Regional Strategy for Risk Prevention, Disaster Management and Climate Change Adaptation 2015,¹⁰ among others.

The impacts of climate change have been felt globally, but Africa is one of the most vulnerable despite its limited contributions to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.¹¹ These impacts have been particularly notable due to the continent's high vulnerability, limited mitigation and adaptation capacity, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture.¹² Africa is in a dilemma because many of her States are categorised as developing countries.¹³ As a result, priorities are shifting between developing and responding to climate challenges.¹⁴ Its developmental needs exist side-by-side with its climate vulnerabilities.¹⁵ Balance, of course, is necessary but cannot be achieved without good governance, which many African States lack. Among various reasons for this is the presence of political instability.

Political instability refers to fragility, unpredictability, and sudden changes within a government or political system.¹⁶ It is manifested through unconstitutional changes in leadership, civil unrest, or policy volatility, often driven by corruption, systemic inequality, ethnic divisions, economic

⁵ Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015. <<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>> Accessed 10th May 2026.

⁶ Ibid, art 3-4.

⁷ African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032). <<https://au.int/en/documents/20220628/african-union-climate-change-and-resilient-development-strategy-and-action-plan>> Accessed 10th May 2026.

⁸ Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Climate Strategy 2022-2050.

<[https://climatestrategy.ecowas.int/images/documentation/Short%20version%20-%20ECOWAS%20Regional%20Climate%20Strategy%20\(2022-2030\).pdf](https://climatestrategy.ecowas.int/images/documentation/Short%20version%20-%20ECOWAS%20Regional%20Climate%20Strategy%20(2022-2030).pdf)> Accessed 10th May 2026.

⁹ East African Community (EAC) Climate Change Policy. <<https://nilebasin.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/EAC%2520Climate%2520Change%2520Policy.pdf>> Accessed 10th May 2026.

¹⁰ (ECCAS) Action Plan for Implementation of the Central Africa Gender Responsive Regional Strategy for Risk Prevention, Disaster Management and Climate Change Adaptation 2015. <<https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/publication/ECCAS%20-%20Gender%20Action%20Plan%202020-2030.pdf>> Accessed 10th May 2026.

¹¹ African Development Bank Group, 'Climate Change in Africa' <<https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa>> Accessed 10th May 2026. UN, 'United Nations Fact Sheet on Climate Change: Africa is particularly vulnerable to the expected Impacts of Global Warming'. <https://unfccc.int/files/press/backgrounders/application/pdf/factsheet_africa.pdf> Accessed 10th May 2026.

¹² L M Ayompe and W N Epie, 'Building Africa's Climate Resilience: Understanding the Impacts and Future Strategies in the Face of Climate Change' *Frontiers in Climate* [2025] (7)1619799.

¹³ A A 'FDI, the Opportunity-to-Necessity Entrepreneurship Ratio, and African Development' *AIB Insights* [2025] 26 (1) 1-5.

¹⁴ O Akeredolu, 'Africa's Climate Change Balancing Act - Green Energy vs Economic Development' *Africa Energy Portal* (21st January 2025). <<https://africa-energy-portal.org/blogs/africas-climate-change-balancing-act-green-energy-vs-economic-development>> Accessed 11th May 2026.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ M W Dirks and T Schmidt, 'Political instability and economic growth: Causation and Transmission' *European Journal of Political Economy* [2024] (85) 1-19.



decline, or contested elections.¹⁷ Political instability has not just affected governance but climate governance, which is necessary for combating climate vulnerabilities in Africa effectively.¹⁸

Africa is one of the most politically unstable continents globally, and this has been the case since most African nations gained independence.¹⁹ As Wu noted, remnants of colonialism were frequently implicated in Africa's enduring political instability.²⁰ The 21st century, particularly since the 2010s, however, saw a renewed spate of political instability in various African nations and took various forms, including civil conflicts, military coups, electoral violence, insurgencies and uprisings.²¹ Countries such as Mali, Sudan, Libya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other parts of the Sahel region have experienced prolonged instability, which has weakened state institutions, long-term planning, sustained policy commitment, exacerbated poverty and hindered development.²²

Climate governance, understood as the system of laws, policies, institutions and practices designed to address climate change, depends heavily on peace and stability in a State.²³ Where a State is politically stable, as Kumar noted, it can serve as the bedrock for prosperity.²⁴ Such a state can develop and maintain effective State structures and institutions that will be suitable for climate governance to be effective. However, in politically unstable environments, State institutions are often weakened, policy and legal instruments are thus subjected to limited enforcement and implementation, while regional and international climate obligations are not followed through.²⁵ The government's priority is also on security concerns, which diverts fiscal resources, affecting concentration on other areas of the nation, including the environment and sustainability.²⁶ As a result, environmental and climate challenges and vulnerabilities continue to persist. The security concerns usually overshadow other sectors of governance, including the environmental sector and

¹⁷ R Kumar, 'Impact of Political Instability on Economic Growth' *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences* [2023] 12 (9) 79-86.

¹⁸ D D Chamma, 'Corruption, Political Instability, Climate Change and Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan African Countries' *Cogent Economics & Finance* [2025] (13) (1) 1-19.

¹⁹ G T Dalyop, 'Political Instability and Economic Growth Africa' *International Journal of Economic Policy Studies* [2019] 13 (1) 217-257.

²⁰ Y Wu, 'Colonial Legacy and Its Impact: Analysing Political Instability and Economic Underdevelopment in Post-colonial Africa' SHS Web of Conferences ([2024] (193) 04016.

²¹ D Isser and Others, 'Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st Century: Four Trends and an Uncertain Outlook' Policy Research Working Paper 10713.

²² T F Lilly-Inia and C C Eze, 'Political Instability and Military Coups in the Sahel Region' *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research* [2025] 11 (10) 42-53.

²³ Sustainability Directory, 'What is Climate Governance?' (2nd February 2026). <<https://climate.sustainability-directory.com/question/what-is-climate-governance/>> Accessed 11th May 2026. World Bank Group, 'Climate Change Governance' (6th December 2021). <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/12/06/climate-change-governance>> Accessed 11th May 2026.

²⁴ Kumar (n. 17) 1.

²⁵ B Clement, O Nzechie and E Ezezi, 'The Influence of Political Systems on Climate Change Policy Implementation in Africa' *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research* [2023] (9) (7) 30-45.

²⁶ M F Abouelenen and Others, 'Geopolitical Risks and Environmental Sustainability: Can Economic Complexity and Renewables tip the balance?' [2023] 6(3) *Energy Strategy Reviews*, 1-15.



accordingly, prevent the adoption and implementation of long-term environmental and sustainability policies.

While African States have expressed commitment to implement the legal and policy framework aforementioned, and many African nations have gone ahead to develop national policies, laws and institutions to that effect,²⁷ political instability affecting several of these States hinders the practical enforcement and implementation from happening.²⁸ From West to Central to North Africa, civil conflicts and political unrest have put climate action at risk.²⁹ Political instability thus keeps Africa both lagging in climate governance globally and also hinders the State from achieving the development it needs.³⁰

It is on this premise that this paper examines the extent to which political instability has affected climate governance in Africa since the 2010s. This paper will examine political instability as a challenge to effective climate governance in Africa, which weakens legal institutions, disrupts policy continuity, and limits enforcement capacity. The discussion will generally feature examples from several African countries with ongoing political instability issues and will provide recommendations in this regard.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

1.1.1 Political Instability

Political instability refers to a condition in which a State experiences frequent disruptions in its political processes, institutions, or leadership, thereby undermining governance and policy continuity.³¹ It is often characterised by events such as military coups, civil conflicts, electoral violence, unconstitutional changes of government and weak or ineffective leadership structures.³²

In the African context, political instability has been a recurring phenomenon since most African States got their independence from colonial masters in the 1960s.³³ These events went well into the 21st century, and since the 2010s, several African countries have been experiencing prolonged periods of governance crises, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the

²⁷ H Gueldich, 'African Perspectives on International Climate Change Law – Challenges and Opportunities for Justice' *Harvard Law School Human Rights Reflections* (27th January 2025). <<https://hrp.law.harvard.edu/gueldich-africa-in-shaping-international-climate-law/>> Accessed 11th May 2026.

²⁸ Clement, Nzechie and Ezezi (n. 25).

Africa Climate Insights, 'Inside Africa's fight for realistic Climate Plans amid Global Pressure' *Africa Climate Insights* (10th February 2025). <<https://africaclimateinsights.org/inside-africas-fight-for-realistic-climate-plans-amid-global-pressure/>> Accessed 11th May 2026.

²⁹ K Jeffang, 'Political Tension in West Africa puts vital Climate Action at Risk' *Dialogue Earth* (7th October 2024). <<https://dialogue.earth/en/climate/political-tension-in-west-africa-puts-vital-climate-action-at-risk/>> Accessed 11th May 2026.

³⁰ A K. Addis and Z Zhu, 'The Political Situation, Trends and Geopolitical Implications of Sub-Saharan and North African Countries: Comparative Study' *Open Journal of Political Science* [2018] (8) (2) 108-127.

³¹ U A Umar and Others, 'The Role of Political Instability and Poor Governance in Fueling Poverty and Insecurity in Developing Countries: A Literature Review' *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* [2025] (6) (8) 2473-2479.

³² *ibid*

³³ A Mindaoudou, 'From Independence to Long-term Stability: United Nations Efforts in Africa' *UN Chronicle* [2015] (52) (1 & 2) <<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/independence-long-term-stability-united-nations-efforts-africa>> Accessed 12th May 2026.



DRC, Central African Republic, among others.³⁴ These include situations of armed conflict, insurgency and contested political transitions.³⁵ Such instability weakens state institutions, reduces administrative capacity and disrupts government planning, which is needed for long-term implementation of climate policies, laws and strategies.

Political instability further erodes the effectiveness of legal and regulatory frameworks. Laws can exist on paper but will lack widespread enforcement in practice due to weakened institutions, lack of political will or breakdown in governance structures.³⁶ As Dzacka noted, political instability will disrupt policy continuity.³⁷ Thus, it can be argued that where political instability now results in frequent regime changes, successive administrations may alter or even abandon previously established legal commitments. This is particularly problematic in sectors like climate governance, where long-term planning, stability and sustained implementation are fundamental.³⁸ Political instability, therefore, robs the State of the ability to provide effective climate governance.³⁹

1.1.2 Climate Governance

Climate governance refers to the system of laws, policies, institutions and practices designed to address climate change and its impacts.⁴⁰ It encompasses both mitigation efforts (aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation strategies (aimed at coping with the effects of climate change).⁴¹ At the international level, climate governance is shaped by legal instruments including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol to the Convention 1997 and the Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015.⁴² These frameworks establish obligations on States and guide their actions regarding combating climate change. At the regional level, African institutions such as the AU and other regional communities have developed policies and strategies mentioned above to coordinate climate action across member States.

At the national level, the UNDP explained that climate governance involves enacting and enforcing climate and environmental laws, policies and regulations, establishing institutions responsible for

³⁴ Lilly-Inia and Eze (n. 22); Nathaniel Ellis, 'Political Instability in the Global South: The Rise of Military Coups in Africa and Their Economic Implications' *Atlas Institute for International Affairs* (10th March 2025). <<https://atlasinstitute.org/political-instability-in-the-global-south-the-rise-of-military-coups-in-africa-and-their-economic-implications/>> Accessed 12th May 2026; Okechukwu Ibeanu, 'Political Instability and the Challenge of Democratization in Africa: A Conceptual Analysis' *Center for Democracy and Development* <<https://www.cddwestafrica.org/uploads/reports/file/Political-Instability-and-the-Concept-of-Democratization-In-Africa.pdf>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Clement, Nzechie and Erezi (n. 25).

³⁷ A N Y Dzacka, 'Political Instability: Causes, Consequences, And Implications for Development' *Researchgate* (4th January 2021) 2. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380292024_Political_Instability> Accessed 12th May 2026.

³⁸ UNDP, 'What are Long-term Climate Strategies, and how can they help us tackle Climate Change?' (25th April 2023). <<https://www.undp.org/latin-america/news/what-are-long-term-climate-strategies-and-how-can-they-help-us-tackle-climate-change>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

³⁹ Clement, Nzechie and Erezi (n. 25).

⁴⁰ Sustainability Directory (n. 23). World Bank Group (n. 23).

⁴¹ M J Sanz and A K P Blazquez, Analysis of international climate change governance for the agriculture, forest and land use sector: Gaps and recommendations for Future Improvement' *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* [2026] (10) (3) 6424-6436.

⁴² O D Ukoha and A A Adaranijo, 'Government/Legislative Frameworks and International Protocols on Climate Change: Domestication, Institutional Governance, and Social Protection Implications in Nigeria' *Earth System Governance* [2025] (25) 1-21.



effectively implementing these laws, regulations and policies.⁴³ Climate governance is therefore an integration of national, regional and international systems. Yet, it is without a doubt that effective climate governance requires not just the existence of laws, policies and institutions, but also institutional capacity, transparency, accountability and political commitment.

1.1.3 Africa

Africa is the world's second largest and second-most populous continent after Asia.⁴⁴ It covers about 20% of the Earth's land area and 6% of its total surface area.⁴⁵ The continent is home to nearly 1.4 billion people, making it the second most populous continent and contains 54 recognised independent States.⁴⁶ It is divided into 5 geopolitical regions, which include North Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa, West Africa and Central Africa.

Africa is central to and considered in this study because it is one of the most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change. The continent's vulnerability to climate change is evident in the rising droughts, desertification, deforestation, flooding and food insecurity, all of which have had significant socio-economic consequences across the continent.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the continent is important for consideration because of the varying levels of political stability, development and legal effectiveness. Indeed, while some African countries are making serious sustainable developmental progress, such as Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, South Africa, Mauritius,⁴⁸ others mentioned earlier continue to struggle with governance challenges that hinder not just effective climate governance but governance as a whole. The political instability in the continent is therefore worth considering.

2.0 LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

In Africa, climate governance is multi-layered. This comprises international, regional and national legal, policy, regulatory and institutional systems. Examples of national frameworks from selected African nations are provided. This section thus considers these frameworks primarily:

2.1 International Legal Framework

Globally, climate governance rests on certain fundamental legal instruments developed under the United Nations treaty and governance system. There are generally three of them, which include the UNFCCC 1992, Kyoto Protocol 1997 and the Paris Climate Agreement 2015. The first, UNFCCC 1992, establishes the global framework for climate action.⁴⁹ The Convention's objective is to

⁴³ UNDP, 'Volume III: What Is Climate Governance?' 1-32. <<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-09/Volume%20III%20What%20is%20climate%20governance.pdf>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁴⁴ Google Arts and Culture, 'Africa'. <<https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/africa/m0dg3n1?hl=en>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ World Population Review, 'Africa'. <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/africa>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁴⁷ A le Roux and J Cilliers, 'Africa Climate Futures: Thematic Futures' (29th March 2026) 1-31. <<https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/14-climate-change/>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁴⁸ C Michael, 'Six most developed Countries in Africa in 2026' *Business Day* 23rd May 2026). <https://businessday.ng/bd-weekender/article/six-most-developed-countries-in-africa-in-2026/#google_vignette> Accessed 23rd May 2026.

⁴⁹ UNFCCC 1992 (n. 5).



achieve the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.⁵⁰ The Convention recognises climate change as a common concern of humankind⁵¹ and introduces the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.⁵² Known broadly as the CBDR Principle, it acknowledges the difference in development of various States, taking into consideration their response readiness and ability and how much they contribute to emissions.⁵³ The Principle is of particular application to Africa, and while it underscores that all States need to respond together to climate change, developed countries have a higher burden due to historical emissions, while developing States, most of which are located in Africa, cannot be imputed same burden.⁵⁴ As a whole, the Convention encourages States to develop strategies for emissions reduction, biodiversity conservation, green energy and sustainable development.⁵⁵

Building on the UNFCCC 1992, the Kyoto Protocol 1997 was introduced to provide for legally binding emission reduction targets for developed countries.⁵⁶ Although its direct impact on African States is limited due to their classification as developing countries, it created mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM),⁵⁷ which allowed developing countries, including those in Africa, to participate in emission reduction projects.⁵⁸

More recently, the Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015 represents a significant shift towards a more inclusive and flexible approach to climate governance.⁵⁹ It requires all parties to submit what is known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), outlining their climate action plans and what is needed for achievements to be made.⁶⁰ All 54 African nations are parties to the Agreement.⁶¹ For African nations, this Agreement is particularly important as it emphasises adaptation, climate finance and capacity building, which are critical areas that the continent needs to combat climate change. However, the implementation of these obligations depends heavily on national legal systems and institutional capacity,⁶² which are being undermined in politically unstable States in Africa.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, Art. 1.

⁵¹ *ibid*, Art. 3 (1).

⁵² *ibid*, Art. 3 (2).

⁵³ P Cullet, 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities' in M Fitzmaurice, M Brus and P Merkouris (eds), *Research Handbook on International Environmental Law* (2nd Ed: Edward Elgar, 2021) 209-228. L Rajamani, 'The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility and the Balance of Commitments under the Climate Regime' *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law* [2002] (9) (2) 120-131.

⁵⁴ Cullet (n. 53).

⁵⁵ UNFCCC (n. 5), Art. 4.

⁵⁶ Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC 1997 (n. 4).

⁵⁷ *ibid*, Art. 12.

⁵⁸ *ibid*.

⁵⁹ Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015 (n. 5).

⁶⁰ *ibid*, Art. 3 and 4 (2) (3).

⁶¹ UN Climate Change, 'Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change'.

<<https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties-convention-and-observer-states>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁶² J K Kamanda and Others, 'Assessing the Implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement in Africa' *International Journal of Big Data Mining for Global Warming* [2025] (7) (2) 1.



2.2 Regional Legal and Policy Framework

At the regional level, African regional economic communities have developed various frameworks aimed at coordinating climate action across the continent. The African Union has played a central role in this regard through initiatives such as the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032).⁶³ This framework seeks to enhance climate resilience through coordinated emissions reduction and climate adaptation strategies in agriculture, green energy development, and reforestation.⁶⁴ It also seeks to enhance the promotion of sustainable development, urban planning, transportation, infrastructure, and strengthen institutional capacity among member States.⁶⁵

Sub-regional organisations have also contributed to climate governance. For instance, ECOWAS adopted the Regional Climate Strategy (2022-2050), which focuses on adaptation, mitigation and capacity building within West Africa.⁶⁶ Similarly, the EAC and ECCAS developed Climate Change Policy and Adaptation Plan 2020-2030, which respectively help and guide their member States in addressing the challenges of climate change in their respective regions with the goal of sustainable development.⁶⁷

It is maintained that these regional frameworks are fundamental because they promote cooperation, harmonisation of policies and collective action among the respective States in the regions. They also provide platforms for sharing resources, knowledge and best practices which can help States collectively sustain climate action. However, their effectiveness is hindered by weak enforcement mechanisms and the reliance on member States for implementation. In situations of political instability, it can be argued that States may fail to comply with regional commitments,⁶⁸ thereby creating fragmentation and undermining collective efforts in the region and, therefore, in Africa as a continent.

2.3 National Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Climate governance requires that laws, policies, plans or strategies and institutions are in place to direct climate action. It was noted that all African nations are parties to the Paris Agreement 2015. The Convention requires countries to develop Nationally Determined Contributions and other national climate change mitigation and adaptation laws, policies or strategies. In response to this, most African countries developed and submitted their NDCs and have also developed national policies, action plans and strategies to combat climate change and have ministries directing their implementation, some of which are outlined hereunder.

⁶³ AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032) (n..7).

⁶⁴ AU (n. 63).

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ ECOWAS adopted the Regional Climate Strategy (2022-2050) (n. 8).

⁶⁷ EAC Climate Change Policy (n. 9) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Action Plan 2015 (n. 10).

⁶⁸ O J Ogunmakin, 'Integrating Climate Leadership and Adaptation Policies for Resilient Development in West Africa' *Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affairs* [2025] 189-203.



Nigeria has developed its Climate Change Policy⁶⁹ and enacted several climate and environmental laws, including the Climate Change Act 2021,⁷⁰ the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2007 (as amended in 2018),⁷¹ and the Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992,⁷² among others. These laws aim to promote and achieve environmental protection, climate change mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development in Nigeria. National institutions typically include ministries of environment, climate change commissions and regulatory agencies tasked with implementing climate policies. Nigeria, for example, has its Federal Ministry of Environment⁷³ and the National Council of Climate Change was established under the Climate Change Act 2021.⁷⁴ These bodies are responsible for translating international commitments into domestic action, monitoring compliance and enforcing environmental regulations.

Another African nation considered is South Sudan, which, through its Ministry of Environment and Forestry and in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme, has developed a National Adaptation Plan. The Plan lays out a coordinated response to climate risks and impacts, including floods, drought, rising temperatures and rainfall that are threatening livelihoods and ecosystems.⁷⁵ The Plan establishes a legal and scientific basis for action and prioritises vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, health, energy, ecosystems, water and disaster risk reduction.⁷⁶ Finally, the Plan serves as South Sudan's roadmap for building resilience, mobilising climate finance and integrating adaptation into national development planning.⁷⁷

Going further is the Niger Republic, whose current core climate policies focus on strengthening climate resilience in agriculture and reversing land and ecosystem degradation. It has developed two long-term adaptation strategies for this purpose, including the National Strategy and Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector 2020-2035⁷⁸ and the National Strategy and Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector 2022-2026.⁷⁹ These seek to promote climate-smart practices, improve planning and reduce vulnerabilities for agricultural producers supporting food security and protecting the natural environment.⁸⁰ The country has also

⁶⁹ Nigeria's Climate Change Policy 2021-2030.

⁷⁰ Climate Change Act 2021, s. 1.

⁷¹ NESREA Act 2007 (as amended in 2018).

⁷² EIA Act 1992.

⁷³ Federal Ministry of Environment

⁷⁴ Climate Change Act 2021, Part II and III.

⁷⁵ South Sudan, 'First National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change' 2021. <<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/South-Sudan-First-NAP%20.pdf>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ National Strategy and Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector 2020-2035. <https://climate-laws.org/documents/national-strategy-and-plan-for-adaptation-to-climate-change-in-the-agricultural-sector-spn2a-2020-2035_f35c?l=niger> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁷⁹ National Strategy and Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change in the Agricultural Sector 2022-2026. <https://climate-laws.org/documents/national-strategy-for-adaptation-to-climate-change-in-the-agricultural-sector-spn2a-2035-action-plan-2022-2026_7639?l=niger> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁰ *ibid*



developed a National Action Programme to Combat Desertification, which provides a framework for restoring degraded ecosystems and protecting natural resources.⁸¹ Finally, and quite importantly, Niger developed and updated its Nationally Determined Contribution 2021, which provides for the nation's mitigation and adaptation commitments under the Paris Agreement.⁸²

Another important nation is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Through its Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the DRC developed and submitted its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (2021-2030), committing itself to reducing emissions by 21% by 2030 and outlining mitigation and adaptation actions it would carry out across sectors, including energy, agriculture, forestry and waste.⁸³ It also emphasised the need for good governance, strong systems and financial support to meet its climate goals.⁸⁴ The country has also gone ahead to develop its National Adaptation Plan (2022-2026), affirming its commitments to the Paris Agreement and emphasising the need for coordinated action to tackle climate risks and support much-needed sustainable development for the nation.⁸⁵

The country of Sudan, which is north of South Sudan, has climate policies and plans in development. It developed and submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions 2022, which reaffirms its commitment under the Paris Agreement and outlines its priorities for climate change mitigation and adaptation.⁸⁶ Sudan also has a National Adaptation Plan that identifies the nation's climate vulnerabilities, going ahead to set out areas of priority to carry out adaptation actions.⁸⁷ These include agriculture, energy, water and natural resources. Both frameworks form the backbone of the nation's policy architecture, which, if well implemented, can guide it to a resilient future.

These policies and strategies are commendable. Other African nations have developed some form of strategy or plan or submitted their NDCs in response to the Paris Agreement, including Mali⁸⁸ and Burkina Faso.⁸⁹ However, the effectiveness of the national frameworks of these nations hangs in the balance because of the political instability they face. The manifestations of political instability constitute challenges for climate governance, considered hereafter.

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Niger Nationally Determined Contributions <https://climate-laws.org/documents/niger-first-ndc-updated-submission_55ab?l=niger> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸³ DRC Nationally Determined Contributions 2021 <<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/CDN%20Revis%C3%A9%20de%20la%20RDC.pdf>> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ DRC National Adaptation Plan (2022-2026). <https://climate-laws.org/documents/drc-national-adaptation-plan-to-climate-change-2022-2026_d61a> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁶ Sudan Nationally Determined Contribution 2022. <https://climate-laws.org/documents/sudan-s-first-ndc_9baa> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁷ Sudan National Adaptation Plan <https://climate-laws.org/documents/sudan-national-adaptation-plan-nap1_72fc?l=sudan> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁸ Mali Nationally Determined Contributions <https://climate-laws.org/documents/mali-first-ndc-updated-submission_d030> Accessed 12th May 2026.

⁸⁹ Burkina Faso National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2015. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NAP_Burkina_Faso_2015_EN.pdf> Accessed 12th May 2026.



3.0 POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA IN THE 2010s-2020s: A LEGAL ANALYSIS OF EMERGING CHALLENGES

While African nations have developed strategies to combat climate change, it is the main argument of this paper that political instability has contributed significantly to limitations in their implementation. It is noted that political instability is a serious issue facing climate governance in Africa. Since the 2010s, Africa has witnessed a resurgence of political instability in various forms, including military coups, armed conflicts, insurgencies, electoral disputes and governance crises.⁹⁰ Countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya and the DRC have experienced prolonged periods of instability.⁹¹ Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, known as Sahel States, have collectively experienced more than 5 military coups since 2010,⁹² which have disrupted governance and economic progress. The justification for these takeovers has been dissatisfaction with corruption, economic mismanagement and insecurity.⁹³ Yet, while the new governments have promised prosperity, these nations still wallow in poverty and insecurity.⁹⁴ These developments have had far-reaching implications for governance generally and more specifically for sectors that require long-term planning and sustained institutional commitment, such as climate governance.⁹⁵

It cannot be denied that good climate change governance is heavily dependent on the existence of stable and functional state institutions capable of implementing laws and ensuring compliance with international obligations.⁹⁶ However, political instability in Africa has weakened institutions in some of these States, often rendering legal frameworks ineffective in practice. In Burkina Faso, for example, the President Ibrahim Traore is yet to fulfil promises of democratic transition as all government institutions have been militarised.⁹⁷ Weakened institutions have also been observed in other parts of the Sahel and even Somalia.⁹⁸ It is the position of this paper that with this reality, climate governance cannot be optimally achieved.

⁹⁰ Y Olawale and I R Toshio, 'African Union Agenda 2063 and the Resurgence of Military Coup d'état in Africa' *Journal of African Union Studies* [2024] 11-33. Amina Miango, 'African Elections in 2025 Amid Democratic Regression' *CJID* (2025). <<https://thecejid.org/african-elections-in-2025-amid-democratic-regression/>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹¹ Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 'Conflicts Causing Record Level of Forced Displacement in Africa' (4th September 2024). <<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/conflicts-causing-record-level-of-forced-displacement-in-africa/>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹² S Mahmoud and M. Taifouri, 'The Coups d'État of the Sahel Region: Domestic Causes and International Competition' *Arab Center Washington DC* (27th September 2023). <<https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-coups-detat-of-the-sahel-region-domestic-causes-and-international-competition/>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹³ *ibid*

⁹⁴ Transparency International 'Lest we forget: Burkina Faso at a Crossroads against Human Suffering and Instability' (11th October 2024). <<https://ti-defence.org/burkina-faso-coup-military-defence-security-corruption-integrity/>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹⁵ Chamma (n. 18).

⁹⁶ O V C Ikpeze, O C Aduma and O L Udemezu, 'Climate Governance in Comparative Perspective: Lessons from the United States, Norway, and Bhutan for Nigeria' *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of Law and Clinical Legal Education* [2025] (2) (1) 58.

⁹⁷ E Yeboah and E R Aikins, 'Burkina Faso: Progress and Problems after two Years of Transition' *Institute for Security Studies* (21st February 2024). <<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/burkina-faso-progress-and-problems-after-two-years-of-transition>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹⁸ Center For Preventive Action, 'Violent Extremism in the Sahel' (5th May 2026). <<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>> Accessed 13th May 2026. 'A Cebotari and Others, 'Political Fragility: Coups



Climate governance requires long-term planning, consistent policy implementation and sustained investment.⁹⁹ However, in politically unstable environments, frequent changes in government or leadership often result in shifts in policy priorities.¹⁰⁰ This results in a case where political instability will lead to the reallocation of State resources toward immediate security concerns, thereby deprioritising environmental and climate-related issues.¹⁰¹ Governments facing internal conflicts or security threats are more likely to focus on maintaining territorial control and political stability than on other sectors.¹⁰² In such cases, the likelihood of investing in environmental protection, climate mitigation and adaptation strategies will be low.

Political instability further affects States' ability to meet their international obligations under international climate agreements such as the Paris Agreement 2015. While many African countries have submitted their NDCs and have their strategies and plans in place, the implementation of these commitments remains a significant challenge in the African countries that are politically unstable, compounded by limited finance and technological capacity.¹⁰³

Regionally, political instability undermines collective climate governance frameworks. Regional frameworks developed by the AU and ECOWAS, as outlined earlier, rely on member States' commitment for implementation, through regional integration and cooperation.¹⁰⁴ When States within the economic community are politically unstable, their participation in regional initiatives becomes inconsistent,¹⁰⁵ thereby weakening coordination, cooperation and overall effectiveness. An example of this is seen in West Africa, where, due to the political instability and regime changes going on in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, they withdraw from the ECOWAS, having been suspended by the Commission.¹⁰⁶ It can be inferred correctly that this has undermined the cooperation needed to fulfil the objectives of the Commission. Without the much-needed regional coordination, climate governance in the region becomes harder.

Additionally, political instability can exacerbate climate vulnerability, creating a cyclical relationship between conflict and environmental degradation. For instance, armed conflicts can

d'État and Their Drivers' *IMF* (10th February 2024). <<https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2024/034/article-A001-en.xml>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

⁹⁹ World Bank Group (n. 23); O H Afinjuomo and E K Muyali, 'Examining the Effectiveness of International Climate Agreements in Fostering Global Cooperation and Collective Action Towards Climate Change Mitigation in Nigeria' *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* [2024] (8) (6) 618.

¹⁰⁰ Abouelenein and Others (n. 26).

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Yeboah and Aikins on Burkina Faso (n. 97).

¹⁰³ Africa Climate Insights (n. 25).

¹⁰⁴ R. Laverne, 'Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective' *International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*, 1997. <<https://idrc-crdr.ca/sites/default/files/openbooks/812-0/index.html>> Accessed 13th May 2026.

¹⁰⁵ W Raji, R M Ogechukwu and S Udeorah, 'Assessing Political and Economic Barriers to Regional Integration in ECOWAS' *GPH-International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* (2025) (8) (1) 80-91.

¹⁰⁶ A Marc, N Verjee and S Mogaka, 'The Challenge of Stability and Security in West Africa' *World Bank* (2015). <<https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-challenge-of-stability-and-security-in-west-africa/>> Accessed 13th May 2026.



lead to the displacement of populations,¹⁰⁷ unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation.¹⁰⁸ Examples of these are seen in Sudan and the DRC, among others, where conflicts have been used as a front for unsustainable exploitation of gold, copper, lithium and other rare Earth minerals.¹⁰⁹ These countries have also lost significant parts of their natural environment to degradation and depletion resulting therefrom.¹¹⁰ These conditions, in turn, increase vulnerability to climate change and place further strain on already weak governance systems.

It is therefore evident that the challenge revolves around the inability of States to effectively operationalise these frameworks because of the political instability they face. This has led to limited effectiveness and implementation of the aforementioned legal and institutional frameworks for climate governance, diverted resources that could have been utilised for climate action and hindered the peace needed to govern successfully. Accordingly, in order to address climate change in Africa, political instability must be dealt with.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the problem of political instability relative to climate governance in Africa since the 2010s. It gave an overview of what political instability and climate governance mean, and this paper revealed that several African States have battled with political instability since the 2010s. This has limited or hindered committed climate governance. While the legal, policy and institutional frameworks of most African nations have been developed or are in developmental processes, political instability, which manifests itself in insurgencies, electoral violence, governance crises and coups, has reduced the ability of States and their institutions to effectively turn these frameworks into reality. The persistent political instability has further exacerbated environmental degradation, deepening the climate vulnerability of Africa and significantly affecting the ability of African States to meet their commitments regionally and internationally. This paper is therefore important as it draws attention to how climate governance in Africa is hindered by political instability.

5.0 FINDINGS

From the challenges which have been discussed above, this paper has come up with the following findings:

5.1 Policy Discontinuity, Weak Institutional Capacity and Enforcement Mechanisms

This paper revealed that the weakness of institutions responsible for implementing and enforcing environmental laws is a feature of politically unstable African States since the 2010s. Due to political instability, these institutions are underfunded, lack technical expertise or access to state-

¹⁰⁷ Africa Center for Strategic Studies (n. 91).

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Environmental Programme, 'In Sudan, conflict and environmental decline go hand in hand' (4th November 2022). <<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/sudan-conflict-and-environmental-decline-go-hand-hand>> Accessed 14th May 2026. K Seyuba, 'Climate, Peace and Security in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo' *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security* [2025] (2) 1-20.

<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025_02_climate_peace_and_security_in_eastern_drc.pdf> Accessed 14th May 2026.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*



of-the-art scientific and technological systems and operate with limited independence. Furthermore, it was revealed that frequent regime changes often lead to the weakening of key agencies. This discourages investment, making it difficult to sustain long-term climate initiatives. The States will also not be able to meet their NDCs. As a result, the enforcement of existing climate legal and policy frameworks will not be effective, and compliance with regulations, strategies and action plans is significantly undermined. This leads to further environmental degradation and deepens the climate vulnerabilities that African nations already face.

5.2 Weak Regional Coordination and Collective Implementation

Another notable finding made by this paper is that although many African States have ratified international climate agreements such as the Paris Agreement and have signalled commitment to follow through with the implementation of regional policies, strategies and action plans, there exists a lack of regional coordination and collective implementation because of political instability. This is because the States experiencing these instabilities are part of their regional communities and the AU. Obligations are coordinative, meaning that every State's input is important. Where the number of States facing political instability is significant, it greatly affects and undermines adherence to regional and international obligations as a collective people. This, therefore, weakens the overall effectiveness of climate governance in Africa.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings outlined above, this paper proposes the following recommendations aimed at strengthening climate governance in Africa and reducing political instability:

6.1 Strengthening Institutional Capacity, Enforcement Mechanisms and Policy Continuity

To address the challenges of policy discontinuity, weak institutional capacity and enforcement, this paper recommends that African States prioritise the development of resilient and autonomous systems that still carry on and implement climate policies and strategies even in cases of unanticipated political instability. Furthermore, the government in power must be transparent and accountable, as this will reduce uprisings and the need for untimely regime changes. Many of the coups that occurred in West Africa recently were a result of dissatisfactory governance of the ruling party. Where governments act professionally and manage financial resources for the good of the people and not themselves, it will leave a positive impact on governance, including climate governance, as the government will be responsive to climate vulnerabilities and the need to achieve sustainable development. This will help them implement climate policies and regulations and meet their international obligations successfully.

6.2 Enhancing Regional Cooperation and Collective Climate Action through Peace-building and Stability

To tackle the issue of weak regional cooperation and coordination, it is recommended that African States along the AU line and regional community lines pursue collective peace through AU or regional community-led or assisted peace-building mechanisms. By collaborating with the UN,



other international bodies and working together to achieve peace in a manner that does not undermine the sovereignty of any State within, African States can restore peace, which can then be sustained by reaffirmed commitment to stability and development. Continental and regional climate and sustainable development frameworks will also be impacted, as peace and stability will lead to cooperation and collective action to tackle climate change and environmental degradation. Furthermore, monitoring and compliance mechanisms within regional bodies should be strengthened to ensure adherence to agreed climate policies and strategies. Collaboration in data sharing, technology transfer and capacity building must be made to provide support to African States, which will strengthen the institutional capacity of these States.