

DEMOCRACY AND MILITARISM IN AFRICA AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESURGENCE OF COUPS IN WEST AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between politics and militarism in Africa has roots in the formation of states, where military forces from independence struggles often became intertwined with political structures. In peaceful independence cases, military intervention in politics emerged during periods of instability and social conflicts. Africa has experienced a significant number of coup attempts, with 109 successful and 111 failed coups between 1950 and 2022, making it the region with the highest number of coup cases globally. To address this, regional bodies like ECOWAS and the AU have adopted protocols and charters focusing on democracy and good governance. These initiatives led to a relative reduction in coup d'états between 2001 and 2018. However, since 2020, there has been a resurgence of coups in West Africa, including Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Niger, and Gabon. This research investigated the factors behind the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa and examined their implications on political stability, human rights, and socio-economic development. It employed two qualitative data collection methods namely interviews and bibliographic research, with content analysis serving as the primary analytical tool. The resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa is attributed to factors such as terrorism, corruption, economic challenges, neocolonialism and/or colonial vestiges, political instability, and electoral manipulation. It was recommended that these countries take the following steps in addressing the status quo: Strengthen Democracy and Governance. Address Socio-economic Inequalities, Promote Security Sector Reform, Enhance Regional Cooperation, Engage the International Community, Foster Youth Empowerment and Participation, Strengthen Conflict Prevention and Resolution Efforts, Address Resentment towards Former Colonial Powers.

Keywords: Coup d'états, Governance, Neocolonialism, West Africa

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Africa has undoubtedly been interpreted in different forms and can be said to be very contextual in that, each country

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has its own definition of what democracy is. It further deserves mention that the active involvement of the military in governance has, in recent years, been on the rise, and it is evident in the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa, especially in the former French colonies. The presence of state apparatus has been used to oust the sitting government that is allegedly oppressive or undemocratic. This is further, an explicit illustration of military influence in politics and issues of governance (Cheeseman, 2015).

Since 2019, West Africa has experienced the highest number of military coup d'états and it is noteworthy that, all of these countries are French-speaking. Since 2020, there have been ten coup d'états in Africa, with seven occurring in West African countries, namely: two in Burkina Faso, two in Mali, one in Chad, Guinea, and Niger. Two occurred in Central Africa (Gabon) and one in North Africa (Tunisia), (Sany, 2023).

The frequent occurrence of coup d'états in West Africa, especially in Francophone countries, is alarming. Within a span of less than four years, experiencing seven coups in the same region is truly concerning, emphasizing the need to explore the factors driving this notorious trend and exploring recommendations that could in the near future prevent such occurrences.

This article aims to investigate the factors behind the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa from 2019 to 2023, focusing on the similarities within the affected countries. West Africa comprises sixteen countries, nine of which are French-speaking: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

The research will employ qualitative data collection methods, including interviews and bibliographic research. The core method of analysis will be content analysis.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors have necessitated the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa?

Specific research questions

- What are the main events that have led to the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa?
- Who are the sponsors of the coup d'états in west Africa?
- What are the motivations and interests of the actors involved in the coup d'états?
- What is the impact of the coup d'états on political stability, human rights and socio-economic development in the affected countries?
- What is the response of regional bodies to the coup d'états?
- What is the opinion of the West African Students at the Pan-African University school of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences on the resurgence of coup d'états?

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To investigate factors that have necessitated the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa.

Specific objectives

- To identify the main events that have led to the resurgence of coup d'états in west Africa
- To investigate the sponsors of the coup d'états
- To analyze the motivation and interest of the actors involved in the coup d'états
- To evaluate the impact of coup d'états on political stability, human rights and socio-economic developed in the affected countries
- To analyze the responses of regional bodies to the coup d'états.
- To examine the opinion of the West African Students at the Pan-African University school of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences on the resurgence of coup d'états.

Significance of the Study

It is common knowledge and almost inevitable that were there is unrest, instability and different forms of crisis emerges. This study delves into understanding the intricacies that have led to coups in West African Franco-phone countries. This becomes significant in understanding this geographical disposition with regards coups and further, by virtue of this study incorporating the views of people that leave in this study area, gives more depth and entail on what has been obtaining on the ground. This gives credibility of the findings and offers a credible avenue for researchers to get information for further research. Equally the recommendations offered could perhaps be adopted by these countries that have experienced coups and those that are at risk of experiences coup d'états.

In the African context, the relationship between politics and militarism dates back to the formation of states. In countries that achieved independence through armed struggles against colonial rule, the military force used in the war did not separate significantly from the political and administrative apparatus of the State after independence. In countries that attained independence through peaceful negotiations, military intervention in politics emerged in the context of political instabilities, civil wars, and other social conflicts that occurred after independence.

This interaction has generated divided opinions within civil society, the political class, and academia. For instance, Claude Ake, (2000) and Tatah Mentan, (2007) view militarism as a burden to development and democracy. They argue that the portion of the budget allocated to the military is excessive and counterproductive, considering the low productivity of the military class and the detrimental effects of such expenditures on key sectors of society, such as education and healthcare.

On the other hand, Jonathan Powell, Mwita Chacha, & Gary Smith, (2018) argue that military intervention in political power can potentially facilitate democratic transition in authoritarian regimes. They cite examples such as, the 1974 coup d'état in Portugal, which ousted the authoritarian Estado Novo regime and paved the way for democratic transition, as well as more recent instances like the coup against Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Additionally, military interference through coups d'état can be seen as a strategy to safeguard national interests against corrupt politicians and foreign exploitation.

On the African continent, military involvement in politics has been characterized by a variety of dynamics, with the coup d'état being one of the most prominent. What is a coup d'état? Why and how does a coup occur? What are the consequences of a coup on politics, the economy and human rights? What have people's positions and interpretations of coups been?

A precise and nuanced understanding of coups requires, according to Powell & Thyne (2011) the identification of the tactics used in their execution, their targets, and perpetrators. Coups are carried out illegally and are generally not very violent, which distinguishes them from civil wars that often involve significant bloodshed. They are perpetrated by individuals connected to the state apparatus, commonly the military. A coup d'état's primary target is the executive's head, which distinguishes it from other forms of challenging established political power that may not necessarily aim for a regime change.

However, there is also a phenomenon known as institutional coup, which is carried out by individuals in positions of political power, such as presidents, ministers, and legislators, and involves the manipulation of state institutions for personal interests rather than the population's interests as a whole. The weakening of the principles of separation of powers, loss of autonomy, and the personalization of democratic institutions characterizes it. For our analysis, we consider these two conceptions.

From 1950 to 2022, Africa witnessed 220 coup attempts, 109 successful coups, and 111 failed coups. Recently, there have been coup d'états in Niger, West Africa, and Gabon, Central Africa. These statistics make Africa the region with the highest number of coup cases globally, followed by Latin America and East Asia (Powell & Thyne, 2011). To address the recurring cases of coup d'états, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the Additional Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance. The African Union (AU) embraced and expanded this initiative, which created the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) in January 2007. As a result, there has been a relative reduction in coup d'états between 2001 and 2018.

This situation has changed significantly since 2020, with the resurgence of coups d'état, including those that occurred in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Sudan, and more recently, Niger and Gabon. What are the main factors contributing to the resurgence of coups d'état in sub-

Saharan African countries? How do coups d'état impact democracy and political stability in the region? What are the social, economic, and political consequences of coups d'état in the affected countries? What should be the role of the international community and regional organizations in response to coups d'état? Are there specific countries, organizations, or actors that may have an interest in supporting such actions?

Understanding the resurgence of coups d'état in Africa, like other forms of conflict, requires an eclectic and nuanced approach. This analytical exercise considers the diversity of interests, actors, and objects in dispute. These countries share some similarities influenced by historical, political, and geographical determinants. Most of them belong to the West African region, represented by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Except for Sudan, they are all French-speaking and are former colonies of France. All of these countries have experienced more than one attempt and/or unconstitutional change of power between 2008 and 2023. Additionally, they are facing challenges related to religious fundamentalism and terrorism, except for Gabon, Sudan, and the Republic of Guinea.

Definition of key terms

This section will delve into explicitly defining of key concepts utilized in this study. These concepts are: Coup d'états, Governance, Neo-colonialism and West Africa.

Coup d'état

A coup d'états id an authorized invasion or takeover of a state by the military, this entails that the military ousts the democratically elected head of state and suspects the rule of law. This takeover is unconstitutional and commands little or no legitimacy in most cases except in isolated areas where this takeover could tentatively gain the support of the people (Pryce & Time, 2023).

Governance

Governance is the act of governing of a state or an entity, which in simple terms means to rule, direct and guide. The manner in which political authority is exercised for the utilization of resources of a country for development and growth is called governance. Good governance adheres to tenets such as transparency, accountability, adherence to the rule of law, fairness, equity, free and fair elections, responsiveness, participation among other aspects that in cooperate the views of the people in order to guide and direct the affairs that speak directly to the needs of the people. Bad governance alludes to the opposed (World Bank, 2023).

Neo-colonialism

Neocolonialism can be defined as another version of colonialism which exists in a more advanced stage. It is seen as the interference and subjugation of a former colonial territory that comes in form of cultural, economic, educational, technological and social control

in the modern era. As opposed to colonialism that existed, neo colonialism is subtle and does not explicitly employ direct or physical control nor does it employ the presence of the military (Babatola, 2013).

West-Africa

A sub region in Africa that is located in the upper left hemisphere of the African continent, it consists of the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and the Gambia. The ethnic groups are very vast and wide. It must be noted that these countries adopted official languages of their former colonizers splitting them into three languages namely, English, French and Portuguese. Religion wise, Islam and Christianity are widely practiced and this has become a source of conflict (World Atlas, 2023).

Country specific events

This segment highlights the peculiar intricate events that have occurred in the four Franco-phone countries leading to the status quo.

Burkina Faso

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been caught up in an escalating web of violence attributed to rebel fighters allied to both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS) group, killing thousands of people and further displacing millions of people. In 2022, the country experienced two coups: with the first being in January in which the army spearheaded by Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba ousted the civilian elected president Roch Kabore after his six years in power, following a series of unrest in the capital. Damiba as a transitional leader, promised to improve the security status in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

However, the situation did not come close to better if anything, it worsened in his tenure. It is alleged that armed groups in Burkina Faso increase by 23 percent in the first five months of his reign (Human Rights Watch, 2022). It is further alleged that Damiba in his tenure had taken a more pro-France stance and had a high affinity for working closely with the former colonizer to root out armed groups. This is in the midst of anti-French sentiments that have risen in Franco-phone countries.

Some of the serious issues that the country has been languishing with have been: hunger crisis, with over 600,000 people literally starving and unable to meet their daily and livelihood needs. Additionally, blockages in the cities by armed groups making it very hard for aid to reach the intended people in need of basic needs. It was on 30th September 2022 when the military ousted president Damiba, that Ibrahim Traore a military leader assumed power. Since then, the country is yet to have democratic elections. The interim president stated that elections are likely to take place in July 2024 (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Since assuming power, Captain Traore has cut links with France, the former colonial power. He ordered French forces based in the country to help tackle the Islamist insurgency to leave, and launched mass recruitment drives to reinforce the security forces. It should be noted

that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has condemned these acts of unconstitutional change of power and ECOWAS has since suspended the country's membership. The African Union and United Nations have equally expressed their displeasure (African News, 2023).

Niger

Since Niger gained her independence from France in 1960, the country has experienced five (5) successful military take overs, with other unsuccessful attempts in between. With the latest being that of President Mohamed Bazoum who a group of military soldiers ousted after members of his presidential guard team detained him at the country's presidential palace in Niamey. Throwing the country into a political pandemonium. Suspending all institutions. This was preceded by extremely poor governance; non-adherence to the tenets of democracy, constant deteriorating security conditions in the country, constant attacks against civilians and security forces (Sany, 2023).

There are several insurgent groups, such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates, as well as Boko Haram operating in the country. These attacks by these insurgent groups have consequently led to a thousands of deaths and displacements in the last decade. Additionally, the presence of foreign forces continuously increased, especially from France and the United States. Prompting the military guard led by general Omar Tchiani to oust the sitting president (UN, 2023).

Interestingly, hundreds of youths in the capital, Niamey, gathered to celebrate the July coup, waving Russian flags and chanting Wagner. This suggests to a larger extent that the population in Niger believe that the military, supported by Russia and the private military contractor, Wagner group, would do a better job of fighting insurgents and offer a better environment for Niger to thrive. According to (Aljazeera, 2023). the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United States, France, and the United Nations also strongly condemned the coup, calling it unconstitutional. What is particularly striking about former French colonies is that they have a monetary union that France literally controls. In West Africa they have the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and use a currency called West African Francs (XOF) whilst those in Central Africa have the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and use a currency called Central African Francs (XAF). It should be noted that, these currencies are all printed by the Bank of France since its creation in 1945. It is only now that West African Franco-phone countries are reforming to reduce France's role in the currencies.

Mali

In Mali, there has been a significant decline in the integrity of elections and political pluralism over the past decade. This decline is evident in the limited political freedoms, such as freedom of assembly, as well as restrictions on media freedom and digital rights. Furthermore, there has been an unequal distribution of political power among different

segments of society. Mali ranks among the ten countries with the highest decline in Security & Rule of Law on the continent. Worsening security and safety conditions primarily drive this decline due to a significant increase in armed conflict and violence against civilians. No other country on the continent has experienced a greater decline in this aspect than Mali. The frustration stemming from flawed legislative elections in 2020, where the results for 31 legislative seats were overturned in Favor of President Keïta, coupled with growing insecurity due to rising violent extremism and allegations of corruption, sparked widespread protests against President Keïta. These factors are considered the main triggers for the military coup that took place in August (Schultes, 2022).

Guinea

Since 2010, Guinea has experienced significant restrictions on political pluralism and civil society space, resulting in a decline in various rights indicators, particularly Digital Rights and Media Freedom. The distribution of political power has become more unequal in 2019 compared to 2010, and the enjoyment of civil rights across different segments of society has been limited. The security situation in Guinea has deteriorated due to a rise in violence against civilians, primarily perpetrated by state forces. However, the decline in Security & Rule of Law is primarily driven by deteriorations of Justice. Concerns arise from a less impartial judicial system, less rigorous judicial processes, and decreased executive branch compliance with the rule of law. Even before President Condé amended the constitution in 2020, which allowed him to run for two additional terms, Guinea's rule of law situation was already on a negative trajectory. The flawed 2020 presidential elections and President Condé's pursuit of a third term were among the main factors motivating the coup in 2021 (Schultes, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The popular support for military takeovers through coups d'état in formally democratic contexts, the reactions of major global powers, and the inconsistent position of regional and international organizations in response to coups d'état invite us to transcend the traditional interpretation of coups d'état in Africa. This theoretical reorientation could change the logic of interpreting coups d'état and allow one to consider other possible determinants of their resurgence, including their use to establish social justice, protect national interests against foreign domination, fight against neocolonialism, and combat corruption and authoritarianism of elected leaders.

By pointing out these other determinants of a coup d'état, we do not intend to disregard the traditional interpretation characterized, almost exclusively, by the analysis of non-electoral rise to power, especially by the military class. On the contrary, we aim to provide insights to enhance the analysis of coup d'état, including in its traditional approaches. There is a vast set of interests, actors, and circumstances that determine coups d'état. Failing to consider these factors and limiting ourselves only to the electoral dimension may compromise our understanding and interpretation of this subject.

Coup d'état as an act of social justice

In a context marked by political violence and insensitivity of the ruling class, a coup d'état is seen by many people as a strategy to reclaim popular power and pursue social justice. What narratives, symbols, and practices support this perception? How has it played out in practice? Has there been coherence between the reasons invoked for the coup and the subsequent behavior of the coup plotters? In her analytical exploration of the civil-military relationship, Nadine Olafsson (2020) emphasizes that while coups are motivated by selfish ambitions, coup d'états are driven by altruistic motivations, triggered not only to seize power but to establish social justice. However, for a coup to be considered an act of justice, certain practices need to be identified in the post-coup period, such as power redistribution, popular support, improving living conditions for marginalized classes, and action favoring state interests.

These elements are relevant to avoid a dissociation between discourse and practice, as the reasons invoked for the coup are not always genuine. For example, the cases of the coup by Moussa Dadis Camara in Guinea and the 2012 coup in Guinea-Bissau, where the coup plotters justified their actions based on reasons related to safeguarding national sovereignty and establishing social justice, which was to some extent necessary. However, the post-coup period was marked by the misappropriation of state institutions, worsening social inequalities, and the misappropriation of state resources by the coup plotters and their allies.

In the last century, Muammar Gaddafi, Thomas Sankara, and Jerry Rawlings led coups in Libya, Burkina Faso, and Ghana, respectively. But unlike the previously mentioned cases, the post-coup period in these instances was characterized by adopting policies and programs to promote social justice, fight corruption, and defend state interests over those of the ruling class.

Under the reign of King Idris, I, supported by the United Kingdom and endorsed by the United Nations, Libya remained underdeveloped in education, healthcare, housing, and social security. In 1969, Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi and a group of officers overthrew the Senussi dynasty, proclaiming true independence and removing foreign influences. Gaddafi implemented policies to share the country's oil wealth among the population, significantly improving living conditions. Social programs were launched in education, healthcare, housing, public works, and subsidies for basic needs (Telesur, 2020). These efforts transformed Libya from one of the poorest countries in Africa into a leader in the continent's Human Development Index until 2011, with high literacy rates, increased life expectancy, and gender equality. Women, in particular, benefited; becoming ministers, ambassadors, pilots, judges, and doctors. The government received widespread support from the lower and middle classes (Mamdani, 2011).

In Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara led a popular uprising on August 4, 1983, in the country formerly known as the Republic of Upper Volta in West Africa. Inspired by the social utopias of the 1960s and

figures like Patrice Lumumba and Che Guevara, Sankara had a deep passion for social justice. Between 1983 and 1987, he implemented agricultural and land reforms, reforestation to combat desertification and prevent famine, and prioritized education and healthcare. He reformed the administration, fought against corruption, reduced state spending, curtailed the powers of traditional authorities, and worked for women's emancipation.

After his assassination on August 15, 1987, thousands of Burkinabe expressed a profound emotional attachment to Sankara. In the days that followed, they walked to the Dagnoën cemetery to pay their respects at his grave. Alongside flowers and tears, handwritten messages were left at his tomb, including the following: "Long live the president of the poor." "The jealous, power-hungry traitors killed you." "Mother Sankara, your son will be avenged. We are all Sankara." "Can we forget you?" "A hero never dies" (Harsch, 2014).

These messages reflect the importance of Thomas Sankara's regime in promoting social justice. His commitment to representing the interests of the poorest, combating corruption and inequalities, and the reverence the Burkinabe people have for him as a charismatic and visionary leader are evident to some extent.

Coup d'état as an act of reclaiming national sovereignty and fighting foreign domination

To understand the issue of a coup d'état as an act of reclaiming national sovereignty and fighting foreign domination, it is necessary to revisit the history of decolonization in African countries and their relationship with former colonial powers. Unlike the Portuguese colonies, which mostly achieved independence through armed struggle between 1973 and 1975, the British and French colonies in West Africa already gained independence in 1965 through negotiations between the independence movements and colonial regimes. However, this independence did not result in a complete disconnection from the former colonizer and the cessation of all relations of domination. For this reason, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah referred to it as "flag independence" (African Heritage, 2017).

In the context of French colonization, the decolonization negotiations were marked by the signing of a pact between France and its former colonies. This pact included various provisions, such as privileged access for France to the natural resources of these countries, control of monetary policy through the use of the CFA franc, the obligation to support France in cases of global crisis, and the prioritization of French interests and companies in bidding processes (African Heritage, 2017). This pact has been characterized as neocolonial and has received criticism from the population, the academic community, and the military in former French colonies in Africa. They see the dynamics of the France/Africa relationship as an extension of colonialism and exploitation of African countries.

In the former French colonies, many regimes that came to power through military coups justify their actions by invoking the fight against French neocolonialism. This claim has been well received by the population, which not only supports the coup leaders but also openly criticizes France while showing sympathy towards Russia. To what extent are the coup leaders' claims valid? What attributes justify the anti-neocolonial tendency of these coups?

Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Congo are facing conflict, with the first two being related to fundamentalist and terrorist movements, and the latter being linked to a separatist conflict and illegal exploitation of natural resources. Through military cooperation projects, France has established military bases and sent soldiers to prevent and combat these movements. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of France's contribution have been questioned. On the one hand, France is accused of protecting only French interests in these countries, and on the other hand, of exacerbating the situation of chaos to justify its continued presence.

The military regimes in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have accused France of having an insatiable desire to maintain colonial relations with their countries and of being complicit in the problems they face. Under the leadership of Mamadu Goitá, the military regime in Mali has taken a series of measures aimed at restricting French influence in the country, including revoking the independence pact, abandoning French as the official language, and requesting the withdrawal of French troops from Mali. In Burkina Faso, Mamadou Traoré has taken a similar stance regarding language, promoting the use of local languages as many languages of instruction and also demanding the withdrawal of French troops from the country.

While France vehemently condemns the coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, France has shown a timid condemnation and an urgent rapprochement with the coup leaders in Chad, Guinea Conakry, and Gabon. This practical and discursive inconsistency of France in the face of the same situation (a coup d'état) increases the credibility of the claim that the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have an anti-neocolonial character. What is the basis for the initial refusal of the French ambassador to leave Niger, even after being declared *persona non grata*? Who is France concerned about not wanting to leave Niger?

According to Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), the receiving state has the right to declare the head of mission or any member of the diplomatic staff *persona non grata*, without explaining its decision. Similarly, the receiving state can also declare other mission staff members as "unacceptable". This means that the receiving state can refuse to accept or recognize the appointment or presence of these individuals on its territory. If such a declaration is made, the sending state is expected to take appropriate measures and withdraw the individuals. France's position in certain situations shows that it does not recognize the sovereignty of these countries, making it impossible to treat them as sovereign states in terms of state-to-state relations.

Coup d'état as an act to combat corruption, personification of the state, and poor governance

Democracy is a political system that goes beyond holding elections. It also implies guaranteeing and upholding constitutional principles and a commitment to the autonomy of democratic institutions. Unfortunately, there are cases where democratically elected leaders consolidate power and become dominant figures, acting as puppet institutions of the government. When state institutions are personified in this manner, they lose their autonomy, making it difficult, if not possible, to control or curb authoritarian actions by the rulers.

In this context, a coup d'état emerges as the only option to de-personify state institutions and interrupt a restricted group of individuals' appropriations of the state and its resources. The exclusive focus on condemning coups d'état is, as highlighted by Handy, Akum, and Djilo (2020), a simplistic approach to dealing with governance crises in Africa. The emphasis on protecting democratically elected governments reflects the context and spirit of the Lomé Declaration, which aimed to ensure the authority of civilian political institutions against the authoritarianism of military interventions.

However, since 2000, the citizen debate on democracy and governance in Africa has evolved. Priorities have shifted to address the quality of electoral processes, the importance of term limits, as well as legitimacy, performance, and accountability in political and economic governance. Social discontent, often expressed through protests, has been met with varying degrees of repression, cooptation, and the maintenance of the status quo (Handy, Akum, Djilo, 2020).

In 2014, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) observed that unconstitutional changes of government are originated by governance deficiencies, which include: greed, selfishness, mismanagement of diversity, inability to seize opportunities, marginalization, human rights violations, lack of acceptance of electoral defeat, unconstitutional manipulation of constitutions to serve narrow interests, and corruption (Handy, Akum, Djilo, 2020).

The relationship between poor governance and coups d'état is evident and has been observed in various African contexts. Between 2012 and 2019, it was found that governance indicators were low compared to the African average in countries such as Burkina Faso, Sudan, Niger, Gabon, Guinea, and Mali. It is necessary to go beyond simply condemning coups d'état and address more comprehensively the underlying issues of democracy in Africa. This involves addressing issues such as the quality of electoral processes, rulers' accountability, public administration transparency, human rights promotion, and the fight against corruption. Additionally, regional and international organizations must play a more active role in promoting these values and holding governments accountable when they fail to uphold them.

Coup d'état as an act of shielding mandate and maintaining interests

Aware of the loss of popular support, the difficulty in winning elections, and the risk of facing a military coup, some rulers and their allies may carry out a kind of self-coup to remain in power and justify the reorganization of the military structure in their favor. In February 2022, an "attempted coup" took place in Guinea-Bissau, with the aim of assassinating President Umaro Cissoco Embaló and some government members. There was a confrontation and exchange of gunfire for three hours between the presidential guard and the alleged coup plotters. During the "attempted coup," the President, the Prime Minister, and other government members were gathered at the government palace for a council of ministers (Africa News, 2023).

The President and the government confirmed the attempted coup, and the President mentioned the involvement of political actors, but why did it all remain merely accusations if there is evidence? Who are the moral actors to whom the President always refers? There is a military base very close to the government palace, so why was there no intervention and reinforcement? All that is known is that after this episode, Cissoco took the opportunity to request the deployment of a military force from ECOWAS, restructure the presidential guard, and arrest some individuals.

Recently, a coup d'état took place in Gabon, which ousted President Ali Bongo and placed General Brice Oligui Nguema, Ali Bongo's cousin, in power. Nguema argues that the coup was due to the manipulation of the electoral results that occurred on August 26, in which Ali Bongo was declared the winner with 64.27% of the votes (Africa News, 2023). If the coup was due to electoral result manipulation, why didn't the military hand over power to the true winner? Wouldn't it be a strategy to maintain the continuity of the Bongo family? Who are the interested parties in this coup? Why, unlike in Niger, did the French ambassador recognize and visit the coup plotters in less than two weeks? Despite the former President Ali Bongo's performance and the timid condemnation from France, it is clear that this coup was not aimed at establishing social justice, reclaiming institutional sovereignty, or combating neocolonial logics. It is evident that it is nothing more than a self-coup and a strategy to shield the ruling elite to circumvent the loss of popularity and protect their political interests and those of their partners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

West African franco-phone countries are the study focus area considering that all the coup detats have occurred in the French Speaking countries. It deserves mention that, from 1950 to 2022, Africa witnessed 220 coup attempts, 109 successful coups, and 111 failed coups. Recently, there have been coup d'états in Niger, West Africa, and Gabon, Africa. These statistics make Africa the region with the highest number of coup cases globally, followed by Latin America and East (Asia Powell & Thyne, 2011).

This research employed qualitative data collection methods namely: interview guides and bibliographic research, with content analysis

serving as the primary analytical tool. The interview guides were purposively distributed to eleven (11) students of the Pan-African University whose country of origin is West African franco-phone or Central African Francophone. Namely: Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Sudan. Also, Anglophone West African countries like Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, this was so considering these countries are in the same geographical space. This was strategic in that they understand better the political, military and socio-economic intricacies of these countries where the coups have occurred. Also, it really is information one can utilize to relate to the challenges and stakes of these countries considering that they are personal and to some extent collective experiences that speak to the status quo.

Furthermore, the bibliographic research was employed as secondary data with the use of credible information from the internet, books, research papers amongst other credible literature and news platforms. It deserves mention that with the rapid mushrooming of media houses, it is more than necessary to ensure that the information obtained from news platforms was scrutinized and counterchecked and truly speaks of what is obtaining on the ground. Consequently, ascertaining the credibility of information.

This data was later analyzed, to ensure that the content is interpreted into logical information that can be understood. Content is the message, while the analysis is the meaning derived from the message. Content analysis is a systematic approach that is used to recognize patterns in various recorded communication. It should be noted that, content analysis assisted the researcher in finding similar themes of study throughout the literature review thus building data sets for further analysis and introduction into the study (Bhatia, 2018).

It deserves mention that, because some of our interviewees are French speakers and are not bi-lingual, translation was employed from French to English. This was done using a third party to translate. This enabled an in-depth analysis of the information collected and analyzed.

DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEW RESULTS

The discussion of the results from the interviews conducted from the Pan-African University Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences (PAUGHSS) provides insights into the main events leading to the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa, the sponsors of these coups, the motivations of the actors involved, and the impact of coups on political stability, human rights, and socio-economic development. It also explores the responses of regional bodies and the role of the international community in addressing coups. Additionally, the opinions of West and central African students at the Pan-African University School of Governance, Humanities, and Social Sciences are examined as they provide in-depth analysis of these questions highlighted.

In terms of the main events leading to the resurgence of coup d'états, the respondents highlight various factors. These include the fight

against terrorism and resentment towards France, corruption and lack of transparency, lack of rule of law issues, misappropriation of funds, political instability, economic challenges, poor governance, ethnic and religious tensions; this is in light of the fact that, most African countries have many ethnic groups and tribes of which most of them are struggling for power in order to control the means of production. Further, the manipulation of elections by political office holders. Some respondents also point out specific events such as attempts by incumbent presidents to modify the constitution to extend their mandates, which have led to public demonstrations and ultimately coups.

Regarding the sponsors of the coup d'états, the respondents have differing opinions. Some suggest that France, as the former colonial power in many of these countries, may have a hand in the coups due to the benefits they derive from them. Others mention the possibility of alignment with other powers such as Russia. Some respondents also suggest that the coups are supported by wealthy individuals within the affected countries or by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) due to religious differences.

The motivations and interests of the actors involved in the coup d'états are seen as power-hungry individuals with selfish interests, often backed by foreign interests. They are driven by personal ambitions, ideological beliefs, economic interests, and a desire to address the failure of previous leaders and restore good governance. Some actors may also be motivated by the need to reclaim territory, reinstate peace and stability, and expel former colonial powers from direct influence in these territories.

The impact of coup d'états on political stability, human rights, and socio-economic development is considered negative. The respondents mention human rights violations, political instability, economic disruption, democratic setbacks, freezing of financial assets, suspension of funding from donors, inflation, trade sanctions, degradation of the quality of life for the population, and the undermining of international engagement and integrity.

Regarding the responses of regional bodies and the role of the international community, the respondents suggest multilateral diplomacy, humanitarian assistance and protection, diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, intervention, condemnation of coups, mediation and conflict resolution efforts, and support for the transition to democratically elected governments. They emphasize the need for a proactive approach, prevention of coups through regional and international mechanisms, and a uniform approach in addressing coups across the region.

The opinions of West African students at the Pan-African University School of Governance, Humanities, and Social Sciences reflect the belief that popular support for military regimes facilitating coups is driven by the failure of democracy and the perceived inability of elected leaders to meet the aspirations of the people. The sentiment against former colonial powers, particularly France, is also mentioned. The students emphasize the importance of strengthening security sector reform, addressing socio-economic inequalities, supporting peaceful conflict

resolution, promoting good governance, combating poverty, decentralizing power, strengthening institutions, implementing policies effectively, and promoting equal economic development.

CONCLUSION

The resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa can be attributed to a combination of factors. The main events leading to these coups include the fight against terrorism, corruption and lack of transparency, rule of law issues, economic challenges, political instability, and the manipulation of elections. Attempts by incumbent presidents to modify the constitution to extend their mandates have also played a significant role. The sponsors of these coups remain a subject of debate, with suggestions ranging from former colonial powers like France to wealthy individuals within the affected countries or external actors like Russia and ISIS.

The motivations and interests of the actors involved in the coups are driven by personal ambitions, ideological beliefs, economic interests, and a desire to address the failures of previous leaders. Some actors aim to restore good governance, reclaim territory, or expel former colonial powers from direct influence. The impact of coup d'états on political stability, human rights, and socio-economic development is overwhelmingly negative, resulting in human rights violations, economic disruption, democratic setbacks, and the undermining of international engagement.

Regional bodies and the international community have responded to coup d'états in West Africa through various measures. These include multilateral diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, condemnation of coups, and support for the transition to democratically elected governments. However, there is a need for a proactive and uniform approach, as well as prevention mechanisms, to effectively address coups across the region.

The opinions of West African students emphasize the failure of democracy and the perceived inability of elected leaders to meet the aspirations of the people as driving factors behind popular support for military regimes. There is also a sentiment against former colonial powers, particularly France. The students emphasize the importance of strengthening security sector reform, addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting good governance, and implementing policies effectively to combat poverty and promote equal economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights provided by the discussion of the questionnaire results, as well as the opinions of West African students, the following recommendations can be made to address the issue of coup d'états in West Africa:

Strengthen Democracy and Governance: Efforts should be made to strengthen democratic institutions and promote good governance. This includes enhancing transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. It is important to address issues such as corruption, misappropriation of funds,

and manipulation of elections, which are often cited as factors contributing to coups.

Address Socio-economic Inequalities: Socio-economic inequalities and challenges play a significant role in creating an environment conducive to coups. Policies should focus on reducing poverty, promoting inclusive economic development, and addressing disparities in access to resources and opportunities. This can help alleviate grievances and reduce support for military takeovers.

Promote Security Sector Reform: Security sector reform is crucial to prevent military intervention in politics. It involves ensuring civilian control over the military, improving professionalism and accountability within the security forces, and promoting respect for human rights. International support and assistance can be provided to facilitate these reforms.

Enhance Regional Cooperation: Regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should play an active role in preventing and addressing coups. They should develop a unified and proactive approach that includes preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution mechanisms, and sanctions against coup perpetrators. Strengthening regional cooperation in areas such as intelligence sharing and border security can also contribute to stability.

Engage the International Community: The international community, including major global powers, should consistently condemn coups and support democratic processes in West Africa. Diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and the freezing of financial assets can be used as tools to discourage coup attempts. Humanitarian assistance and support for transitional processes are also important.

Foster Youth Empowerment and Participation: Given that the opinions of West African students highlight the failure of democracy as a contributing factor to coup support, it is important to engage and empower young people in the political process. This can be done through initiatives that promote youth leadership, civic education, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Strengthen Conflict Prevention and Resolution Efforts: Efforts should be focused on preventing conflicts and addressing underlying tensions that can fuel coups. This includes promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and peaceful resolution of disputes. Mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms can be supported to facilitate political stability and prevent resorting to military intervention.

Address Resentment towards Former Colonial Powers: It is important to address the sentiments of resentment towards former colonial powers, such as France, which are perceived to have a role in the coups. This can be done through open dialogue, mutual understanding, and efforts to build independent and mutually beneficial relationships between West African countries and their former colonial powers. This also includes limiting the influence that the colonial powers have in the internal affairs of these countries.

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