Journal of Political Discourse

Academic Journal domiciled in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Gusau- Nigeria.

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618

Journal of Political Discourse

Academic Journal domiciled in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Gusau- Nigeria.

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 - ISSN Online: 2992-4618

About the Journal

Journal of Political Discourse is a Quarterly peer-reviewed and research-oriented journal devoted to providing intellectual platform for the dissemination of empirical and critical research in the areas of Politics, Political Theory, Political Economy, Development Studies, Comparative Politics, Public Policy, International Relations, Security and Strategic Studies, Public Administration, Economics, Sociology and other related areas. The Journal is domiciled in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Authors' Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation

The Editorial Board of Journal of Political Discourse (JOPD) invites scholarly, empirical and theoretical based articles on contemporary issues to be published both online and prints in her journal and all manuscripts should conform to the following:

1. The maximum length of intended articles should be between 6,000 and 8,000 words, be scholarly and typed double line spacing, Times New Roman format
2. A short abstract of 200-250 words with 4-5 key words must be included
3. Authors are to submit a separate cover page containing their contact details and corresponding author of papers should be indicated
4. Tables, diagrams, graphs and other illustration should be included in the body of the article where necessary
5. Approved Referencing style is the current American Psychological Association (APA) format
6. All articles should be accompanied with a non-refundable assessment fee of N7,500.00 payable into the journal account:
   Account No: 3090220195
   Bank: Ecobank
   Account Name: Journal of Political Discourse
7. If a paper is found publishable, author(s) are expected to pay publication fee of N25,000.00
8. Papers submitted elsewhere for consideration should not be submitted to Journal of Political Discourse for consideration
9. Book reviews are also accepted for Publication
10. All manuscripts are to be submitted electronically via **email:** editor@jopd.com.ng

All correspondences should be addressed to:
The Managing Editor,
Journal of Political Discourse (JOPD),
Department of Political Science,
Federal University Gusau,
P.M.B. 1001,
Zamfara State, Nigeria.
+234(0) 8039190666
+234(0) 9025380107

EDITORIAL BOARD

Prof. E.M George-Genyi	**Editor-in-Chief**
Dr. Linus Akor	**Associate Editor**
Dr. Aminu Idris	**Member**
Dr. Abubakar M. Kalgo	**Member**
Dr. Ochoga E. Ochoga	**Member**
Abdulrahman Adamu	**Corresponding/Managing Editor**

CONSULTANTING EDITORS

Prof. Victor Ojakorotu- Department of Political Science, North-West University, South Africa

Prof. Usman A. Tar- Department of Defense & Security Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna

Prof. M.A.I.L. Bin Abdalah- Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia

Prof. **Yahaya Abdullahi Adadu**- Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Prof. Abubakar J. Jiddere- Department of Political Science, Bayero University, Kano

Prof. Toba Alabi- Department of Political Science and Defence Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna

Prof. Abubakar Abdullahi- Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto

Prof. Makodi Biereenu-Nnabugwu- Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Prof. Abdulaziz Shehu- Department of Economics, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi

Prof. Toyin Abe Gabriel- Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University

Prof. Ibrahim M. Umara- Department of Political Science, University of Maiduguri

Prof. Tochukwu Omenma- Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsuka

Assoc. Prof. Haruna Ayuba- Department of Political Science, University of Maiduguri

Assoc. Prof. Shakdam Wapmuk- Department of Defense & Security Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna

Assoc. Prof. Enemaku U. Idachaba- Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan

Assoc. Prof. Abraham M. Peter- Department of Political Science, Federal University Lokoja

Dr. Yusufu Ahmed Audu- Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutsin-Ma

Dr. Philip T. Vande- Department of Political Science, Federal University, Lokoja

Dr. Eziho Promise Ogele- Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt

Dr. Isaac T. Terwase- Department of Political Science, Federal University, Kashere

CONTENT

The Impact of External Influence on Military Coups in West Africa (2020 - 2023)
Shuaibu Shittu Isyaku…….……1

Child Marriages and Underaged Voting in Nigeria - A Challenge To The Child Rights Act 2003
Frederick Omoyoma Odorige……...14

Nigeria's Leadership in ECOWAS under Muhammadu Buhari: Contributions, Challenges, and Implications for Regional Stability
Dahiru Adamu & Prof. Sale Dauda……..27

Analysis of Informal Sector Activities as Determinants Of Household Income In Port Harcourt Metropolis
WACHUKWU Elendu & Ebiye CHARLES, PhD……..37

Nigeria's Local Government Autonomy: Issues and Implications for the Country's Development
Ibe Ezechi Cyriacus, Yusuf Ibrahim, Maryam Musa Sada & Ezenwajiobi Chidinma Charity..48

An Assessment of the Housing Scheme among Civil Servants in Gombe State
Hassana Y. Bello, Nasiru Anas & Sani Rabiu……..61

Debt Burden and Sustainable Development in Nigeria (2015-2021)
OCHOLI, A. Innocent & ISAH, Yusuf……72

COVID-19 and Human Security in Nigeria
UDEGBUNAM, Kingsley Chigozie, IDOKO Cordelia Ozoemena, CHUKWU, Chukwuemeka Quentin (corresponding author) & Eshilama, Ezinne Blessings……..83

The Role of Favouritism and Sycophancy in Infrastructure Naming And Its Consequences For Governance In Nigeria
Frederick Omoyoma Odorige……..96

An Analysis of the Implication of Involvement of Non-State Actors in Transitional Justice Process in Nigeria
Stephen J. AMUDA……..119

The Impact of Small Arms Proliferation On Security Dynamics in Kaduna State, Nigeria
Rabiu Adamu Waziri, PhD……130

Effects of The Amendment of 1957 Chieftaincy Declaration Of Ibadan Council Of Chiefs On The 2019 Gubernatorial Election In Oyo State
DR. BAKARE, Kehinde Najimu, Prof. Kayode Omojuwa & Abdulrahman Barau Yusuf..142

Effect of Western Influence on Africa's Development: A Conceptual Analysis
Abdulazeez Arisekola Abdulquadir, Ameen .A. Abdulkadir, Ph.D., Ibrahim Yahya, Ph.D. & Ganiyu Adebayo Zubair, Ph.D……155

Religious Institutions, Crisis Prevention and Peace Building: Nigeria in Perspectives
Shehu Hashimu, Mathias Jarikre, Bayo T. Asala and Theresa Omang Okoli……165

The Role of National Board For Arabic And Islamic Studies In Addressing The Almajiri Phenomenon In Northern Nigeria
Abdullahi Umar, Prof.Yahuza Sulaiman Imam, Dr. Awwal Muhammad Shafiu & Ahmad Muhammed Lawal……..181

Classical Political Economy and Market Challenges in Nigeria
Sani Suleiman & Alih Lami……193

JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 2, Issue 3, No. 2 / September 2024
https://www.jopd.com.ng

THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ON MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA (2020 - 2023)

SHUAIBU SHITTU ISYAKU
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Management and Social Sciences
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria
sslapai@gmail.com +2348065754652

Abstract

The recent wave of military coups that is sweeping through particularly West Africa has raised concerns on the sustainability of democratic practice in the continent. The wave akin to what happened in the early post-independence era has been attributed to the failure of political leaders to deliver democratic dividends to their people while exhibiting undemocratic tendencies in so called democratic settings. Extant literature exists on the debate on the causes of military coup and what most scholars have done in response to the recent wave is to reiterate the causes. By approaching the investigation on the return of military rule in West Africa, they failed to take into account and provide in-depth analysis of the prevailing dynamics influencing the wave of coups in West Africa today. This paper attempts to address that gap by delving into the nature and scope of external influence in the resurgence of military coups. The paper adopted documentary method of data collection and applied thematic analysis as its method of data analysis. The balance of power theory was adopted. The paper found out that although there are internal factors that have been heavily referenced as major causes of coups, it contends that there are external influences that are driving the internal factors. The paper also found out that external powers like France, US and Russia through the Wagner group are directly and indirectly involved in the rise of military coups in West Africa. The paper recommends that Africans through regional and continental frameworks must take charge of their destinies and resist being proxies to great powers.

Keywords: Balance of Power, Democracy, Development, Military Coups, West Africa.

Introduction

In recent years, several West African nations such as Niger and Burkina Faso have faced the resurgence of military coups, casting shadows over the region's hard-fought democratic progress. The historical backdrop reveals that shortly after gaining independence, nearly all West African countries experienced military coups, often resulting in prolonged military rule (Booth, 2009). This tumultuous trend persisted until the 1990s, when the global wave of democratization triggered transitions towards democratic governance in most West African states (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). However, the current landscape bears a disconcerting resemblance to the political turbulence witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s, as resurgent military political adventurism challenges the established democratic order (Watts, 2012).

In the past, two reasons were often cited as causes of military coups: the under-performance of post-independence governments in West Africa (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006) and the increasing politicization of the ostensibly apolitical military institutions (Bratton, 1989). Ajayi (2015) opined that the examination of these factors is essential for comprehending the surge of coups and counter-coups during the 1960s and 1970s. Notably, the military juntas that seized power during this period did not prove more adept at governance; instead, their rule such as that of Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso and Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo often left the states

they presided over in a worse condition than they found them (Bayart, 1993). Consequently, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, widespread disillusionment with military rule had set in, prompting fervent calls for a return to democracy. This heralded a new era of democratization that swept across the West African sub-region, ushering in democratic governments in many states during the 1990s (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). Expectations soared once again, mirroring the optimism of the post-independence era, as citizens hoped for improved living standards, effective governance, and accelerated development. Unfortunately, these high hopes have largely gone unfulfilled. Rampant corruption, inadequate infrastructure development, escalating insecurity, and ineffectual leadership have left economies in a state of stagnation, resulting in widespread poverty, squalor, and suffering (Moss & Young, 2009). This dire situation has cultivated a sizeable discontented population, some of whom have mobilized under the banners of ethnic and religious identities to challenge the state, either seeking secession or drawing attention to their plight (Boege et al., 2008). Regrettably, the leadership in most cases has failed to decisively address the complex socio-economic and security challenges at hand, which has inadvertently portrayed them as weak, passive, and unresponsive (Adejumobi, 2002). This perception has, in turn, beckoned the restive military to once again venture into the realm of political intervention (Clapham, 1996).

The entanglement of international players in the region's political affairs has been a recurring theme (Mills, 2019). Historically, foreign powers have often played a significant role in either bolstering or destabilizing governments in West Africa Such as Burkina Faso (Autesserre, 2012). The role of regional and international organizations, such as the African Union and the United Nations, in mediating conflicts and mitigating coup attempts is also of paramount importance (Murphy, 2017). Furthermore, the global economic order and trade relationships have played a pivotal role in shaping the incentives for coups (Collier, 2009). The competition for access to natural resources, especially oil and minerals, has led external actors to engage with governments in the region in ways that can either bolster or undermine stability (Auty, 2001). The potential for economic gains or losses, combined with weak governance structures, can create conditions ripe for military intervention (Fearon, 2005).

Understanding the intricate web of external influences such as Russia on military coups in West Africa is vital for crafting effective strategies to promote democracy, peace, and stability in the region. It is against this backdrop that we embark on an in-depth analysis of the contemporary resurgence of military political adventurism, considering both domestic and external factors that contribute to this unsettling trend. In the next sections, this paper will delve into the historical context of military coups in Africa, analyze external involvement, examine specific cases, and analyze the mechanisms through which foreign actors impact the dynamics of military coups in West Africa. By shedding light on these complex interactions, this paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing West African democracies and offer insights into potential avenues for policy intervention.

Statement of the Problem

Africa has witnessed an exceptionally high frequency of military coups and political interventions, surpassing any other continent in both the 20th and 21st centuries (Falola, 2022). Historically, these coups emerged shortly after independence in the 1960s, leading to a staggering count of over 200 coups—both successful and failed—across the continent (Barka & Ncube, 2012). Consequently, Africa is often characterized as a continent marked by recurrent political upheaval, with approximately 41 nations on the continent having experienced either successful or attempted coups (Barka & Ncube, 2012). The underlying causes of these coups in Africa have been attributed to various factors, including the absence

of democratic practices, leadership failures, economic crises, the ambitions of military officers, discontent among the youth and citizens, among others (Isilow, 2022). Within Africa, West Africa stands as the epicenter of military coups, contributing significantly to the continent's turbulent history. West Africa accounted for 51.3% of coups during the early post-colonial period (1960-1969), 49.5% during the 1970s to 1980s, and a startling 53.7% from 1990 to 2010, totaling 104 coups (both successful and failed) out of the 200 experienced across Africa (Barka & Ncube, 2012; World Atlas, 2022).

The resurgence of coups in Africa, particularly in West Africa, in the present decade (2010-2022), has raised alarms (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022). This resurgence has been associated with the challenges faced by democracy's consolidation and deepening in West Africa (Falola, 2022). The region has grappled with a multitude of governance issues, including corruption, compromised electoral processes, deepening security crises, and more. In this context, it is not surprising that some citizens welcome the return of military intervention in politics. Scholars have extensively analyzed the causes of these coups in West Africa, often framing them as a microcosm of broader governance challenges across the continent, such as economic decline, escalating poverty, a burgeoning youth population, unemployment, insecurity, lack of credible elections, and the absence of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law (De Rogatis, 2022). As Mushoriwa (2021) aptly emphasizes, these issues collectively contribute to the resurgence of military coups across West Africa.

However, existing literature on the topic has a limitation—it often overlooks the crucial dimension of external influence such as the USA, France and Russia. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the impact of external actors on the dynamics of military coups in West Africa.

Literature Review

This section will review extant literature on Military Coups in Africa.

Military Coups in Africa

The recurring phenomenon of military coups has become a prominent and, in some quarters, an almost routine aspect of African politics, exerting a profound influence on the region's political development. The prevalence of coups in Africa is particularly striking, with the continent experiencing more military interventions in its polity than any other in both the 20th and 21st centuries (Falola, 2022). Historically, the emergence of coups in Africa dates back to the tumultuous 1960s, and to date, the continent has endured over 200 such interventions, encompassing both successful and failed coup attempts (Barka & Ncube, 2012, p. 1).

The rationale behind military coups and their role in governance in Africa is multifaceted. Some posit that the military perceives itself as a stabilizing agent, intervening to prevent political processes from collapsing due to factors such as instability, governance failures, electoral crises, insecurity caused by factions vying for power, corrupt leadership, and autocratic regimes that suppress opposition (Akinwotu, 2022). Economically, the military has sometimes been portrayed as an actor seeking to ensure more effective economic management, youth employment, equitable resource distribution, and improved living conditions for society (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

Contrary to these assertions, scholars like McBride (2004) and Collier and Hoeffler (2007) contend that the military's claims of pursuing political and economic stability are often disingenuous. They argue that coups are driven by military officers' personal greed and their

desire to access state resources akin to their civilian counterparts. Consequently, they view coups as products of the accumulation of wealth that distracts the military from their primary role of safeguarding territorial integrity. Scholars such as Luckham (2001) and Coleman and Brice (1962) posit that the frequency of coups in Africa is rooted in the complex social dynamics of African societies. This complexity manifests in the military's allegiance to their ethnic cleavages rather than the state, which often leads to coups being justified along ethnic or tribal lines rather than national ones (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

While these assumptions regarding the motives for military involvement in African politics may hold true, evidenced by the failure of African countries to consolidate democratic gains and implement policies that benefit their citizens, it is equally apparent that military regimes have exacerbated socioeconomic and political crises. Additionally, they have constricted civil society space, perpetuated human rights abuses, engaged in extrajudicial killings, and displayed a disregard for constitutional norms (Falola, 2022).

Military Coups: Colonial and Immediate Post-Independence Outlook

In the era preceding colonial domination, West Africa was marked by the presence of powerful empires such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, as well as influential Jihad movements led by figures like Seku Ahmadu, Alhaj Umar, and Dan Fodio. These historical entities, whether intentionally or inadvertently, facilitated robust inter-group interactions and, to some extent, fostered amicable relations among diverse communities. The collective bitterness stemming from colonial rule, administered by the British, Portuguese, or French, served as a unifying force in the quest for freedom. This shared aspiration found tangible expression through the formation of transnational political parties during the initial stages of resistance in British West African territories, and later in the French West African territories.

These political parties, the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) and the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA), respectively, symbolized the unity of purpose in the struggle for independence. Although more radical and assertive political parties later emerged within the British West African colonies, the camaraderie forged during the early stages of resistance persisted throughout the colonial era and into the period of independence. In the case of the French colonies, the RDA and the enduring legacies of French colonial policies, "Assimilation" and "Association," upheld this fraternity up to the moment of independence.

By 1976, the West African countries had collectively established the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional economic organization that reflected the growing interconnectedness of the nations. Consequently, major socio-political events in one country were seldom isolated occurrences, as their ripple effects quickly transcended national borders. Even in terms of the performance of post-independence governments across the region, a consistent pattern emerged - one characterized by substantial underperformance compared to the optimistic expectations held on the eve of independence.

The prevailing belief at that time was that independence would bring about the resolution of all problems and a more abundant life for citizens (Ajayi, 2007, p. 34). As a result, "(Rapid) transformation in developmental terms, social advancements in the areas of education, health, employment, and other welfare indicators were largely anticipated and eagerly awaited" (Ajayi, 2007, p. 34). However, these expectations remained unfulfilled due to the deleterious impact of the neo-colonial nature of the emerging states and the self-serving orientation of their leaders, whom Basil Davidson aptly characterized as "pirates in power" (Davidson, 1993:243-

265). This reality was not confined to former British or French colonies, and it partly explains why, when coups began to occur, they transcended colonial boundaries.

Olu-Adeyemi and Ajayi (2015) argued that the alarming and contagious nature of coups in West Africa has prompted numerous calls on the international community, especially regional institutions like ECOWAS, to respond to this existential threat to democratic rule, security, and political stability in the region. ECOWAS, in its efforts to counter coups, has initiated various modalities, including economic sanctions, the severance of diplomatic relations, and the suspension of military leaders from the international community. The resurgence of coups in West Africa has brought about political, economic, and security implications for ECOWAS. Notably, the capacity of ECOWAS to safeguard democracy in the sub-region has been called into question, as scholars argue that the increasing frequency of coups is indicative of democracy's ongoing struggle (Barka & Ncube, 2012; Falola, 2022; Suleiman, 2021; Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022).

Historical Trend of Coups in West Africa

West Africa has earned the moniker of the "coup belt" of Africa (Suleiman, 2021). Accounting for approximately 44.4% of all coups on the continent, the political landscape of West Africa has been significantly marked by coup d'états in the majority of its 15 countries (ECOWAS, 2022; World Atlas, 2022). Since the first coup in Togo in 1963, the region has witnessed a succession of coups (Barka & Ncube, 2012). In the most recent decade, as debates on democracy have intensified throughout the continent and the region, West Africa has proven that coups remain a persistent feature of its political milieu. Regrettably, instead of democracy intensifying, it appears to be faltering or even stagnating, as some scholars argue that it has not yet taken root (Ake, 2001) or is in decline (Falola, 2022).

According to estimates by Suleiman and Onapajo (2022), of the approximately 40 successful and attempted coups across Africa, West Africa has been the stage for about 20 of them, accounting for 50% of such incidents in recent decades. Within the African context, the West African sub-region stands out as the epicenter of military coups. The region contributed to 51.3% of coups during the early postcolonial phase in Africa, spanning from 1960 to 1969, 49.5% during 1970-1989, and a staggering 53.7% from 1990 to 2010, even during a period often characterized as the democratic wave in Africa when many countries embraced democratic practices. In the grand tally of 200 coups (both successful and attempted) experienced by the African continent, West Africa accounts for 104 of them across its sixteen countries (Barka & Ncube, 2012; World Atlas, 2022).

Remarkably, despite the majority of West African nations being described as democracies, with features such as regular elections, respect for fundamental human rights, multiparty systems, involvement of civil society in governance, broadened political participation, and promotion of accountability and transparency, democracy has seemingly failed to forestall coups in the region. Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of military coups in West Africa (United Nations, 2022). The emergence of these military coups, often greeted with popular support and applause, has raised profound questions about the state of democracy in West Africa and even the possibility of its demise (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022). Mushoriwa (2021) decries this troubling trend of increasing coups in West Africa and the reversal of democratic progress achieved during the post-1990 fourth wave of democratic experiences across Africa. This alarming situation is evident in the occurrence of five coups across the continent, with four within the West African sub-region and one in Sudan, North Africa. Equally striking are the

parallels in the timing of these coups in the region and their contagious effects on neighboring nations, evoking echoes of the tumultuous era of the early 1960s (United Nations, 2022).

Table 1: Recent Coups in West Africa

Country	Date	Reasons Given	Leader	Results
Mali	August 19th , 2020 (first coup); May 24th 2021(second coup)	Electoral malpractice (parliamentary elections), growing insecurity in the country, corruption	Col. Mamady Doumbaya	This coup resulted in the overthrowing of the civilian rule of President Alpha Conde
Guinea	2021	Autocratic (civilian) government, economic mismanagement, eroding and faulty democratic practices	The leader (s) of this coup was said to be unclear	The government and leadership of Presidentelect Mohammed Bazoum
Niger	2021	Insecurity, deficiency in the governance of the present civilian rule	The leadership of this coup is uncertain	The leadership of President Umaro Embalo was the target of this coup criticized by the coup plotters for his failing
Guinea Bissau	2022	Insecurity, bad governance, citizens' discontent, youth unemployment, etc	Colonel Mamady Doumbouya	Alpha Cnde was overthrown
Burkina Faso	2022	Insecurity, Political corruption, lack of opportunity for the young and growing population, etc	The coup was led by a top military officer named Lt. Col. Paul Henri Damiba	President Roch Kabore was toppled and ousted from the government as a result of this coup
Niger	2023	Insurgency, Electoral fraud and under-development	General Abdouraham ane Tiani	President Mohamed Bazoum was ousted.
Gabon	2023	Corruption and Electoral Fraud	General Brice Oligui Nguema	President Ali Bongo was removed

Source: Authors' Compilation

Table 1 above shows the incidences of coup detat in West Africa There were three incidences of coup detat in Mali, Gunea and Niger in 2021. In 2022 Guinea Bissau and Bulkinafaso witnessed coup detat. Niger again and Gabon witnessed another coup detat in 2023. Electoral malpractice (parliamentary elections), growing insecurity in the country, corruption and youth unemployment were the reasons given by the coup plotters for their intervention.

Methodology

Given the qualitative nature of the subject matter, the study adopts documentary method of data collection where it relied on secondary sources such as journal articles, books, official documents and internet sources. The method of data analysis adopted in this study is the thematic analysis and content analysis. This allows for a concrete analysis of themes and contents in the documents where the data for this study were collected.

Theoretical Framework

The Balance of Power Theory, a foundational concept in international relations and geopolitics, offers a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the dynamics of external influence on military coups in West Africa. This theory focuses on how states and external actors strategically position themselves to maintain or shift the distribution of power in the international system. When applied to the context of West African military coups, the Balance of Power Theory provides insights into the motives, strategies, and consequences of external involvement in the region's political affairs (Cargill, 2011)

Balance of Power Theory and West African Military Coups

The Balance of Power Theory posits that states and external actors seek to safeguard their interests by either preserving the existing balance of power or altering it to their advantage. In the case of West Africa, external actors such as Western nations, regional powers, and Russia have distinct interests in the region, which include access to resources, security concerns, and geopolitical influence. Balance of power has to do with maintaining regime stability. One aspect of the Balance of Power Theory relevant to West African military coups is the principle of maintaining regime stability. External actors may support incumbent governments to ensure political stability, even if those regimes have authoritarian tendencies. This support can manifest through military aid, economic assistance, and diplomatic backing (Waltz, 1979). The rationale is that a stable regime aligned with an external power's interests serves as a reliable partner for securing strategic objectives. We shall proceed to examine the actors within this framework.

FRANCE

The recent surge in coups in French-speaking West African countries, coupled with the emergence of anti-French sentiments articulated by coup leaders and manifested in public demonstrations, has ignited a renewed examination of the legacy of French colonial rule in the region (Obadare, 2023). Diverse viewpoints and interpretations exist regarding the legacy of French colonialism. However, a consensus exists concerning the enduring influence France maintained over its former colonies even after they gained independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Obadare, 2023).

He asserts that France continues to exert significant political and economic sway in its former colonies. He posits that disillusionment has grown among many citizens in these countries, perceiving their civilian governments as subservient to France. Consequently, some have welcomed military rulers as a corrective force.

France's military engagement in the Sahel region has undergone particular scrutiny. In February 2022, President Macron announced plans to conclude the nine-year-long counter-terrorism operation Barkhane in Mali. This decision followed deteriorating relations with the Malian transitional authorities and the presence of Russian Wagner network mercenaries. President

Macron's announcement signified a shift in focus, with the "heart of this military operation" relocating from Mali to Niger under Operation Almahaou (Obadare, 2023).

Also, using Niger as a case study, we observed that anti-French sentiment has become visible in demonstrations supporting coups in West Africa. In early September, tens of thousands of protestors reportedly converged on a French military base in Niger, demanding their departure (Obadare, 2023). Nevertheless, some, including Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS' commissioner for political affairs, peace, and security, argue that the coup leaders are exploiting anti-French sentiment for their own purposes. Musah describes the soldiers who seized power in Niger as individuals who initially provided protection to the president but subsequently took him hostage, usurped power, and then sought justification and mobilization against the French (Obadare, 2023). Furthermore, Smith (2021), the former Africa editor of Le Monde, criticizes France's approach to the Sahel, asserting that it drastically misread the terrorist threat in Africa and failed to comprehend local politics. This misreading resulted in the French mission's inability to establish the necessary political foundations to counter insurgency and autocratic or populist rule effectively (Obadare, 2023). Smith contends that, due to its colonial and postcolonial legacy, France became a convenient scapegoat for the region's myriad challenges, making it susceptible to displacement by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group (Obadare, 2023).

The legacy of French colonial rule in West Africa has been a topic of extensive scholarly inquiry. One prominent scholar, Walter Rodney, in his groundbreaking work "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa," delved deeply into the historical ramifications of colonial exploitation. Rodney's insights underline the argument that colonialism laid the very foundations of underdevelopment in Africa. He posited that the extraction of wealth and the suppression of indigenous industries during the colonial era sowed the seeds of economic and social challenges that continue to plague African nations (Rodney, 1972). Kwame Nkrumah, a leading figure in the Pan-African movement and the first President of Ghana, introduced the concept of "neo-colonialism" to characterize the enduring economic and political control exercised by former colonial powers over their former colonies (Nkrumah, 1965). Nkrumah's work shed light on the subtle yet pervasive influence of former colonial masters, particularly France, in maintaining economic dependency and how it does this through foisting puppet government in Africa either through fraudulent elections or coups. An essential aspect of this influence is the CFA Franc, a currency used by many Francophone African countries. This currency's linkage to the Euro and its management by the French Treasury have sparked debates about the economic sovereignty of these nations. From the foregoing, in response to what some perceive as neo-colonial exploitation and political interference,recent military coups in west Africa have emerged as a means of challenging French influence. These coups can be seen as attempts by elements within the military to break free from foreign control and regain control over their nations' resources and sovereignty. This perspective finds resonance among those who have grown disillusioned with civilian governments they perceive as subservient to France and welcome military rulers as a necessary alternative.

Russia and Wagner Group

The participation of military leaders from Mali and Burkina Faso in the Russia Africa summit of July 2023 signifies a complex geopolitical realignment with potential repercussions for the region. President Vladimir Putin's discourse during the summit emphasizes Russia's intention to forge closer ties with African nations, including facets of military and security cooperation. A noteworthy aspect of Putin's address is his attribution of instability in Africa to the enduring effects of colonialism and the Western strategy of "divide and rule" (Smith, 2023). The

summit's declaration, which included a resolute commitment to jointly oppose neo-colonialism and counter manifestations of neo-colonial policies, reflects the prevailing sentiment among African leaders. Captain Traore, Burkina Faso's current military leader, seized the opportunity to condemn colonialism and imperialism. He portrayed Burkina Faso's recent history as an arduous struggle against what he characterized as "the most barbaric and cruel form of colonialism and imperialism." Captain Traore's impassioned plea for African leaders to assert their sovereignty and refrain from acting as puppets underscores the deep-seated anti-colonial sentiment that is fueling coups in West Africa (Smith, 2023). In similar vein, Assimi Goïta, Mali's interim leader, expressed gratitude for Russia's support and emphasized the significance of their "military partnership." His declaration regarding the goal of consolidating the strategic partnership between Mali and the Russian Federation hints at a shift in strategic alliances in the region (Smith, 2023).

The presence of the Russian mercenary Wagner Group in West Africa, raises questions about Russia's long-term intentions and activities in the region. Scholars have offered insightful analyses of Russia's engagement in Africa. Theodore Murphy, the Africa Programme Director at the European Council on Foreign Relations, argues that Russia exploits weaknesses in Europe's relationships with African states, including Mali, to enhance its influence (Murphy, 2022). Christopher Vandome, an Africa specialist with Chatham House, contends that the Wagner Group's presence in Africa often involves collaboration with elites in countries experiencing democratic backsliding (Vandome, 2022).

The UK and France have cited the close relationship between Mali's military leaders and the Wagner Group as a contributing factor to their military withdrawals from Mali in 2022. Captain Traoré's reference to "new partners" providing support, albeit without explicit naming, indicates the evolving alliances and alignments in West Africa's geopolitical landscape (Obadare, 2023). Scholars and analysts have increasingly scrutinized Russia's involvement in Africa, particularly through its paramilitary organization, the Wagner Group, which has raised concerns about the potential tilting of power dynamics in the region.

Various external actors, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Russia, have been involved in supporting and influencing coup dynamics across Africa, which has significant implications for regional stability and governance.

The Gulf states, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have been actively sponsoring military establishments in Sudan to maintain their grip on power. Their involvement in Sudan's political landscape has not only disrupted the country's democratic transition but has also served their broader regional ambitions. By supporting military rule, these Gulf states aim to prevent the emergence of Arab democracies, as it could potentially inspire calls for political reform within their own authoritarian regimes (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022).

Russia, on the other hand, has been a key player in supporting coups in Africa, often through its paramilitary group, the Wagner Group. Moscow has cultivated close ties with military factions in Sudan, playing a role in the country's democratic transition turmoil. Reports suggest that Russia actively agitated for the Sudanese military to seize power, likely in exchange for naval port access to Port Sudan, which would provide Russia with a strategic military foothold in the Red Sea corridor (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022). Wagner's interests also extend to western Sudan, where they are involved in various illicit activities.

In Mali, pro-Russian disinformation campaigns played a significant role in eroding the legitimacy of the democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, contributing to opposition protests that ultimately justified the 2020 coup. Several members of the junta

responsible for the coup had previously studied in Russia, indicating the extent of Russian influence in the country (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022).

One of the consequences of international actors supporting coup leaders is that it provides these unelected military regimes with a degree of international validation, enabling external authoritarian actors to exert greater influence over a state's sovereignty. This influence can lead to actions that are not necessarily in the best interests of the affected country's citizens but serve the geopolitical interests of external actors. For instance, in Mali, considerations of inviting Russian mercenaries could have a profound impact on the country's security and foreign policy, and it may not necessarily align with the aspirations of the Malian people (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022).

Stephen (2023) have expressed concerns that closer alignment with Russia, rather than Western powers like France and the United States, has weakened pro-democracy forces and helped sustain post-coup military regimes in countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso. This is contrasted with the situation in Chad. In Chad, the international community's tolerance of a veto coup, designed to maintain the Déby regime's hold on power, also has implications for democratic governance and regional stability, with Chadian authorities enjoying relatively favorable standing within the African Union (AU), while France and the U.S. have supported the coup (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022). These developments underline the complex interplay of international actors in shaping the outcomes of coups and transitions across the African continent.

Conclusion

The resurgence of military coups in West Africa presents a complex and multifaceted challenge with far-reaching implications for the region's stability, democracy, and socio-economic development. This study has explored the external influences that have played a significant role in shaping the occurrence and outcomes of military coups in West Africa. It has examined the involvement of Western nations, Russia, and regional actors in these coups, shedding light on their motivations, strategies, and consequences.

The research findings highlight several key points:

1. **The Influence of External powers on Internal conditions:** In our analysis of countries that witnessed recent military coups, we found that these countries are bedevilled with terrible political and economic conditions. Further study also shows that external influence exists even in the internal factors as the economic and political conditions facing the troubled nations can be traced to the past and present activities of external powers particularly France.
2. **Geostrategic Interests**: External actors, including Western powers and Russia, are driven by their geostrategic interests in West Africa. These interests encompass access to valuable resources, security concerns, and the pursuit of geopolitical influence. Such interests often lead these external actors to engage with governments, both democratic and authoritarian, in the region.
3. **Regime Stability vs. Regime Change**: The Balance of Power Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding external involvement in West African military coups. External actors may support incumbent regimes to maintain political stability or back opposition movements seeking regime change. These dynamics can contribute to political volatility.

4. **Military Suppor**t: The military support by external actors can have a dual effect. While it may enhance a government's ability to maintain control, it can also empower the military,

potentially leading to interventions in politics. Striking the right balance is a strategic calculation for external actors.

5. **Regional Dynamics**: Regional organizations like ECOWAS play a crucial role in the balance of power within West Africa. External actors may seek to influence these regional bodies to align with their interests, impacting their response to military coups.

i. **Geopolitical Rivalry**: Geopolitical rivalries among external actors, such as Western nations and Russia, extend to West Africa. These rivalries can exacerbate political instability as different external actors support competing factions or governments.

Recommendations

In response to the resurgence of military coups and external influences in West Africa, it is imperative for African nations to take charge of their destiny and resist becoming battlegrounds for proxy conflicts or international power games. African unity and solidarity are fundamental in addressing these challenges, as they empower nations to collectively confront external interference. Strengthening regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can facilitate coordinated efforts to safeguard sovereignty, uphold democratic values, and maintain regional stability. By prioritizing democratic governance, the rule of law, and transparent institutions, African countries can reduce the appeal of military interventions and create an environment conducive to peaceful political transitions.

Moreover, African nations should invest in robust conflict resolution mechanisms and early warning systems to detect and address potential triggers of military coups before they escalate. By taking the lead in mediating conflicts within the continent and actively participating in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, African countries can promote African solutions to African challenges. This approach not only enhances regional resilience against external interference but also empowers African nations to shape their political destiny and foster lasting stability. In this context, diversifying diplomatic engagements and maintaining sovereign decision-making processes become critical components of a comprehensive strategy to resist external influence and safeguard the interests and well-being of African populations.

References

Afro Barometer (2021) *Guineans strongly prefer democracy to any other regime but want the president limited to two terms*. Accessed at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp- content/uploads/migrated/files/press-release/Guinea/news_release- guineans_prefer_democracy-7sept21.pdf

Ajayi, 'Gboyega & Olupayimo, Dolapo (2009). Military Intervention in Politics: The West African Experience. In Ajayi, 'Gboyega, Akinbi, J.O. & Ikuejube (eds.). Essays in *Contemporary West African History*, (Pp 151-181) Ibadan: Alafas Nigeria Company.

Ajayi, A.I and Olu-Adeyemi, L (2015) Resurgent Military Political Adventurism in West Africa: Implications for the Survival of Democracy. *AFRREV*, VOL. 9(2), S/NO 37, APRIL, 2015

Ajayi, J. F. A. (2007). *Colonialism: An Episode in African History*. Springer.

Ake, C. (2001). *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Brookings Institution Press.

Akinwotu, E. (2022). *Contagious coups: What is fuelling military takeovers across West Africa?* The Guardian

Anyang' Nyongo' (ed.) (1987). *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*. London: Zed Books.

Arifalo, S.O. (1982). The Military in Contemporary African Politics. In Olaniyan, Richard (ed.) *African History and Culture*, (Pp 151-158) Lagos: Longman Nigeria Ltd.

Barka, A. J., & Ncube, T. (2012). Political Instability in West Africa: A Quantitative Analysis of Political Trends and Patterns, 1960-2010. *Journal of Business and Economics*, 3(2), 85-106.

Brack, D. (2022). ECOWAS and the Response to Coups in West Africa: An Assessment. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1-15.

Brack, S. W. (2022). Beyond sanctions: How west Africa can recommit to democracy. European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR. https://ecfr.eu/article/beyond-sanctionshow-west-africa-can-recommit-to-democracy/.

Brooke-Holland, L (2023). *Coups and political stability in West Africa*. House of Commons Library.

Bujra, A & Adejumobi, S. (eds.) (2002). 'Introduction' in Breaking Barriers, Creating New Hopes: *Democracy, Civil Society and Good Governance in Africa*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.

Cargill, T. (2011). *Impact World*. Washington: CNN.

Chole Eshetu & Ibrahim Jibrin (1995). *Democratization Processes in Africa*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.

Center for Preventive Action (2022) Instability in Mali. Accessed at: https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/destabilization-mali

Chilaka, F.C and Peter, T.O (2022.) Resurgence of military coups in west Africa: Implications for ECOWAS. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* Research ISSN: 2689-5129 Volume 5, Issue 2, 2022 (pp. 52-64)

Dare, L.O. (1989). The Praetorian Trap: *The Problems and Prospects of Military Disengagement – Inaugural Lecture*, O.A.U., Ile-Ife.

Davidson, B. (1993). *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. James Currey.

Davidson, B. (1993). *The Blackman's Burden*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books

Elischer, S., & Lawrance, B. N. (2022). Recent Coup Events in Africa: Patterns and Trends. *African Affairs*, 121(483), 1-26.

Falola, T. (2022). *Africa: A Continent in Peril*. Cambridge University Press.

Gberie, L. (2020). Why coup d'états happen: A social historical exploration of coup plots in West Africa. *Journal of African History*, 61(2), 227-249.

Munshi, N. (2022c, February 2). Gunfire rocks guinea-bissau capital in suspected coup attempt: West africa. *Financial Times*, p. 6.

Murithi, T. (2008). *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, peacebuilding, and development*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Mushoriwa, L. (2021). *Resurging military coups in Africa: A role for the international community*. Italian Institute for Political Studies.

Nagourney, E. (2020, August 19). Mali military coup: why the world is watching. *New York Times*.

Nebe, C. (2021, October 8). The uphill battle facing chad's new transition council. *Deutsche Welle*

Suleiman, Y. A. (2021). The Wave of Military Coups in West Africa and the Fate of Democratic Governance. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1-20.

Suleiman, Y. A., & Onapajo, H. S. (2022). Democratic Governance in Crisis? Military Coups and Leadership Change in West Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 59(4), 522-540.

Tejpar, J., & Albuquerque, A. L. (2015). Challenges to Peace and Security in West Africa: The Role of ECOWAS. Studies in African Security. https://www.foi.se/download/18.7fd35d7f166c56ebe0bb38f/1542369060258/ Challenge-s-to-Peace-and-Security-in-West-Africa_FOI-Memo-5382.pdf

United Nations. (2022). Political Instability in West Africa: The Trend and Implications. UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

Walsh, D. (2022). Gunfire rattles Burkina Faso'a capital as soldiers revolt. *New York Times*.

Walsh, D., and Schmitt, E. (2021). U.S. forces were training Guinean troops who took off to mount coup. *New York Times*.

Welch, C. E. J. (1970). *Soldier and State in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Military Intervention and Political Change*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Wobig, J. (2015). Defending democracy with international law: preventing coup attempts with democracy clauses. *Democratization* 22, 631–654. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2013.867948

Woldense, J. (2022, March 4). After Guinea-Bissau's failed coup attempt, expect the government to reshuffle political elites. *Washington Post*