

State Fragility and the Resurgence of Military Coups in West-Africa

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Abstract

State fragility and coups in Franco-phone West Africa constitute a worrisome political issue caused by weak leadership, instability, poverty, corruption, weak governance institutions, insurgency and terrorism, kidnapping and banditry, border porosity and high rates of military coup. The paper analysed the causes and consequences of military takeovers in West Africa and the role of regional organizations in curbing them. Secondary materials were used for data analysis. The paper concludes that the brazen-faced and audacious French imperialism in West Africa has contributed to the ongoing instability and insecurity in the subregion; creating a fertile ground for coup resurgence, which was driven by military leaders seeking to gain control and exploit the resources of the region for their own benefit. The paper thus suggests that as soon as the polity is stabilized, political power should be returned to the people in the affected States.

Keywords: *Coups, Coup-Resurgence, State Fragility, State Fragility Indicators, Franco-Phone States.*

Introduction

The recent coups in West Africa are often linked to state fragility in the subregion due to a variety of factors such as: presence of weak democratic institutions, corruption, poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and disputes over natural resources can all contribute to state fragility, making countries more susceptible to coups (Martin-Shields, Charles, Koester and Diana, 2024). The phrase 'fragile states' gained significance in discussions about development during the 1990s. While ideas like 'state failure' and 'state collapse' were familiar in law, development, peace and conflict studies, political science and international relations, it was not until a shift in perspectives on human and global security, and the recognition of the connection between conflict and development, that international organizations and scholars began to use the term 'fragile states' in the context of development issues (Ferreira, 2015).

The problematique of this paper centres on how the heightened features of State fragility in Franco-phone West-Africa has have created power vacuums that military actors have exploited by staging coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger among others. The features of State fragility are closely related to the causes of military coups in Franco-phone Africa. Furthermore, in spite of the many civil service, economic, financial and judicial reforms that the States of Africa have carried out, the efforts have not proved effective in terms of solutions to address the challenges to help African countries build stronger and more resilient states (Kwaja, 2021, Mlambo, 2023), hence the reason for this paper. It specifically underscores the need for policymakers, researchers, and the international community to work together to support African countries in overcoming these obstacles and build more robust and effective states.

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Objectives of Study

The main objective of the paper is to examine causes and possible consequences of the sudden surge in the military take-overs in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger

The specific objectives are to:

Interrogate the interconnectedness of the Francophone order with this emerging trend of coups in Francophone West-Africa;

analyse ECOWAS diplomacy in resolving the issue of withdrawal of fellow members from ECOWAS without succumbing to external pressure from international actors; and

establish the linkage between state fragility and coup resurgence in Francophone West-Africa.

Literature Review

State Fragility

According to Elagin (2021), state fragility pertains to those nations which suffer from a deficiency in political stability, demonstrate an incapacity to effectively regulate their borders, and struggle to fulfill the multitude of essential functions expected of a sovereign state. In addition, Elagin (2021), made a review of the development of the definition of state fragility, categorizing it into first- and second-generation definitions. Initially, the earliest definitions of state fragility centered on identifying the deficiencies and shortcomings of fragile states, often employing descriptive approaches. These early conceptualizations predominantly highlighted the absence of inadequacy of certain attributes or capacities within fragile states, without necessarily delving deeply into the underlying causes or dynamics of fragility.

The emergence of the second generation of definitions marked a notable shift in understanding state fragility, acknowledging it as a complex, multi-faceted, and ongoing phenomenon. Green (2011), as cited in Nwozor (2018, 2021), argues that the leaders in question neglected to enact crucial structural, institutional, and governance reforms that could have paved the way for the successful establishment of stable African states. Instead of prioritizing state-building initiatives, they focused on nation-building endeavors. This strategic shift inadvertently transformed the potential advantage of ethnic diversity, prevalent in nearly all African states, into a disadvantage. The failure to address structural deficiencies and promote inclusive governance mechanisms hindered the effective consolidation of statehood and perpetuated instability within the region. This perspective underscores the missed opportunities and detrimental consequences resulting from the mismanagement of governance priorities in post-independence Africa (Olowu & Chanie, 2016). This view is shared by Cebotari, Chueca-Montuenga, Diallo, Turk, Xin and Zavarce, (2024), Maino and Emrullahu, (2022).

State fragility not only compromises the state's internal stability and resilience but also poses significant challenges to regional and international security. In essence, contemporary perspectives on state fragility highlight the imperative for states to address vulnerabilities, enhance resilience, and build effective governance structures to mitigate the risk of failure and promote sustainable development (Hoeffler, 2019, Elagin, 2021).

Features of State Fragility

Fragility arises when entities are not adequately equipped to handle the challenges they face, leaving them vulnerable to potential destabilization or breakdown. This perspective emphasizes the importance of building resilience and enhancing coping mechanisms within states, systems, and communities to address fragility effectively and promote sustainable development. Negative consequences such as violence, the disintegration of institutions, displaced people, humanitarian crises, or other emergencies can result from fragility (OECD, 2016).

Elagin (2021) delineates the primary attributes of weak or failed states, emphasizing their incapacity to uphold a robust public image of sovereignty through their institutions, functions, and procedures. This perspective highlights several key dimensions. The first dimension is institutional weakness; this means that, weak or failed states often suffer from institutional deficiencies, characterized by ineffective governance structures, corruption, and a lack of accountability. These institutions may struggle to enforce laws, provide public services, or uphold the rule of law, diminishing the state's legitimacy and capacity to govern effectively. The second dimension is dysfunctional functions. This means that fragile states may also exhibit dysfunctionality in performing essential functions expected of a sovereign entity. This could include failures in maintaining security, managing the economy, delivering basic services like healthcare and education, or ensuring social cohesion and inclusivity. The third dimension includes procedural challenges; weak or failed states often face procedural obstacles that impede their ability to function cohesively. This may involve bureaucratic inefficiencies, bureaucratic red tape, or a lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, hindering effective governance and exacerbating state fragility.

Hoeffler (2019) demonstrates how fragility affects not just the people living in fragile states but also has significant detrimental spillover effects on the regional and global levels. Several of the major issues facing the globe today are linked to fragility such as; poverty, sickness, terrorism, malnourishment, hunger, and criminality. Fragility or fragile situations, according to the World Bank as cited in Hoeffler (2019), can be defined as times when states or institutions lack competence, legitimacy, or responsibility to arbitrate relations between citizens and the state as well as between citizens groups, leaving them open to violence.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), as cited in Adeto (2019), assert that extractive state organizations represent a hallmark of state fragility. These entities are characterized by their propensity to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few, often at the expense of the broader populace. Extractive states typically engage in practices that exploit natural resources, monopolize economic opportunities, and stifle competition, leading to widespread impoverishment and economic stagnation.

Moreover, the extractive nature of these state organizations not only perpetuates inequality and poverty but also exacerbates social tensions and grievances. The disenfranchisement and marginalization experienced by large segments of the population create fertile ground for social unrest and violent conflict. In this regard, extractive state organizations serve as catalysts for instability and insecurity, undermining the foundations of statehood and impeding the prospects for sustainable development (Adeto, 2019).

Adeto (2019) further explains that states in the "Horn of Africa" are weak and their institutions lack the political will and ability to carry out the fundamental duties required for development, poverty alleviation, and defending the safety and human rights of their citizens. This has an impact on society as a whole by endangering livelihoods, deepening the economic downturn, and igniting further crises that compromise human security and raise the possibility of protracted armed conflict in the sub region (Ferreira, 2015).

Furthermore, according to Brooks (2005), cited in Elagin, 2021, state fragility is defined by several key aspects. This includes the inability to maintain physical control over its territory or assert exclusive authority over the justified use of force. Ferreira (2015) contends that a state can be considered fragile if it exhibits specific indicators. These include the state's inefficiency in enforcing contracts, safeguarding property, delivering public goods, and generating revenues. Additionally, the presence of political violence, whether through repression or civil conflict, is indicative of state fragility. Ferreira further suggests that the severity of these indicators directly correlates with the extent of state fragility.

Similarly, Notshulwana, (2011), suggests that nation-states experience failure when they are engulfed in internal violence and no longer provide beneficial political services to their populations. As a result, their governments lose trust and the legitimacy of the nation-state as a whole comes into question among its citizens. Ultimately, this erosion of trust and legitimacy poses significant challenges to the coherence and viability of the nation-state, potentially resulting in further unrest and fragmentation within society. Notshulwana, (2011), elaborates on the necessity of comprehending the organizational structure and operational dynamics of the state when discussing issues of fragility, weakness, and failure.

Moreover, examining the interplay between internal and external factors, such as conflicts, resource exploitation, and geopolitical interests, is crucial for contextualizing discussions on state fragility in Africa (Nwozor, Olanrewaju, Oshewolo, Oladoyin & Adedire, 2021). Over the last three decades, considerable attention has been devoted to examining the state of fragility, weakness, and failure in Africa. Despite numerous efforts to define, categorize, measure, interpret, and forecast these phenomena, satisfactory outcomes have yet to be achieved (Notshulwana, 2011).

Fragile states are perceived as a medium for terrorism, drivers of underdevelopment, and a threat not only to their own populations but also to neighboring countries and the global community as a whole. State fragility is not solely viewed as an indication of underlying social, legal, or political issues but is recognized as a significant problem in its own right, necessitating a range of diverse interventions and solutions (Saeed, 2020).

Saeed (2020) claims that state fragility is based on three assumptions: 1) states have obligations they must meet, 2) failure to do so leads to instability and potential collapse, and 3) this can harm international peace and development. Last but not least, there is the crucial notion that the fragility of states represents a deviation from the norm observed within the broader community of stable and robust states (Osimen, Daudu, Oladoyin & Ahmed, 2024).

Saeed, (2020) additionally demonstrates that the rankings, indices, and reports classify states according to their performance in a number of areas, such as managing riots and protests, addressing violations of human rights, safeguarding religious freedoms, addressing food shortages, achieving GDP growth, combating corruption, upholding state legitimacy, ensuring political freedoms and civil liberties, holding regular elections, and preventing conflicts and militancy, among other criteria.

Furthermore, booking institution (2008) cited in Saeed (2020), characterizes weak states as nations that lack the necessary capability and/or determination to fulfill four crucial government duties: fostering conditions conducive to sustainable and fair economic growth, establishing and sustaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions, ensuring the security of their populations from violent conflicts and territorial control, and meeting the fundamental human needs of their citizens.

According to Cilliers and Sisk (2013), Fragile states cannot ensure basic human security or create public goods for development. Although authoritarian regimes have institutional capacity, their leadership undermines essential functions. States under captured or kleptocratic rule face governance challenges despite having the necessary capabilities (Cilliers & Sisk, 2013, Hoeffler, 2019). The cases of states in Africa are good examples.

In particular, violent conflict has an impact on people's ability to make ends meet and their economic performance. It can also undo years of progress made in reducing infant mortality and lengthening life expectancy. The profound and enduring impacts of violence on health systems and the delivery of essential services like maternity and child health care are at least partially to blame for the subpar development results in fragile states (Adeto, 2019).

Clarifying the Concepts of Coup d'état or just "Coup"

A coup d'état, or just "coup," is the term used to describe the removal of a government by a small group of people, usually from the military or the elite. According to Powell and Thyne (2011), coups usually entail the overthrow or seizure of the current government as well as the suspension of the legislature and the constitution. "A sudden blow or strike" is how the French term "military coup d'état" is translated. An abrupt overthrow of a government against popular will is known as a coup d'état, or simply a coup (Nkosi 2010). A military coup, according to Thomson (2004) is an abrupt and unlawful overthrow of the government in which security forces are heavily involved. It is a violent challenge to the state, similar to a rebellion, claim Collier and Hoeffler (2006). Miller (2011) defines a coup d'état as "a forceful seizure of executive authority and office by a dissident/opposition faction within the country's ruling or political elites that results in a significant change in the policies of the previous regime and the executive leadership."

Multi-party elections in the 2000s decreased coups. Only 2 successful coups reported in West Africa from 2001-2010: Mauritania in 2005 and Guinea-Bissau in 2003. (Powell & Thyne, 2016).

Historical Analysis of Military Coups in West Africa

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Africa has experienced more military takeovers and political interventions than any other continent in the globe (De Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2023). Most African coups in history started in the 1960s, right after the continent gained its independence from the colonial masters. Moreover, the continent has seen more than 200 hundred coups as far, both successful and unsuccessful. Therefore, it can be said that Africa is a continent that experiences coups frequently, with around 41 governments having either successfully or unsuccessfully staged coups (Ani, 2021). The occurrence of coups in Africa in recent times has been ascribed to various factors, including the lack of democratic practices, inadequate leadership, economic hardships, the avarice of military personnel, discontent among the youth and residents, and so on (Woldense, 2022).

From the 1960s after independence, military takeovers have been a common occurrence in West Africa. Between 1955 and 2005, the area had more than 80 successful and unsuccessful coup attempts, according to McGowan (2006). Several coups occurred during this time in nations including Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, etc. Among the notable coups were those in Burkina Faso headed by Thomas Sankara and later Blaise Compaore, Nigeria in 1966 that resulted in a civil war, and several coups in Ghana in the 1970s prior to the Rawlings movement (Hutchful 1997). The results of coups vary; some resulted in military dictatorships, others instigated more coups, and some eventually brought their countries back to democracy.

Though African economies continued to be dependent on the influence of colonial powers, the early optimism gave way to a different reality in the post-colonial age. Disillusionment resulted from African leaders' inability to fully utilize the continent's immense potential for the good of the populace, even in the face of the establishment of democratic regimes modeled after European ones (Osimen, Daudu & Awogu-Maduagwu).

In the mid to late 1960s, a wave of military coups was made possible by the establishment of one-party systems, which were especially prevalent in nations like Tunisia, Senegal, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast. These systems also exacerbated political cynicism and ethnic conflicts. Claims of electoral fraud and misbehavior by civilian regimes served as justifications for military interventions, which frequently made governance worse. It was evident from the corrupt and despotic regimes of Jean-Bedel Bokassa, Idi Amin, and Mobutu Sese Seko that military rulers, once in power, often displayed governance shortcomings on par with or even worse than those of the civilian administrations they replaced. This tendency has prompted many observers to contend that Africa has suffered from a lack of capable leadership since its independence, regardless of whether it was ruled by the military or by civilians.

Theoretical Framework

One theoretical framework that could help explain the resurgence of coups in West Africa and the incidence of state fragility is the theory of state failure. This theory suggests that weak institutions, lack of inclusive governance, and economic challenges usually contribute to political instability and the breakdown of state authority. Moreover, factors such as corruption, ethnic tensions, and external interference can also play a role in the vulnerability of states to coups and fragility.

Some proponents of the theory of state failure include scholars like Robert Rotberg, Michael Ross, and Francis Fukuyama. They have studied the causes and consequences of state fragility and highlighted the importance of addressing governance, economic, and social issues to prevent state failures.

Methodology

The method adopted by the paper was the use of secondary materials, including reported news in official and recognized news outlets and publications, journal articles and internet reports. After collecting the data, the author analysed it using descriptive analysis techniques that involves looking at the data and describing what patterns or trends that could easily be discerned. To enrich the analysis, the author also utilized the simple tool of rational-cum-logical explanation corroborated by insights from renowned scholars on the subject matter pertaining to the subject matter under discussion. Thematic analysis was derived from the enumerated objectives of the paper.

Analysis

The Resurgence of Coups in West Africa Sub-Region

The term "coup belt" of Africa appropriately describes West Africa (Chigozie & Oyinmiebi, 2022). The political history of West Africa has spent half of its existence recording coups throughout the majority of the continent's 15 countries, accounting for around 44.4% of all coups in the region (ECOWAS, 2022; World Atlas, 2022). There have been multiple coups in the region since Togo's first coup in 1963 (Raube, 2023). In the early years of Africa's postcolonial phase, between 1960 and 1969, the continent accounted for 51.3% of coups; from 1970 to 1989, it accounted for 49.5%; and from 1990 to 2010, the frightening number was 53.7%. Of the 200 coups that have occurred in Africa, 104 (including successful and failed) have occurred in West Africa (Barka & Ncube, 2012; World Atlas, 2022). The worrying trend of coups occurring in Africa, particularly in West Africa, between 2010 and 2022 is noteworthy (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022). The failure of democracy to intensify and deepen in West Africa has been linked to the rise of coups in the region (Falola, 2022). There are numerous instances of weak governance in the region, including worsening security crises, lack of free, fair, and legitimate elections, and corruption. The people's celebration of the military's return to politics becomes predictable.

The democratic advancements gained in West Africa throughout the 1990s have been disrupted by the return of coups d'état in the region in recent years. Since 2020, the sub-region has witnessed numerous successful and attempted coups, following a notable decrease in coups during the 2000s (African Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). Three successful coups occurred in West Africa in 2021 alone, two in Mali and one in Guinea, according to data from the Center for Systemic Peace (Marshall, 2022). Since 1999, this is the most coups that have occurred in the area in a single year. In addition, coup attempts were noted in 2021 in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Niger (ICG, 2021).

The overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the transitional government in Mali in August 2020 and May 2021, respectively, via coups brought to light the legitimacy dilemma that civilian governments face in the face of corrupt practices and weak governance (Mechoulan, 2021). Similar themes of elite corruption and a failure to enhance residents' welfare were also evident in the September 2021 coup in Guinea, which led to the overthrow of President Alpha Condé (Diallo, 2022). Afro-barometer surveys show that public support for military takeovers has increased throughout the area. According to Lekalake and Buchanan-Clarke (2021), an average of 46% of participants across 18 nations said they would be in favor of the military assuming control of the country. Just before the coups of 2021, support for coups was highest in Mali (67%), followed by Guinea (59%).

The region's civilian administrations have been overpowered by security difficulties, including armed insurgencies, intercommunal conflicts, predatory ruling elites, failed democratic transitions, and other factors (Chitiyo & Rupiya, 2021). These factors have contributed to the resurgence of coups. The surge in violent extremism has further weakened regimes and opened the door for military takeovers, particularly in the Sahel nations of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. West African democracy continues to suffer greatly from the rise of coups, which calls for immediate action to address the symptoms as well as the underlying reasons. While individuals continue to press for good governance changes that tackle corruption, abuse of authority, and raising living conditions, regional organizations like ECOWAS must fortify their accountability mechanisms (Bah and Jones, 2021).

West Africa has demonstrated that coups remain a persistent aspect of the political landscape in the region, with troops continuing to participate in power struggles as the discussion over democracy has heated up throughout the continent and the surrounding area. Sadly, data indicate that democracy is not strengthening but rather failing or dying (Falola, 2022) or has not yet started, as some academics have claimed (Ake, 2001). Suleiman and Onapajo (2022) estimate that of the 40 successful and attempted coups in Africa, roughly 20 have occurred in the West Africa sub-region, making up 50% of coups in recent decades. Military coups were a feature of the African continent in the 1960s, posing a major threat to the democratization process. While they ceased to be the norm for a brief period, recent coups in countries such as Guinea, Sudan and Burkina Faso suggest that the military is finding its way back to power. West Africa and the Sahel have experienced more coups than other regions.

In Mali, on August 19th, 2020 the first coup took place which was followed by the second coup on May 24th 2021. Some of the major factors that triggered this first and second military coup in Mali was malpractice in the electoral process (parliamentary elections), rising national instability, and corruption. The military leader of both coups that took place is Asimi Goita. In 2020, the administration of President Ibrahim Keita was targeted and the second led to the overthrowing of President Bah Ndaw. Both coups in 2020 and 2021 were considered successful as it led to the overthrow of the civilian regimes present.

Another recent military coup that took place was that of Guinea in September, 2021. It was majorly triggered by Economic mismanagement, deteriorating and flawed democratic norms, corruption and autocratic (civilian) governance. The military leader responsible for the coup was Col. Mamady Doumbaya. These factors resulted in the overthrowing of the civilian rule of President Alpha Conde and the coup was successfully carried out and overthrew the civilian rule. The coup ended Conde's controversial third term following his heavily disputed election victory in 2020. It was fueled by frustrations over corruption, human rights abuse and lack of economic progress under Conde (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023).

The French prolonged imperialism in Francophone West Africa resulted in significant economic, political, and social ramifications in the subregion. The extraction of resources and establishment of colonial administrations during this period led to a dependency on France and a lack of local autonomy. This increased fragility in the region as the French prioritized their own interests over those of the indigenous populations.

In 2022, Guinea Bissau also experienced a military intervention. This occurrence was due to several factors such as insecurity in the region, bad governance, citizens' discontent, youth unemployment and so on. The military leader responsible for the coup is uncertain however their major target was the leadership of President Umaro Embalo, He was criticized by the coup plotters for his failing leadership. The coup was described as an unsuccessful coup because it did not successfully overthrow President Umaro Embalo. Another military coup took place in January, 2022, soldiers led by a top military officer named Lt. Col. Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba staged a coup in Burkina Faso. Similar to other regions, it was caused by the level of insecurity in the region, political instability and corruption, lack of opportunity for the youth and growing population. The government and administration of President Roch Marc Christian Kabore was tumbled and overthrown from the government as a result of this coup. The coup was generally described a success as it saw to the imposition of the military in the affairs of government and the removal of the president. This was also amid public anger over his failure to tackle a spiraling jihadist insurgency.

Beyond the successful coups, the region also witnessed several failed coup attempts signaling further instability. In March, 2021, another military coup took place in Niger. The causes of this coup were not so different from that of Guinea, some of the triggers were a lack of effectiveness in the current civilian rule's governance and widespread insecurity. However, the leader of this military coup was not definite. The major target of this coup was the government and leadership of President-elect Mohammed Bazoum.

Three successful coups were reported in West Africa overall in 2021, the most in the region since 1999. A possible reversal of the democratic advances made over the last few decades has been highlighted by the wave of coups, which have stopped democratization. Organizations in the region, like ECOWAS, have denounced the coups and demanded the restoration of constitutional order. However, because to

dissatisfaction with civilian authorities, public support for military intervention is still strong in nations like Mali and Guinea. It is still imperative to address problems like poverty, corruption, and security threats in order to stop coups from causing more democratic backsliding.

Causes and Possible Consequences of the Sudden Surge of the Military Take-Overs in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau and Niger

Past coups in the region have been attributed by analysts to a number of variables, including military factionalism, inter-ethnic conflicts, personal power rivalries among elites, and political instability in newly established governments (McGowan, 2006; Onwumechili, 1998; Akinola & Makombe, 2024)). Junior officers and military factions targeting leaders of state from various ethnic groups carried out the majority of coups.

- *Issues With Governance*

Democratic governance and leadership failings throughout the area are to blame for the resurgence of coups. Public anger has been fueled by problems such as widespread corruption among the ruling class, violations of human rights, and arbitrary term restrictions (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2022). Such governance issues gradually reduce public confidence in civilian institutions and foster an environment that is favorable to coups.

- *Nepotism and Corruption*

The presence of patronage politics, has bred lack of openness, and high levels of corruption in government. Certain groups perceive coups as essential to 'clean house' in situations when families or ethnic groups hold a monopoly on power and money (Cordell, 2022). For example, these stories played a significant role in the coups in Guinea and Mali.

- *Unstable Democracies and Feeble State Institutions*

Numerous academics attribute coups in West Africa primarily to the breakdown of democratic institutions and procedures (Omotola, 2010; Bah & Jones, 2021). Weak state institutions, political divisiveness, election violence, and ongoing constitutional subversion have beset the majority of post-independence civilian governments. Military factions have potential to seize control because of the institutional instability and democratic fragility (Thompson, 2022).

- *An Increase in Extremism and Security Crises*

Overwhelming civilian authorities has been aided in coups by the sharp increase in extremist insurgencies, terrorism, and bloodshed within communities. Failures to control instability have contributed to coups in nations like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso at the center of the Sahel issue (Raleigh & Dowd, 2022). Groups inside the Army take advantage of security voids by claiming that order must be restored.

- *Public Discontent and Economic Mismanagement*

Unemployment, poverty, and inequality are examples of economic issues that have spurred opposition to the current administrations. The bulk of people still live in impoverished economic circumstances despite shifts in political leadership (Ouédraogo, 2014). Parts of society view coups as a sign of hope for radical economic change in the face of dismal living standards.

- *Ineffective Regional Norms and Competing Interests*

The revival of coups has been made possible by the inability of regional organizations such as ECOWAS and AU to set robust protocols against them (Abatan & Spies, 2022). Sanctions and isolation policies for

military governments are still ineffective. Coup plotters are also encouraged by the conflicting regional interests of US, France, and Russia, among other international allies.

- *Impacts of Demonstration and the Contagion Effect*

Since 2020, coups have clustered, which suggests that a copycat contagion effect is at work. Plotters in other parts of the region have been motivated by the recent coups' early success in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso (Chitiyo & Rupiya, 2021). Certain military elements think they may take advantage of public dissatisfaction to topple governments and seize power as well.

- *Hunger, Poverty and High Cost of Living Is and Genuine Cause That Serve as A Reason for Coups in The Sub-Region*

Some common causes of coups in West Africa include political instability, corruption, poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, weak democratic institutions, and disputes over natural resources. Historically, military intervention has been a common response to these challenges in the region. The recent coups in West Africa are often linked to state fragility in the subregion due to a variety of factors. State fragility refers to a state's inability to provide basic services and security for its citizens, often resulting in political instability and conflict. The presence of weak democratic institutions, corruption, poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and disputes over natural resources can all contribute to state fragility, making countries more susceptible to coups. Additionally, the lack of effective governance and leadership can create power vacuums that military actors may seek to exploit.

The Role of Regional Organizations in Curbing Recent Coups

Regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have tried to deter coups through diplomatic and economic pressures, with varying results. Following the coup in 2020, ECOWAS placed sanctions on Mali and withdrew the country from the group until constitutional order was reinstated (Mechoulan, 2021). This did not, however, stop Mali from experiencing a second coup in 2021. Similarly, following Guinea's coup in 2021, ECOWAS threatened sanctions and suspended the country. However, following protracted negotiations, Guinea just recently agreed to a transition schedule (Reuters, 2022). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been at the forefront of efforts to deter coups and uphold democratic governance in the region plagued by political instability. Since its founding in 1975 for economic integration, ECOWAS has progressively expanded its mandate to address security issues like coups that threaten development (Maiangwa, 2021).

ECOWAS frequently imposes sanctions on coup leaders to pressure a return to constitutional order, including asset freezes, trade suspensions, border closures, and cutting off financial aid. However, the effectiveness of these sanctions is debated, as they often impact citizens more than junta elites (Avoulete, 2022). ECOWAS has also pursued diplomatic initiatives, sending envoys and convening meetings to negotiate restoring civilian rule after coups (Bekoe & Mengistu, 2002). Yet the organization's anti-coup frameworks have struggled with enforcement and competing interests among members. ECOWAS's threats of isolation have so far failed to outweigh domestic incentives for coups across the region. Its inconsistent responses and hesitance to condemn popular coups have undermined norms against unconstitutional changes of government (Maiangwa, 2021). To deter further democratic backsliding through coups, analysts argue ECOWAS needs to coordinate more muscular actions with the African Union and international allies. This could include tightened sanctions, security reforms, and preventive governance assistance. But without stronger regional commitments to collective security, coups may continue unchecked and roll back democratic gains in West Africa (Avoulete, 2022)

The African Union immediately banned Burkina Faso and Mali's membership in response to their coups, emphasizing that "zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government" would not be tolerated (Dahir, 2022). The AU dispatched envoys to advocate for the restoration of civilian authority and prohibited coup leaders from attending summits (Nantulya, 2022). However, these pauses have turned out to be mainly symbolic, since juntas continue to hold power.

Overall, member state conflicts and enforcement have been challenges for the anti-coup frameworks of the AU and ECOWAS. Thus far, domestic pressures and incentives for coups have not been able to overcome their fears of isolation and sanctions. Coordination for stronger measures has also been impeded by political divides within regional blocs. Moreover, the initial reluctance to denounce coups considered "popular" also upset conventions opposing illegitimate government transitions (Bah & Jones, 2021). The AU and ECOWAS should support unstable nations with governance support, security sector reforms, and stronger sanctions to strengthen their anti-coup regimes (Abatan & Spies, 2022). However, coups can go unchecked unless there is a regional commitment to preserving democratic norms that takes precedence above party concerns.

Conclusion

A concerning trend that could undo the democratic progress the area has made since the 1990s is the recent rise in military takeovers in West Africa. Since 2020, there have been numerous successful and attempted coups, showing how easily civilian regimes and democratic institutions can be toppled by force throughout the area. This resurgence of coups in West Africa is made possible by a number of intricately connected and interrelated variables. Public dissatisfaction in elected officials have been met with widespread corruption, economic mismanagement, and inattentive governance. Institutions of civil society have been further weakened by the disintegration of democratic processes, breaking of laws and rights, and marginalization of ethnic groups. Meanwhile, the sharp rise in extremist violence, communal conflicts, and widespread insecurity has overwhelmed and delegitimized regimes, providing openings for military factions to seize power in the name of restoring order.

French presence in the countries under focus often exacerbated ethnic tensions and power struggles, because of their questionable role, thus creating a fertile ground for coup resurgence. These coups were often driven by military leaders seeking to gain control and exploit the resources of the region for their own benefit.

Furthermore, regional organizations such as the African Union and the ECOWAS have not been able to prevent coups because their sanctions threats and anti-coup protocols are ineffective. Coup plotters are also emboldened by the competing interests of foreign allies. It seems that the recent coups that were successful have had a ripple effect, encouraging similar coup attempts around the region.

Recommendations

Urgent action on several fronts is required in response to the emerging possibility of coups undoing democratic gains. In order to stem the surge of military coups in Franco-phone Africa in particular, corruption and reckless use of state power must stop and institutional and constitutional checks must be put in place.

In addition, conscious efforts should be made to address the problems of poverty, high cost of living and ostentatious lifestyle of political office holders.

Cost of governance must be kept modestly low and the taste and demand for foreign goods must be disciplined. ECOWAS leadership should be intentional about promoting development interests of member states and should shun all versions of political imperialism anywhere in the subregion. Security in the subregion should be non-negotiable.

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The Authors do not have any form of conflict of interest.

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