ASSESSING THE RESURGENCE OF COUPS AND COUNTER COUPS IN WEST AFRICA: DRIVERS, DYNAMICS, IMPACTS AND COUNTER-RESPONSE.

Dr. Kangdim Dingji Maza
Department of Political Science
Karl Kumm University -Vom, Plateau, Nigeria
Email: mdingji@gmail.com

Mr. Paul Satur Nanlung
Department of Political Science
Karl Kumm University -Vom, Plateau, Nigeria
Email: paul.snanlung@gmail.com

Abstract

Of the 16 States in West Africa, only Cape Verde had no record of a coup since independence. From 2000-2019, the military was more apolitical. However, from 2020-2023, the region witnessed the resurgence of military coups and counter-coups that was fast spreading from Mali to Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger aside from failed attempts in Sierra Leone. This resurgence of coups and counter-coups in the region created a serious dilemma regarding a decline in democratic consolidation in the sub-continent. It is in this context, that this this paper assesses the drivers, dynamics, impacts and counter-response by the sub-regional bloc The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The qualitative research approach where emphasis on academic and non-academic literature was used in this paper to ask and respond to this recent phenomenon of democratic disruption in the West African sub-region by the military. Findings of the paper, attributed factors associated with poor governance, insecurity, economic hardship and influence by external forces as drivers and triggers for the resurgence of coups and counter-coups in the region. These factors created the environment for the military who see themselves playing a messianic role to salvage these states from the deficits of democracy and its ideals in the affected states. In addressing these challenges, the paper put forward practical recommendations to both states and non-state actors in the sub-region to ensure that these triggers for military incursion are adequately addressed.

Keywords: Coup, Counter-Coup, Democracy, Military, ECOWAS and West Africa.

Introduction

The African continent is made up of 54 countries most of which got their independence around the 1960s (Grinin & Korotayev, 2023). The continent is organized politically under the African Union (AU). After independence, the governance crisis was the major challenge faced by the newly independent State especially by the democratic leaders to the extent that those whose primary duties were to protect the State against external aggression were willing and ready to remedy the situation using the barrel of guns as the only means. This means military interest and incursion in African politics are as old as the independence of these States. Within this purview, Chilaka and Peter (2022) sum up the position of Barka and Ncube that historically, coups in Africa began most, immediately after independence in the 1960s. Egypt was the first African country that experienced a putsch in 1952 when the Egyptian military overthrew King Farouk and since then, it has spread to other countries within the continent like a bush fire. Other countries that followed suit were Sudan in 1958, Algeria, in 1965, Congo (Brazzaville), in 1963, Zaire (Congo-Kinshasa) in 1965, Central African Republic, in 1966; in West Africa, Togo, in 1963, Ghana in 1966, Benin (Dahomey) 1963 (Etim & Wilfred, 2012). The aftermath of Egypt 1952 coupled with the experience of over 200 hundred coups – both successful and failed coups in Africa. Hence, one can describe Africa as a continent of frequent coups with most states in the continent experiencing either failed or successful coups as well as counter coups. However, only six African countries: Botswana, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa have never experienced military coup plots (Shraeder cited in Orkuma, 2022). These, to a great extent, justified Africa as a continent of military governance rather than democratic governance as submitted by Falola (2022) that in the anal of coups in both the 20th and 21st centuries, Africa remains the continent with the highest number of coups d'état.

West Africa is one of the regions within the African continent that is made up of 16 States namely, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast (also known as Côte d'Ivoire), Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The region is politically organized under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The region is not exempted from the political instability in Africa caused by the military seizure of political power from the democratically elected leaders through the power of guns. This makes the history of coups and counter-coups in West Africa a long and complex

phenomenon, yet it is on the increase despite most countries around the world becoming more democratically inclined. Togo was the first country that experience a military coup in the region on January 13, 1963. That was when the military overthrew President Sylvanus Olympio (Mannjong & Follah, 2023). Since then, it has spread like wildfire and affected democratic governance in all other countries in the region except Cape Verde. This pattern of political instability has had far-reaching consequences on the socio-economic development and democratic processes in many West African countries. Habu (2022) averred that though the rate of coups in Africa was high from the 1950s to 1960s and in 1999. Contrarily, from 2000-2019, it was a period of democratic boom or prosperity for Africa when military coups had profoundly declined largely as a result of the democratization process that took place at the end of the war cold war. This era was the highest period of military professionalism since they were more apolitical. However, this does not mean that there were no military coups in Africa within the era of democratic boom rather it was very minimal. However, from 2020 to 2023, the military in some African countries became more politically inclined and partisan leading to an aberration in democratic governance in a more contagious manner that cut across many countries within a short period.

West Africa has recently been rocked by military uprisings. In the past three years, rogue soldiers have overthrown the presidents of Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Guinea (September 2021), Burkina Faso (January and September 2022) and Niger (July 2023) (Africa News, 2023). Because of this development, Falola (2022) stated that the coups have sparked a debate on whether or not coups have finally resurfaced in many parts of the continent, as well as the suspicion of how the nationals of these countries embraced these coups. The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres described this situation as an "epidemic of coups" (Nichols, 2021 cited in Habu, 2022). This generally raised concern about the declines in democratic consolidation within the continent.

Daniel (2023) observed that despite progress towards democracy in the region, a series of military interventions have disrupted the stability and democratic processes in several West African countries in recent years. Recently, West Africa has witnessed a resurgence of military coups and counter-coups, posing a threat to the stability and democratic progress of the region. While the region has experienced political instability in the past, the frequency and intensity of

coup attempts have raised alarms among regional and international actors. Unequivocally, the current wave of military resurgence in governance by seizure of power from the democratically elected government as well counter-coup in the region is of great concern not only to researchers, but AU and ECOWAS regional bloc as well lovers of democratic governance.

Adam (2023) stated that despite significant progress in democratic governance around the world as well as significant democratic progress recorded in the past two decades in West Africa, West African countries now continue to suffer setbacks in their pursuit of total democracy in the region. From 2020-2023, no fewer than four out of the 16 countries in the region have been captured by military leaders who gained power through the barrel of guns. This resurgence of coup and counter-coup in West Africa militates against the fragile political stability, security and democratic progress of the region. The consequences of this wave of military uprising in the region are a decline in democratic consolidation, abuse of human rights and the general socio-economic development of the region. Therefore, the a need to examine the drivers, dynamics, impacts and counter-response to the current menace of military resurgence in West African sub-regional politics.

It is within this framework that this article seeks to address the resurgence of military coups in West Africa by understanding the drivers, triggers, and sub-regional implications of this intervention and the role of sub-regional and regional and regional actors in curbing this challenge by answering questions related to the resurgence, triggers, drivers, sub-regional responses on how to curb this trend in West Africa.

The resurgence of Coups and Counter-Coups in West Africa: Conceptual, Theoretical Narratives and Discourses

This section of the paper will offer conceptual, theoretical narratives and discourses regarding what the military is, and what coup état is. The section will further offer a theoretical lens and narrative as drivers and triggers for the recent resurgence of military intervention in toppling the democratic processes in West Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Military:

Mahmood (2016) opined that the word military was first used in 1585 in English. It comes from the Latin "militaris" and French "militaire" which possess the meaning of soldier. Currently, the word according to the Oxford Dictionary as submitted by Mahmood (2016), simply refers to someone skilled in the use of weapons and engaged in warfare or military service.

In the view of Alam and Alam (2014), the military is an organization authorized by the majority of the members of a society to use lethal force, usually including the use of weapons, it defends its country by combating actual or perceived threats.

Contributing, Idongesit (2022) explicitly explained the military also called armed forces. It comprises the army, the navy and the air force. The military is a professional organization charged with the constitutional responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of a state against external attacks and internal insurrections. In terms of specific roles, the army is charged with protecting the land borders; the navy, the territorial waters and the air force, the airspace.

The major attributes of the military which differentiate them from other organization as contained in Ojo (2014) are; i. centralized command ii. hierarchy iii. discipline iv. internal communication and v. *esprit de corps* with corresponding isolation and self-sufficiency

Contributing to the primary functions of the military, Mahmood (2016) opined that the primary task of the military includes the defence of the state from foreign threats and safeguarding of territorial boundaries, defence of the state against internal challenges (political and public unrest) and to provide services in natural calamities. This entails that the primary duty of the military in any state is to defend the state against any form of external attack or aggression by other states and to internally assist in restoring law and order within when called upon to do so especially when the police force and other paramilitary are incapacitated of handling such internal unrest or security breach.

Coup:

To Ibrahim (2023), a coup, short for "coup d'état" is a sudden and often violent or illegal seizure of political power or government control by a group of individuals, typically within the military or other influential factions of a country.

Orkuma (2022) opined that a military coup d'état alludes to the sudden, forcible and unconstitutional removal from power of an existing government by the military usually with violence. Military coups are either carried out against a civil-led government or the military themselves regardless of regime type. E.g. monarchical, democratic, or authoritarian ideology (capitalist, socialist or Marxist).

A coup is a sudden happening which lasts for a minimum of an hour or a week, often a violent overthrow of a government by a small group of military, police, or security forces. Such often leads to the illegal replacement of the existing government personnel or constitutional relationships, and may radically alter the state's fundamental social and economic policies of the given state (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

Pryce and Time (2023) noted that a coup d'état is analogous to the unauthorized invasion of a town by soldiers, who then suspend the rule of law. The putschists sometimes drag the town's elected/appointed officials to jail without the benefit of a fair hearing, or due process. Successful putschists are exactly that, taking away the hard work and security of fathers, mothers and guardians, and turning society on its head via the barrel of the gun, the latter an instrument of terror that is, paradoxically, paid for by the taxpayers. Thus, coups start with little to no legitimacy.

From the various definitions, it is very obvious that a coup is also known as a putsch which has to do with the seizure of civilian democratic power by the armed forces of a country through the instrument of coercion such as the barrel of gun. Such means are not the legitimate path of acquiring power since it is not in line with the will or consent of the majority of the masses which is expressed through the instrument of ballot paper. Therefore, it is an aberration in a democratic process.

On the primary objective of the coup, Falola (2022) submitted that coups or military interventions are always embarked upon with self-righteous reasoning by putschists with the primary goal of salvaging their state.

Irrespective of any country where a coup takes place, such is mostly characterized by the replacement of a constitution by degree or edicts, centralization of administration especially at the federal level for states practising federalism, suspension of all elected political leaders as well cancellation of most political appointments, suspension of all political parties and their activities, limited fundamental human rights, supremacy of the dictator, limited press and civil society organizations freedom and no separation of powers, etc. within this purview, Ibrahim (2023) identify some key features of a coup which include a centralized and organized effort, often involving the military, to seize power and replace the government. It can result in the suspension of constitutional order, and the establishment of a new ruling authority, often led by the coup plotters themselves.

On the various forms of coups, Ibrahim (2023) opined that coups can take various forms, including coups by the military and armed forces, civilian coups, political coups, or hybrid coups involving a combination of these actors. From the various forms of coups mentioned, the paper is only concerned with the coup by the military or the armed forces.

The resurgence of Coups and Counter-Coups in West Africa: Theoretical Narratives and Discourses

When discussing and analyzing the paradigm of the recent resurgence of military intervention or coups in truncating the democratic space in West Africa, there is no monolithic perspective or theoretical lens that seeks to explain this phenomenon (Kreps, 2008; Merom, 2016). However, despite the non-monolithic theoretical analysis that explains the incursion of the military in truncating the democratic space in West Africa, there are several perspectives and narratives given by scholars that seek to explain the justification behind the recent resurgence of coups in the West African sub-region.

As argued by proponents of the socio-economic instability, most states in West Africa, are grappling with the challenges associated with instability in the economy which resulted in

increased unemployment, poverty, hunger, rising cost of living, inequality and other forms of socio-economic injustices in the region (Jean-Baptiste, 2022). These challenges did not only lead to frustration, anger, and resentment by the people towards the political elites leading to agitations and public outcry. Consequently, the inability of these political leaders to adequately address the socioeconomic problems, created the fertile ground and justification for the military to not only meddle in politics but also to intervene in these countries citing failure and absence of political leadership to address the socioeconomic challenges facing these states (Daffeh, 2024). Closely related to this position is also the theoretical position that lack of political will and capacity by political elites in West Africa to adequately proffer the needed solutions to the growing challenges facing their respective states such as insecurity, insurgency, the proliferation of light weapons and other forms of complex transnational threats, as witnessed in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali where these countries are grappling with the continued presence and attacks by radical insurgent groups, and the ineptitude of these political elites to adequately guarantee the safety and protection of lives and properties, does not only show their lack of capacity, it further created the climate for the military to intervene in these countries (Mbaku, 2018; Shearer, 2020).

The narrative and position put forward by the fragility of democratic institutions and systems is that most states in West Africa have not been able to adequately build institutions and strengthen robust and vibrant democratic institutions that are not only accountable, legitimate and ensure that the true ideals of good democratic governance and entrenched in the society (Yusuf, 2023; Cebotari, Chueca-Montuenga, Diallo, Ma, Turk-Ariss, Xin & Zavarce, 2024). The failure of these political elites to create these strong institutions, created the avenue for corruption, bad governance, abuse of governmental powers and other forms of maladministration, further enabling the perfect environment for the military to intervene in the affairs of these states (Day & Woldemariam, 2024).

The fact that ethno-religious, regional tensions and aged-long unresolved conflicts exist in most states in the West African continent further affects the spirit of Pan-Africanism and regional integration (Nwagwu, 2018). These tensions not only undermine the spirit of unity, development, progress and stability, it also create the perfect opportunity for the military to intervene in the political affairs of states in the sub-region (Dione & Togola, 2018).

There is also the theoretical position that the recent resurgence of coups in West Africa can be attributed to influences from external powers(Roessler, 2011; Powell, Lasley & Schiel, 2016; Bleck & Van de Walle, 2019). This is because, studies suggest that vested economic interests of the foreign powers, geopolitical interests and perceived non-support and over-reliance by local political actors in protecting the interests of foreign actors can make or mar the perfect opportunity for the military to intervene especially when these foreign powers feel their interests are not well projected and protected by the political leadership (Beloff, 2024).

Consequently, it is important to note that, when theorizing the resurgence of coups in West Africa, there are several theoretical lenses and arguments put forward by scholars justifying why the military is in the political and democratic processes of these states. Therefore, addressing these factors also will require a multi-pronged approach which involves amongst others, addressing the various triggers and drivers serving as avenues which paved the opportunity for the military to abandon their professional calling of ensuring the territorial integrity of states in the sub-region is protected against external aggression.

Drivers of Coup in West Africa from 2020-2023

Table 1:

Most Recent Military Putsch or Coups in West Africa and their Drivers

S/N	Country	Year	Drivers of the Coup	Deposed President/Military Dictator
1	Mali	2020/2021	Insecurity, corruption, economic factors, disputed parliamentary elections and arrest of political opponents, poor working conditions of the armed forces ethnic and regional differences and	Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta/ Asimi Goita

			external influences by Russia	
2	Guinea	2021	Third-term ambition, mismanagement of public resources and economic factors (poverty and unemployment)	Alpha Condé /Mamady Doumbouya
3	Burkina Faso	2022 (Jan and Sept)	Insecurity, economic factors, leadership failure, corruption, ethnic clashes and external influence by Russia	Roch Christain Kaboré /Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba and Ibrahim Traore
4	Niger	2023	Insecurity, bad governance, ethnic factors and external influence by Russia.	Mohamed Bazoum /Abdouramane Tchiani

Source: Authors compilations from several academic and non-academic documents 2024.

From the above table, it is obvious that what led to the putsch in the four above states in West Africa is not just one factor but it's a multiplicity of factors with each state having their peculiar issues. However, some factors are also common in most of the states. Some of these factors are discussed are follows:

Insecurity:

This is a threat to human existence in all ramifications. Centre for Preventive Action (2014) revealed that the persistent and growing insecurity in the Sahel region by extremist groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) is a fertile ground for breeding of coup especially in states worst affected. This was what led to the coup in Burkina Faso as submitted by Aljazeera News (2022) that on January 24, Burkina Faso's army, led by Damiba, announced it had deposed President Roch Christian Kabore after more than six years in power, following several days of unrest in the capital Ouagadougou. Damiba cited the failure of the Kabore administration to unite the country and control the deteriorating security situation as reasons for ousting the civilian government. Ornella and Fahiraman (2022) and Aljazeera News

(2022) observed that right from 2015, Burkina Faso has faced an unprecedented crisis that has killed an estimated 7569 people in six years and displaced more than 1.6 million. Frequent attacks by jihadist insurgents such as JNIM and ISGS allied to both al-Qaeda and (ISIS) groups in that manner have targeted civilians and government officials, especially the armed forces, which have suffered heavy losses. Teachers, civil servants and judicial staff are also being targeted, leading to the disuse of public services in conflict-affected areas. The peak of insecurity was in 2021 as submitted by Ornella and Fahiraman (2022) that in 2021 alone, Burkina Faso recorded some 1 337 crisis-related violent incidents, with 2 294 casualties. Such condition made Burkina Faso the new epicentre of conflict in the Sahel. Aljazeera revealed that even under the military of Damiba, only 60% of Burkina Faso territory was under the control of the government while 40% was under the jihadist terrorist groups. Damiba was also overthrown through a counter-coup led by Ibrahim Traore.

Similarly, Niger was facing a serious security problem from terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP as averred by Aljazeera news (2023) in which Colonel Amadou Abdramane, spokesperson of the group, said that the armed forces of Niger had decided to put an end to the regime that you know due to the deteriorating security situation and bad governance in Niger. Mali was not left out of this security menace. This is because apart from JNIM and ISGS terrorist groups, the Center for Preventive Action (2014) established that the influx of extremists into northern Mali reignited the dormant Tuareg rebellion in 2012, which had previously surfaced in 1963, 1990, and 2006. Representing only 10 per cent of the Malian population, the Tuareg people, organized under the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), sought an autonomous state and aligned themselves with multiple Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The consequent collapse of state institutions in the north enabled the MNLA to capture the regional capitals of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu; the group had declared the independent state of Azawad in northern Mali by April. Only Guinea that was not facing security problems facing other states such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Poor working conditions of the armed forces:

The armed forces of the four current countries under military rule were not pleased with how the civil government was handling their welfare including financial, human and material resources

or equipment needed to combat the terrorist groups. Such dissatisfaction had contributed to the coup in the region. Ornella and Fahiraman (2022) consented that government investments haven't improved the forces' living conditions or operational capacity much, partly due to financial management problems. Rather, persistent equipment and supply problems have made them weaker while jihadist groups grow stronger In November 2021, 53 police officers died in a terror attack on the *Inata* military post while they were waiting for logistical support and supplies, including food rations. The incident sent shock waves through the country, leading to calls for Kaboré's resignation. The poor working condition of the armed forces in Burkina Faso was summarized by BBC (2022) as the relentless reports of Islamist attacks fueling popular anger on urban streets and resentment among soldiers who feel they are being sent out, too lightly armed, underpaid or even under-fed, to sustain the struggle against militant groups that take no prisoners. Even when the armed forces have good working conditions, the personal drive of some officers still served as a driving force for coups as opined by Decalo (1973) cited in Idongesit (2022) that the personal ambition of some idiosyncratic elements in military hierarchies to clinch political power may result to the coup.

Political Instability:

Stability in the system of governance in Africa has been a major problem because political contestation in some states was often marked by violence, intimidation, protest and rigging. As such, triggering the military to take power since the politicians were not ready to play the game according to the rules. This explains why the continued change in government from democratic to military and vice versa. The governments of so many African countries have changed frequently, frequently by force. As a result, there is a lack of faith in democratic institutions and processes, with the military frequently viewed as a more dependable and acceptable substitute (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011 cited in Mannjong & Follah,2023). Justifying instability in the political system of Mali as a motivator for the coup, Christian (2023) noted that Mali had experienced a series of political upheavals in the preceding years, setting the stage for the 2021 coup. In August 2020, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was ousted from power by a military alliance, marking the second coup in less than a decade. Months of unrest and dissatisfaction over irregularities in parliamentary elections and the kidnapping of an opposition leader fueled public outrage. Analyzing instability in Guinea, the British Broadcasting Corporation BBC

(2022) and BBC (2021), stated that the coup was a result of a long period of political tension in Guinea, first spurred by Conde's highly contested bid for a third presidential term last year having been in power since 2010. The most recent presidential poll in Guinea, in October 2020, was marred by violence and accusations of electoral fraud. Conde won a controversial third term, but only after pushing through a new constitution in March 2020 allowing him to sidestep the country's two-term limit. Dozens of people were killed during demonstrations against a third term for Conde, often in clashes with security forces. Hundreds more were arrested. The government cracked down, arresting several prominent opposition members for their alleged role in abetting electoral violence in the country. Niger too was affected by instability given its past trajectory of military coups in 1974, 1996, 1999, and 2010 before the recent one in 2023 which demonstrated the constant exchange of government between the civilian and the military.

Socio-Economic Challenges;

It encompasses a high rate of unemployment among the teaming youths, poverty, hunger, and high prices of goods and services. This economic hardship had hampered the livelihood of most citizens of the Sahel countries currently under military rule. Hence, triggering the armed forces to take over from the civil government. Burkina Faso was so affected by hunger as revealed by Aljazeera News (2022) that the UN highlighted Burkina Faso, a country of 16 million people, as one of several West African nations facing an "alarming level" of hunger with the country facing the worst hunger crisis in six years with more than 630,000 people on the brink of starvation. Considering Guinea's economic predicament, Christian (2023) revealed that despite utilizing Guinea's rich natural resources to bolster the economy, the benefits of this growth failed to trickle down to the majority of the population. Economic challenges intensified as the government grappled with rising prices of essential commodities, prompting austerity measures that slashed funding for crucial sectors like the police and the military. This, in turn, led to mounting tensions within the country.

Alam and Alam. (2014) submitted that economic stability, inflation, increasing rate of daily accessories and when the civilian government cannot control economic deterioration, groups may tend to act violently thereby inviting the military to intervene. The Sahel region has seen widespread struggles with poverty, unemployment, and inequality problems which are

aggravated by mismanagement and corruption (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011 cited in Mannjong & Follah,2023).

Mismanagement of Public Resources

Ornella and Fahiraman (2022) agreed that the Burkinabè were frustrated with the political management of the Kaboré regime, which was regularly accused of corruption, laxity and nepotism. Since 2017, polls have shown a steady decline in trust and satisfaction with a government that has failed to meet the Burkinabè people's expectations for good governance. Similarly, according to Aljazeera News (2021), Guinea as a state with 13 million people, is one of the world's poorest countries despite boasting significant mineral resources. This shows that misappropriation has eaten deep into the nation. This was one factor that prompted Lieutenant-Colonel Mamady Doumbouya.

The success of the Coup in other countries:

Idongesit (2022) argued that the successful takeover of government by the armed forces in a neighbouring country tends to instigate the military in other countries to do the same. This was particularly visible in the West African sub-region that has had the most rapidity of coups. Falola (2022) explained that where there is a military intervention, there is a possibility that countries in other areas of the region might also resort to this. Military intervention in a country brings about a sense of legitimacy in another country and encouragement. Other countries, particularly those with similar problems, will start to see it as the only viable solution to their problems. This was the case with the four states in West Africa with Mali in 2020 followed by Guinea in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023 all within the French colonies and within the same Sahel region. But if the coup in Mali failed or was resisted by all stakeholders, probably, others might have not even attempted it. Once a coup succeeds, it becomes more contagious to its neighbouring states. This was the same thing that happened immediately after the independence of most African States with the first coup in Egypt in 1952 and it spread fast like wildfire to other African countries.

External Interference by Power-bloc Nations

The four countries under study were all colonized by France. However, Russia being an authoritarian state had put in more effort which led to the displacement of their colonial master-

France, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This means the former colonies of France have now turned their back on them as well as shifted their loyalty to Russia. France is always advocating for a democratic government against the Russian autocratic ideology. Aljazeera News (2022) revealed that Damiba was toppled by Ibrahim for seemingly taking a more pro-France stance in working together with the former colonizer to root out armed groups, as anti-France sentiment has risen in former colonies. Morse so, Amadou Abdramane, spokesperson for the coup makers in Niger, announced the revocation of five military cooperation agreements with France. Niger also suspended broadcasts of French state-funded international news outlets France 24 and RFI, drawing condemnation from the French foreign ministry (Aljazeera News 2023). Similarly, Muhammad and Hakeem (2022) pointed out that foreign influence and strategic competition make coups more likely to occur. In the first four decades of independence, coups were set against Cold War politics as two global powers, the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the United States locked horns over the continent. Like coups in the post-independence era, recent coups in West Africa also have foreign fingerprints. For instance, Russia is cited in both the 2021 and 2020 coups in Mali, as well as the latest one in Burkina Faso. Assimi Goïta, the leader of both coups in Mali, is also reported to have received US training and assistance. The influence of France on the political landscape of the region is fast diminishing. The Niger coup demonstrated this paradigm ship from France to Russia when the France embassy was burnt by the excited Nigeriens during the military coup as well the withdrawal of the French troops in Niger. Theodore (2023) clearly stated that African leaders grasp that the changing global order is creating greater interest in Africa and more particularly the Sahel region. They encourage new partners as a welcome means of diversification beyond the former confined choice of the US, old colonial powers such as France and Britain, or China. However, the impact of Russian and middle power engagement in the coup belt demonstrates the pitfalls of such diversification. Rather than creating an additionality of options for Africa's benefit, Russian and middle power engagement strengthens African autocrats and feeds state destabilization.

In welcoming this development, Louisa (2023) revealed that the dictators in Mali, Burkina Faso attended the Russia Africa summit in St Petersburg in July 2023. At the summit, President Putin spoke of strengthening ties with African countries, including military and security cooperation. Putin clearly stated that instability in Africa is a result of the colonial legacies and specifically the Western approach of divide and rule adopted during the colonial era in their states. It was

agreed that there is an urgent need to fight against neocolonialism by both the countries. President Putin on his part promised free grain to Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as several other African countries who may be willing to have new ties with Russia. Potential trade and energy agreements between Burkina Faso and Russia were also discussed, along with the re-opening of the Russian embassy in Burkina that was closed in 1992.

Impacts of Coup in West Africa Sub-Region

The resurgence of this paradigm of military intervention in the West African sub-region, is said to have a multipronged impact in the sub-region. This section of the article will dwell on the sub-regional implications of these coups.

Contagious effect: Once a coup has taken place in a country, it often moves fast like a bush burning fire to other countries within its region who may see it as a new means of governance. This is why Habu (2022) argued that once a coup happened, the major concern is the chilling fear that unless extra caution is made to reverse the ugly trend, the contagion effect of coups would easily drawback some countries into the egregious days of military authoritarianism with its attendant suppression of civil society and denial of human rights and freedoms. This is the current wave or epidemic in the Sahel region which is fast spreading through more attempted coups.

Human Rights-related violations: Once a coup or counter-coup has taken place in a country, it often leads to human rights violations. Military incursion in politics often results in curtailed civil liberties, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings, and limited freedom of speech and expression as well as freedom of association and even movement a times. Herbert and Michael (2014) submitted that the recent coup had led to the restriction of fundamental human rights such as right to freedom of speech and expression, freedom association, right to life, abrogation of the people's constitution and in its place, the promulgation and use of decrees, as well as the denial of the people their inalienable rights to participate in governance and the subsequent security threats such rule poses to the affected country, the regional sub-continent and the world at large. Daniel (2023) validates this position by citing Doumbouya who deposed Conde's restriction on protest by making it an offence with capital punishment in Guinea. Such an act had drawn criticism from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Political instability and retrogressive democracy: Resurgence of coups and counter-coups in the sub-region, poses a threat to political stability and democratic governance in West Africa. This is because such a scenario disrupts democratic processes, erodes democratic values or ethos, undermines the rule of law, and erodes public trust in democratic governance. Where there is frequent disruption of the electoral process and suspension of constitutional provisions, it undermines democratic consolidation. Herbert and Michael (2014) observed that the current understanding of a coup equates it with political instability. The more the coup, the more unstable the region becomes and the more security threats the world faces at large and vice versa. He submitted that more coups have taken place in Asia, Africa and Latin America meaning that such continents had experienced more political instability. Indeed, the region is now shifting from a democratic paradigm to an autocratic ideology. This breeds totalitarianism in the region. This raises an eyebrow about the prospect of stability and democracy consolidation in West Africa.

Undermine economic development: States that have experienced coups and counter-coups have suffered economic backwardness. This is because coups and counter disrupt long-term planning, affect policy implementation due to lack of continuity, hamper economic growth, low revenue generation, and discourage foreign direct investment because no investor will be willing to invest in a military control state for fear of seizure of their business by force, growing level of poverty and unemployment. In this kind of environment, stagnation, economic downturns, and exacerbated socio-economic disparities become the order of the day which negatively affects the well-being of the citizens of such a state.

Widen antagonism between the political class and the armed forces: Countries that had witnessed coups and counter-coups might have seen more division in such a country because of grievances between the two actors (politicians and armed forces). The political class sees the military as their enemies because they have pushed them out of the corridor of power. Contrarily, the military perceived the political class as those who did not mean well for the state because of their inability to meet the needs and yearnings of the masses through the dividend of democracy or good governance. Rather their interest is what matters to them. Because of this division, it would be very difficult to achieve any meaningful development within the state.

Within the 21st century, democracy has become a world-order system of governance that is widely acceptable to most countries and their citizens, however, states that chose the opposite means of democratic governance have a bad image at the global level or before the committee of nations. In other words, putsch gives a bad name or image to a country.

The worst of all is the inability of the putschists to solve the problems which prompted them to take over power from the civil government. This was observed by the Center for Preventive Action (2014) that the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have not effectively tackled the insecurity problem which triggered them to depose the civilian-led government. Aligning with this submission, Daniel (2023), opined that in many ways, the military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea have performed no better than the governments they overthrew.

Counter-Response to Coup in West Africa: ECOWAS in Perspective

The aftermath of any coup is often marked by measures aimed at either encouraging it or discouraging it. Therefore, coups in West Africa have witnessed different counter-responses aimed at discouraging military rule especially by the regional blocs and even at the global level. Although the focus here is only on the ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) respectively.

For the counter response at the level of Africa as a continent through AU, Louisa (2023) revealed that the union had suspended Niger, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso as members of the union thereby isolating them from other states within the continent. Such was aimed at stigmatizing the four states to force them to return power to the political class. Apart from the suspension, the legal framework of the union frowns at a coup because it is an illegitimate means of change in government. As such, it condemns it in all spheres. The constitution particle article 30 of the AU law stated that any government that shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union (Au cited in Louisa, 2023). Also, Habu (2022) stated that out of the ten legal instruments of the AU, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (ACDEG) which was adopted on 30th January 2007 clearly defines what unconstitutional government mean. Article 23 of the Charter has unequivocally operationalized what the AU considers as an unconstitutional means of change in government in the following five acts: (a) Any putsch or coup d'état against a democratically elected

government (b) Any intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government. (c) Any replacement of a democratically elected government by armed dissidents or rebels (d) Any refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party or candidate after free, fair and regular elections or (e) Any amendments, which are an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government (AU ACDEG, 2007 cited in Habu, 2022). Despite the AU constitutional provision against coups as well suspension of member states, it has not deterred putschists from the four states and other African countries under military rule. This to a large extent shows that the Au counter-response mechanism is not effective in deterring military intervention in African politics.

Counter response to the coup at the ECOWAS level, ECOWAS has taken stringent measures against the affected state since Nigerian President Tinubu became its chairman in early July 2023. The president emphasizes strong support of democracy, saying the organization must not sit as "toothless bulldogs" when military officers turn their guns against civil authorities (Sahara Reporter in Louisa, 2023). The union strongly condemned military intervention in such states.

Similarly, Louisa, (2023) and Christian (2023) stated that ECOWAS has suspended Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger after their governments were overthrown by the military. At a particular point, ECOWAS had wanted to use force against the affected states especially Niger as observed by Louisa (2023) that ECOWAS has since threatened the use of force against Niger.

The sanction/sticks approach was another counter-response strategy adopted by ECOWAS as pointed out by Avoulete (2022) cited in Chilaka and Peter (2022) that in recent times, ECOWAS deployed the use of sanctions in Mali to facilitate a speed up in the return to civilian rules. Such economic sanctions include freezing of assets, the cutting of financial aid from countries involved in coups, the closing of borders of the country from relating with other ECOWAS member states and the withdrawal of Ambassadors by making the state a pariah state in the region as well cutting off of electricity supply to Niger.

More so, a carrot/diplomatic approach was also adopted by the union for the return back to civil or democratic rule. The regional body has also implemented the use of diplomacy and other missions to stem the growing tides of coups across the region. For instance, in the wake of a military coup in Burkina Faso, the regional body gathered its members to discuss the relevant strategies in adopting in tackling the issue (Aljazeera, 2022 cited in Chilaka & Peter,2022). The

former head of state Gen Abdusalam Abubakar was also sent on a diplomatic mission to Niger for the return of a civil government. Despite adopting both the carrot and sticks approach by ECOWAS, there all the strategies were futile. Such strategies are no longer result-oriented. On a disappointing note, ECOWAS has lifted the sanctions meted out to the affected states. This shows how weak and dysfunctional is the regional organization in curtailing the fast-contagious epidemic of coups currently ravaging the region. Capitalizing on the weak nature of the union, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have agreed not to be part of ECOWAS again but rather have a Sahel regional organization for the three states aimed at unifying the three states and strengthening ties, especially on security and economic ground.

Conclusions

The military whose primary duty in any state is to protect the state against external aggression and to assist internally in combating insurgency as well as restore law and order when the police cannot contain such. However, the armed forces as observed in the Sahel region have derailed from their primary duty as stipulated in the law of the land to be doing the work of the civilian particularly the duty of the political class. Such action of the military has raised an eyebrow in military professionalism, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger from 2020 till date. The military used insecurity, economic challenges, and corruption among others as an excuse to take over power from the civil government. These pose a significant threat to the political stability, democratic consolidation and socio-economic development of West Africa. More worrisome is the violation of human rights that is common with military government. It was obvious, that the deposed civil government was battling with the cancer of bad governance, it should not be an opportunity for the military to intrude into politics. This is because no matter how bad or worse a civilian government is, it is far better than the best form of an autocratic regime of the military. This is because a civil government guarantees fundamental human rights as well as promotes a participatory approach to governance. The only panacea to the current wave of military incursion is to ensure a more diplomatic approach than a stick approach in engaging the putschist leaders to return power to the civilians. Were sanctions were used, the ordinary citizens suffered more than even the putschists. Above all, good governance should be seen in practice and not in promises through the dividends of democracy in meeting the most

pressing needs, yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry of other countries that are yet to be affected by such incursion in West Africa and Africa at large.

To address the challenge associated with any form of resurgence by the military in toppling democratic regimes in West Africa, the article proposes the following recommendations for relevant actors:

- *Ensure the practice of good democratic governance:*

Countries within the region especially the political leaders should ensure the applicability of good governance in their administration. Their actions and inactions should be guided by the rule of law, transparency and accountability, and inclusivity of all ethnic, gender and regions in administration. Leaders should ensure that the dividends of democracy are felt by the majority of the masses through the provision of social amenities as well as a safe and conducive environment for all citizens.

- *Addressing the challenge of insecurity and complex transnational threats:*

West African countries facing the menace of insecurity such as insurgency and terrorism, should use the political will to handle such decisively. Such can be achieved when all hands are put on the desk by the presidents, the armed forces and the masses. The armed forces should be given a matching order to combat such groups. It may be more result-oriented when the military is properly equipped with modern equipment than those of the terrorists, good fair packages for those in the field fighting the terrorist groups, more budgetary allocation and another incentive to the armed forces. The masses should be educated on the negative impact of terrorist activities on their society. If insecurity is properly addressed, it will attract both local and foreign investors to the country thereby promoting economic growth and development.

- *Curbing Socio-Economic Challenge, Systemic and Structural Inequalities:*

To reduce the economic problem bedevilling most West African states, the government at all levels should focus more on poverty and unemployment reduction among the teaming youths by creating more job opportunities and empowering them with relevant business skills with a tangible start-up pack for both the educated and uneducated youths within their state. This will help in reducing crimes and other social vices.

- *Reorientation for the military*:

Armed forces of the West African countries should be reeducated about their primary roles in the nation particularly in protecting the state against external attack which makes them more professional as they remain apolitical and not to be partisans in politics. Such can be achieved through workshops, seminars, symposiums, and conferences for the military by experts on civil-military relations. Civil-military ideas should be properly shared by such experts with the armed forces to encourage them to be loyal and controlled by the civilian government as it is obtainable in most nations like the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

- *Curbing Corruption and Strengthening institutions to be efficient*

Anti-corruption measures should be strengthened by making all anti-corruption agencies more independent. This will help in checking the undue interference in the activities of such agencies in the region. The judiciary should synergize with the agencies to make them more effective. If anti-graft agencies are independent, they can discharge their function effectively. Such can minimize the diversion of public resources to personal pockets by most political classes. Corruption is the major cankerworm that has undermined the effective implementation of government policies and programmes which retard development.

- *Sub-regional and Regional Roles by the AU and ECOWAS*

Adoption of a new approach to counter coup by ECOWAS and AU. Since the methods adopted by the unions are not yielding results, there is an urgent need for the unions to have a new approach which includes the adoption of a preventive approach rather than a reactive strategy. A preventive method encompasses the identification of early warning signs of military incursion in politics and the use of a diplomatic approach in engaging the state currently under military rule in the region.

References

Adam, M. (2023). Niger, Burkina Faso, and other West African countries toppled by Military coups in the last 4 years. Retrieved from https://tribuneonlineng.com/niger-burkina-faso-other-west-african-countries-toppled-by-military-coup-in-last-4-years/.12/1/2024

Africa News (August 2023). Africa: the 7 military coups over the last three years. Retrieved from www.africanews.com/2023/08/30/africa-the-7-military-coups-over-the-last-three-years//. Accesses 20/1/2024

Alam, MDM., & MDM, Alam. (2014). Military intervention in politics: A third world perspective. Retrieved from https://ssrn.com/abstract=2468243. Accessed 3/11/2023

Aljazeera News (August 2023). Timeline: what has happened since the coup? Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/20/timeline-what-has-happened-in-niger-since-the-coup. Accessed 2/3/2024

Aljazeera News (July 2023). Timeline: a history of coup in Niger. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/27/timeline-a-history-of-coups-in-niger. Accessed 2/3/2024

Aljazeera News (Oct 2022). Coup in Burkina Faso what you need to know. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/5/coup-in-burkina-faso-what-you-need-to-know.Accessed 5/3/2024

Aljazeera News. (Sept 2021). Guinea coup: Military arrests president, dissolves government. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/6/guinea-coup-military-arrest-president-dissolve-government. Accessed 3/4/2024.

Barka, H.B., & Ncube, M. (2012). Political fragility in Africa: are military coups d'etat a never-ending phenomenon? African Development Bank

Beloff, J. R. (2024). How France's Lack of a Strategy in West Africa Indirectly Led to the Coups D'états. *Military Strategy Magazine*, *9*(2), 20-26.

Bleck, J., & Van de Walle, N. (2019). *Electoral politics in Africa since 1990: Continuity in change*. Cambridge University Press.

British Broadcasting Corporation BBC (Jan 2022) Burkina Faso coup: Return of the military strongmen to West Africa. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-60138129.Accessed 20/1/2024

Cebotari, A., Chueca-Montuenga, E., Diallo, Y., Ma, Y., Turk-Ariss, R., Xin, W., & Zavarce, H. (2024). Political Fragility: Coups d'État and Their Drivers. *IMF Working Paper No. 2024/034*. 22 February.

Center for Preventive Action (2024). Violent extremism in the Sahel. Retrieved from https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel. Accessed 3/3/2024

Chilaka, F.C., & Peter, T.O. (2022), Resurgence of military coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 5*(2), 52-64.

Christian, M. (2023). West African countries currently under military rule. Retrieved from https://reportera.ng/west-african-countries-currently-under-military-rule/?amp=1. Accessed 28/1/2024

Daffeh, A. (2024). Critical Assessment of Military Interventions in Governance in West Africa: Identifying the Root Causes. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, *5*(1), 456-462.

Daniel, B. (2023). A deeper look Into the West African coup wave. Retrieved from https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/01/a-deeper-look-into-the-west-african-coup-wave/. Accessed 28/1/2024

Daniel, D. Z. (2011). The impact of military coups d'etat on West Africa's socio-economic and political development. Masters thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

Day, C., & Woldemariam, M. (2024). From rebelling to ruling: insurgent victory and state capture in Africa. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *47*(5), 476-501.

Dione, S., & Togola, B. (2018). Historicizing ethno-religious and political conflicts in West Africa: The Malian case. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal) Vol I (4)*, 1-15.

Etim, O. F., & Wilfred, I. U. (2012). The impact of military rule on democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science 33* (3), 285-292

Falola, T. (2022). Democracy must be reformed, for its failures give birth to authoritarianism. Retrieved from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/508569-are-coups-back-in-africa-by-toyin-falola.html?tztc=1.Accessed 3/12/2023

Familugba, J.O., Ibitoye, M. O., Adedayo, A. M., & Ojo, M. C. (2024). The resurgence of military coups in West-Africa states: the case of Niger republic and its implications on peace, security and transnational activities in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences,3*(3), 26-37

Grinin, L., & Korotayev, A. (2023). Africa: The continent of the future. Challenges and opportunities. *Reconsidering the Limits to Growth: A Report to the Russian Association of the Club of Rome*, 225-238.

Habu, M. (2022). The resurgence of military coups in Africa and the role of the African Union (AU). *Social Scientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*,7(31),82-110

Herbert, C. E., & Michael, I. U. (2014). Military and politics: Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of military Incursion in third world politics. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences,* 5(20), 2047-2058

Ibrahim, M.O. (2023). A coup is never a solution: Analysis of the warning signs and impact of recent coups in Western Africa. M.O Ibrahim Foundation, 1-24

Idongesit, E. (2022). The military in politics and governance. In Nation Building in Africa: Issues, Challenges and Emerging Trend. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362016156. Accessed /3/11/2023

Jean-Baptiste, N. (2022). Interventionism in Africa: Clandestine Networks and Proxy Wars in DRC and Exploitation of Resources. *The Impact of Foreign Interventions on Democracy and Human Rights*, 25-54.

Kreps, S. E. (2008). Multilateral military interventions: Theory and practice. *Pol. Sci. Q.*, *123*, 573.

Louisa, B. (2023). Coups and political stability in West Africa. Commons Library Research Briefing, 9861, 1-37

Mahmood, R. (2016). Theoretical preliminaries of military intervention in politics and its implications on Pakistan. *Journal of Indian Studies, 2*(2), 90 – 105

Mannjong, C. A., & Follah, P.T. (2023). Examining the reasons for and effects of military coups in West Africa since 1990: The obstacles to democracy and progress. *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences, 1*(2),20-33

Mbaku, J. M. (2018). Constitutional Coups as a Threat to Democratic Governance in Africa. *Int'l Comp., Policy & Ethics L. Rev.*, *2*, 77.

Merom, G. (2016). New Patterns of Military Intervention. In *Global Politics* (pp. 77-97). Routledge.

Muhammad, D. S. and Hakeem, O. (2022). Why West Africa has had so many coups and how to prevent more.

Nosa, I. (2023). Coup in 7 African countries signals failed democracies. Retrieved from https://businessday.ng/analysis/article/coup-in-7-african-countries-signals-failed-democracies-as-condemnation-threats-peace-moves-on-to-resolve-impasse-antidote-is-purposeful-leadership-not-rejig-of-military-architecture/#google_vignette.15/1/2024

Nwagwu, E. J. (2018). Ethno-Religious Conflict, Political Instability And Africa's Dilemma In Sustaining Democracy. *South East Journal Of Political Science*, *4*(1).

Ojo. E.O. (2014). The military and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria: positive scepticism and negative optimism. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies, 15*(4),9-37

Orkuma, A. S. (2022). The resurgence of military coups d'état in African politics and the reversal of democracy. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy 12* (1), 124-135

Ornella, M., & Fahiraman, R. K. (2022). What caused the coup in Burkina Faso-Analysis? Eurasia Review Retrieved from https://www.eurasiareview.com/06022022-what-cause. Accessed 20/3/2024

Powell, J., Lasley, T., & Schiel, R. (2016). Combating Coups d'état in Africa, 1950–2014. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *51*, 482-502.

Pryce, D.K &Time, V.M. (2023). The role of coups d'état in Africa: Why coups occur and their effects on the populace. *International Social Science Journal,* 1–16.

Roessler, P. (2011). The enemy within Personal rule, coups, and civil war in Africa. *World politics*, *63*(2), 300-346.

Shearer, D. (2020). *Private armies and military intervention*. Routledge.

Theodore, M. (2023). Middle powers, big impact: Africa's coup belt Russia, and the waning global order. European foreign relations.

Yusuf, A. (2023). Resurgence of Coups and Democratic Stability in Africa: An Appraisal. *Resurgence of Coups and Democratic Stability in Africa: An Appraisal (April 2, 2023)*.