



Dimensions
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Analytical report



**Continuing Military Coups
in West Africa: Causes and Consequences**

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INTRODUCTION

Military coups have become the most prevalent phenomenon in Africa; as over the span of seven decades, there have been more than 210 recorded coup attempts, with at least half successfully toppling incumbent regimes while the rest failed. Phenomenon as such has been a persistent feature of Africa's political landscape, albeit diminishing somewhat during certain periods—particularly with the onset of the African democratic transition in the early 1990s. What is notable recently, however, is the resurgence and acceleration of military coups in a sequential narrative. In this regard, most indicators suggest that this trend is unlikely to cease in the near future, especially in the Sahel, and in West and Central Africa. This is notably concentrated in former French colonies^(*); where within less than four years, these regions have experienced 11 coup attempts, of which eight were successful and three failed.

This phenomenon has deeply concerned politicians and policymakers alike, to the extent that putting it under the microscope has become an urgent necessity. In this context, this paper aims to monitor, analyze, and interpret the emerging trend of a series of military coups occurring in Africa. The focus is particularly on West African regions, especially those within the sphere of French influence, to understand such coups' causes and anticipate their outcomes. This is done through an examination of the political, security, and economic environments related to the phenomenon of military coups in the countries that constitute the primary focus of this study in the nations that have experienced this phenomenon from 2020 up to the present time. The ultimate goal is to derive a comprehensive approach to the general causes leading to these coups, and then to foresee their future through the following dimensions:

(*) The researcher believes that most - if not all - African countries have not achieved full independence yet, and that what happened is nothing more than a military and administrative evacuation, and the replacement of new colonialism with old colonialism.



FIRST: THE RISING PHENOMENON OF MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA

Despite the regions of West Africa^(**) have historically been the most prone to military coups on the continent, they have recently witnessed an unprecedented number of them; as in 2020, just one coup occurred; three in 2021 in addition to an attempted coup; in 2022, there were two coups and one attempted coup; and in 2023, up to September 1st, two coups and one attempted coup have occurred. Below is a brief overview of the dynamics of these coups.

1. Mali

On the political front: After gaining independence from France, Mali experienced a turbulent political phase marked by several military coups. This period continued until the early 1990s, followed by a time of relative political stability. Regular elections were held until 2012, after which a military coup led to the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Ke‘ta (IBK) as president.⁽¹⁾ Ke‘ta barely completed two presidential terms when he faced a coup orchestrated by a group of military officers, led by Colonel Assimi Go‘ta in August 2020. Amidst the crisis, Go‘ta vowed to hand over power to civilians after an 18-month transitional period. This transition was slated to culminate in presidential and parliamentary elections in February and March 2022, with the goal of establishing a civilian authority to govern the nation. In alignment with this pledge, Bah N'Daw, a civilian with a military background, was chosen as the transitional president. Meanwhile, Go‘ta, the mastermind behind the coup, was appointed as the deputy transitional leader. Consequently, a government was formed with both military and civilian portfolios.⁽²⁾

(**) What is meant by West Africa here is those areas adjacent to the coasts of West Africa, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, from north to south, and according to the divisions of the regions approved by the African Union, this vast area includes countries that fall into the regions of: North and West Africa (which includes what is known as the Sahel region) and central Africa.

(1) [Link](#)

(2) *ibid*



The transitional phase has been characterized by instability and uncertainty from its inception. The civilian component quickly found itself at odds with the military faction over control of the government. This discord led to a second military coup in May 2021, during which the transitional president and his prime minister were arrested. The military tightened its grip on power, and their leader, Go‘ta, assumed the position of transitional head of state. The transitional period continues to unfold, its trajectory as yet undefined. ⁽³⁾

On the security front: Due to a series of grievances among the Tuareg tribes in northern Mali, separatist tendencies began to emerge in the early 1960s, leading to constant rebellions against the central government. This gave rise to armed political movements, the first of which was the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. This also paved the way for more organized movements to emerge, the most notable being the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, which surfaced at the end of 2011. The Azawad issue remains unresolved to this day. This conflictual environment provided fertile ground for the rise of terrorist organizations, which falsely and deceitfully claim religious motivations, including: "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," "Ansar Dine," and the "Movement for Jihad and Unity in West Africa." Furthermore, this landscape has also seen the growth of organized crime "mafias," which have established strong ties with these terrorist entities. ⁽⁴⁾

On the economic front: Mali heavily relies on agriculture and mining. Despite possessing an abundance of mineral resources such as uranium, gold, bauxite, copper, iron, manganese, phosphates, and salt, Mali remains among the poorest nations globally and within Africa. This can be attributed to multiple factors, chief among them being the unjust exploitation of its resources by Western entities. Internal factors further exacerbate the situation, including poor governance, corruption, nepotism, a lack of social justice, and the proliferation of organized economic crimes. ⁽⁵⁾

(3) Dona J. Stewart, "What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability" (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: US Army War College; Strategic Studies Institute, 2013) Pp. 37-39

(4) Dona J. Stewart, "What is Next for Mali? The Roots of Conflict and Challenges to Stability" (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: US Army War College; Strategic Studies Institute, 2013) Pp. 37-39

(5) Bertelsmann Stiftung, **BTI 2022 Mali Country Report** (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022), Pp. 19-30.



2. Chad

On the political front, Chad's post-independence era began with a bitter struggle for control that led to President François Tombalbaye's authoritarian regime. He established a one-party system and stifled public discourse, which led to the rise of armed revolutionary movements, most notably FROLINAT. The movement, however, was plagued by internal divisions and its efforts faltered. In 1975, Tombalbaye was ousted and assassinated in a military coup, allowing Malloum Félix to come to power. Félix initiated talks with the armed groups and struck a deal with Hissène Habré, but the agreement quickly collapsed, unleashing a brutal war that devastated the capital, N'Djamena.

Félix eventually resigned, paving the way for Goukouni Oueddei to assume the presidency. Oueddei reopened negotiations with Habré, even appointing him as Minister of Defense. Yet, this renewed agreement also disintegrated swiftly, rekindling the conflict. Backed by Libyan support, Oueddei managed to gain the upper hand over Habré, who fled to Darfur in Sudan. However, bolstered by French and American aid, Habré was able to regroup and make a determined comeback.⁽⁶⁾

France intervened militarily on the side of Hissène Habré, successfully driving out the forces of Goukouni Oueddei and the Libyan troops from the northern part of the country. Habré then seized power and ruled the nation with an iron fist, presiding over what is often considered the bloodiest regime in Chad's history. Disregarding calls for democratization, he only fueled the resurgence of armed opposition, sparking another cycle of conflict.

Idriss Déby initially attempted to overthrow Habré but failed and fled the country. However, he returned in December 1990 with support from French intelligence and backing from Libya and Sudan. Ultimately, Déby emerged victorious, forcing Habré into exile.⁽⁷⁾

(6) Salih Hamid Haqira, *Challenges of Democratic Transformation in Africa: A Case Study of Chad*, unpublished master's thesis (Algeria: University of Algiers 3, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, 2014), pp. 146-177.

(7) *ibid*



The National Salvation Movement appointed "Deby" as the President of Chad. He was re-elected after the adoption of the 1996 constitution and remained in power through successive presidential terms, under contested elections. Deby was engaged in a fierce war with armed opposition groups and terrorist organizations until he was killed on the battlefield in April 2021. Subsequently, the military seized power, formed a military council, and dissolved the parliament, claiming it was to ensure stability. General "Mohammed Idriss Deby" was appointed as the transitional president. The transitional period continues to be extended, and in early 2023, a group of eleven army officers, led by "Bahr al-Din Tarqiu," the head of the "Chadian Organization for Human Rights," attempted a coup against the transitional President "Deby Jr.," but they failed. ⁽⁸⁾

On the security front, terrorist organizations intensified their activities in the latter part of Deby's tenure, both within Chad and in its neighboring regions. This forced him to fully engage in counter-terrorism efforts. His forces participated in strenuous military campaigns as part of the G5 Sahel group and also fought against Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria and parts of Cameroon. This volatile political and security landscape provided an opportunity for the resurgence of armed opposition factions, most notably led by the Front for Concord and Change (FACT). Despite these challenges, Deby consistently managed to quell the uprisings with the assistance of France—until the final conflict that led to his demise. ⁽⁹⁾

On the economic front, Chad's economy is a composite of diverse sectors. Approximately one-third is rooted in agriculture and livestock, while petroleum contributes around 27%. The remaining economic activities are primarily in services and other miscellaneous sectors. Despite this diversity, the country is currently mired in a debilitating economic and financial crisis. This is largely attributed to rampant administrative corruption that has seeped into every facet of the state's apparatus. The situation is further aggravated by poor governance, nepotism, and an absence of social justice, all of which exacerbate the nation's economic woes. ⁽¹⁰⁾

(8) Sputnik, "Chad announces the failure of an attempted military coup and arrests its perpetrators," date of publication January 5, 2023, last visit occurred on September 5, 2023 at 1:10 PM at the [Link](#)

(9) Muhammad Saleh Omar, "Chad and the rapid developments. About the nature and trends of the conflict," on the Al Jazeera, date of publication April 25, 2021, [Link](#)

(10) Mohamed Zakaria, "Chad from combating terrorism to victim of Trump's decisions," on the Al Jazeera, date of publication March 10, 2017, [Link](#)



3. Niger

On the political landscape, Niger has navigated a tumultuous path since its independence from France. Initially governed by "Hamani Diori" in a one-party system that imposed strict limitations on opposition, his regime was toppled by a military coup in 1974. Colonel "Seyni Kountché" assumed power and ruled until his death in 1987, after which the military continued to hold sway under its retired leader, "Ali Saibou." A wave of civil unrest eventually led to the relaxation of political restrictions and the introduction of multi-party politics. "Mahamane Ousmane" emerged victorious in the 1993 presidential election but was overthrown by another military faction in 1996. Thereafter, Army Chief of Staff "Ibrahim Mainassara" took the helm, only to be deposed and killed by yet another military group. This faction appointed "Daouda Malam Wanke" as the country's transitional leader, signaling yet another chapter in Niger's complex political history. ⁽¹¹⁾

In 1999, elections were held, and "Mamadou Tandja" won. He was reelected in 2004, but towards the end of his second term, he was overthrown and arrested by military officers. General "Salou Djibo" was appointed as the transitional president until new elections were conducted in 2011. "Mahamadou Issoufou" won those elections and was reelected for a second term in 2016. In the 2021 elections, "Mohamed Bazoum" emerged as the victor. However, just two days before Bazoum's inauguration on March 31, 2021, an attempted coup was thwarted and control was re-established.

Despite this, Bazoum's presidency faced both political and military resistance, largely due to his affiliation with an ethnic minority. To consolidate his rule, he was swiftly confronted by the Chief of the Presidential Guard, "Abdulrahman Tchiana," who led a coup and arrested him. This has resulted in a multi-dimensional crisis that continues to evolve, involving not only internal dynamics but also relationships with France, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and neighboring countries. ⁽¹²⁾

(11) Mustafa Muhammad Saad Abdallah, "The role of the military institution in the democratic transformation in Niger," on the website of the Arab Democratic Center, research study, date of publication October 16, 2017, [Link](#)

(12) Mahmoud Abu Bakr, "Military coups in Niger between causes, facts and dates", on the Independent Arabia, date of publication July 28, 2023, [Link](#)



On the security front, Niger shares a common narrative with many African nations, where the elite are engrossed in struggles for power, thereby creating a substantial security void. This has facilitated the expansion of terrorist groups within Niger and its immediate periphery. The situation is especially precarious in the borderland triangle among Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—often referred to as the "Triangle of Death." In this region, the Islamic State group in the Greater Sahara has seized extensive territories, bringing its fighters to within less than 100 kilometers of the capital, Niamey. Several areas have been subjected to devastating terrorist attacks, resulting in hundreds of deaths and casualties. In an effort to counter these security threats, Niger is an active participant in the G5 Sahel Force and also hosts military contingents from France, the United States, and other European nations. ⁽¹³⁾

On the economic front, Niger's populace primarily engages in subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. Despite having some oil and gas fields, as well as boasting the world's second-largest uranium reserves, and other minerals like gold, phosphate, coal, and iron, Niger remains one of the poorest countries in both Africa and the world at large. More than half of its population lives below the extreme poverty line, and the country ranks at the bottom of the Human Development Index. ⁽¹⁴⁾

(13) Al-Ain News website, "The Triangle of Death". Will the Sahel region become an "area of influence" for ISIS? Publication date: September 23, 2022, [Link](#)

(14) United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Index Website, Niger, Data updated at 8 Sep. 2022, Last Visit at 5 Sep. 2023, at 1:40 pm, at [Link](#)



4. Guinea Conakry

On the political front, Ahmed S»kou Tour», Guinea's first president after gaining independence from France in 1958, adopted a single-party system and socialist ideologies. His relations with France soured, and despite his efforts for liberation, Tour» became increasingly authoritarian and suppressed the opposition. Portugal exploited this situation to try to eliminate him due to his support for the independence of Cape Verde. Portuguese-backed rebel forces attacked him but were repelled. In response, his government carried out large-scale purges, leading to the deaths of at least 50,000 people, while an untold number were imprisoned and tortured. Amid widespread repression and deteriorating economic conditions, a popular uprising against him forced him to adopt political reforms. He also sought to improve relations with France and the West, but he died before these initiatives could fully materialize.

As preparations were underway to choose a successor for both the party and national leadership, Colonels Lansana Cont» and Diarra Traor» orchestrated a coup. Cont» assumed the role of President, while Traor» became the Prime Minister. Military governance continued, but Cont» eventually embraced political pluralism, winning the presidential election in 1993. Despite a semblance of democracy, Cont» maintained a tight grip on political power. Over time, his oppressive rule led to increasing opposition and ultimately a civil war. Cont» survived an assassination attempt in 2005, but the unrest continued, pushing the country to the verge of collapse. Upon Cont»'s death in 2008, Captain Moussa Camara seized power and took on the role of transitional President. A year later, in 2009, protests erupted, demanding democratic governance. Camara's government responded with disproportionate violence, leading to a massacre in Conakry's main stadium, resulting in hundreds of casualties. Shortly thereafter, Camara himself was wounded in a failed assassination attempt, leading to the appointment of Brigadier S»kouba Konat» as the new transitional President.



In 2010, Alpha Condé won the presidential elections in Guinea, securing reelection in 2015. Despite high hopes, his governance proved disappointing. Approaching the end of his second term, Condé orchestrated a constitutional amendment that allowed him to vie for a third term, which he won. This move sparked widespread protests, escalating violence, and resulted in a number of casualties, including deaths, injuries, and detentions. Just as it appeared that Condé had tightened his oppressive grip on power, he was toppled in a coup led by Mamady Doumbouya, the commander of Guinea's elite special forces, in December 2021. Doumbouya's actions precipitated a crisis with ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, but he managed to sidestep the political fallout. He assumed the role of transitional President and continues to hold power.

On the security front: Despite being outside the terrorism belt, Guinea-Conakry has not achieved stability due to the excessive use of force by successive governments. This has almost pushed the country into the category of failed states.

On the economic front: Guineans are among the poorest people in the world. Their country ranks 175th out of 189 nations on the United Nations Human Development Index, with 70.3% of the population living below the poverty line⁽¹⁵⁾. This is despite Guinea's vast wealth of natural resources. The country holds half of the world's total bauxite reserves, along with massive reserves of iron ore, large deposits of uranium, diamonds, gold, and other minerals. Moreover, its diamond reserves are estimated at around 40 million carats. Although the gold reserves are not precisely quantified, Guinea produced about 16,000 kilograms of gold⁽¹⁶⁾ in 2011. This abundance of natural resources has made Guinea an attractive prospect for major international companies and a battleground for international conflict over the acquisition of these riches.

(15) Bertelsmann Stiftung, **BTI 2022 Guinea Country Report** (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022), Pp., 15-22.

(16) Thierno Amadou Diallo, *Beyond the Resource Curse: Mineral Resources and Development in Guinea-Conakry*, **Unpublished Master Thesis** (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute Of Technology), Pp. 46-57.



5. Burkina Faso

On the political front, the state of democracy in this country, which gained its independence from France over 60 years ago, is virtually non-existent. The nation has been burdened by military rule for more than half of its lifespan. The remainder of the time has been under the yoke of authoritarian rulers who have gone to great lengths to consolidate power in their own hands. Not a single leader among the many who have ruled has ever willingly or democratically relinquished power. Guinea rivals Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Ghana for the dubious honor of having the most coup d'etats in West Africa, each with a total of 10 coups. In the broader African context, only Burundi with 11 coups and Sudan with 15 ones. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The first president, "Maurice Yam»ogo," was ousted in a coup in 1966. The second president, "Sangoul» Lamizana," was overthrown in a coup in 1980. The third, "Saye Zerbo," met the same fate in 1982, followed by the fourth, "Jean-Baptiste Ou»draogo," in 1983. The fifth, "Thomas Sankara," was overthrown in 1987. The sixth, "Blaise Compaor»," was ousted amid large-scale protests and violent acts, leading him to flee the country, and the military took over the power in 2014. The reins of power have since been alternately held by military and civilian leaders. Stability came under the civilian and ninth president, "Michel Kafando," only for him to be overthrown by the tenth president, "Gilbert Diend»r»," in a military coup in 2015. He was contested by the Speaker of the Parliament, "Ch»rif Sy," who restored Kafando to power. Elections were held in 2015, won by "Roch Marc Christian Kabor»," making him the twelfth president in the country's history. He was re-elected in 2020. ⁽¹⁸⁾

In January 2022, a group of military officers, led by Colonel "Paul Henry Damiba," rebelled against President "Kabor»," arrested him, and seized power.

(17) Bernard Barbeau, "En Afrique, 200 coups d'État en 70 ans, sur le site de Radio Canada, Publié le 19 jan. 2019, La dernière visite au le 5 Sep. 2023 à 13h55, sur le lien, [Link](#)

(18) Saied Nada, "Why was the Burkina Faso coup repeated in less than a year?", on the website of the Ra Center for Strategic Studies, analytical paper, date of publication October 5,2023, [Link](#)



On September 30 of the same year, another group of military personnel announced that they had decided to remove Colonel "Damiba" from power, citing his inability to halt the growing terrorist insurgency. Led by Captain "Ibrahim Traor»,," this action made Traor» the fourteenth president in the history of Burkina Faso and marked the country's tenth coup after eight successful coups and one thwarted attempt. ⁽¹⁹⁾

On the security front: As a natural consequence of decades of political instability, armed groups have spread across the country, including insurgent groups from neighboring countries, particularly Mali, CÔte d'Ivoire, and Niger. Especially during the presidency of "Blaise Compaor»,," Burkina Faso served as a safe haven for these groups. In addition, organized crime syndicates are widely prevalent in West Africa. Moreover, the spread of terrorist organizations, particularly under the rule of President "Roch Kabor»,," has caused significant security destabilization. This has resulted in more than 1,500 deaths, tens of thousands of injuries, and over 1.5 million displaced and homeless individuals. This led to protests against President Kabor»'s policies. ⁽²⁰⁾

On the economic front: Apart from the agriculture and livestock sectors, the country possesses a wealth of minerals, such as antimony, bauxite, cement, copper, gold, lead, limestone, manganese, marble, nickel, phosphate, silver, and zinc. Gold dominates the mining sector, placing Burkina Faso sixth among gold-producing countries in Africa and fourth in non-fuel minerals on the continental and Middle Eastern scale. Consequently, major powers and their corporations are vying to establish partnerships with the ruling regime in this country. ⁽²¹⁾

(19) Rachel Chason, Borso Tall, "In Burkina Faso, a Coup within a Coup", on Washington Post Website, Published at 1 Oct. 2022, Last Visit at 5 Sep. 2023, at 1:55 pm, at [Link](#)

(20) Saied Nada, "The hidden reasons for Doumbouya's coup against Condé?" On the African Readings website, publication date: September 30, 2021, [Link](#)

(21) Cliff D. Taylor, et. al., "Geology and Nonfuel Mineral Deposits of Africa and the Middle East" (Reston, Virginia: John W. Powell National Center, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, Open-File Report 2005-1294-E, 2005), P. 140.



6. Guinea-Bissau

On the political front: Guinea-Bissau achieved its independence in 1974 after a grueling armed struggle that spanned nearly two decades against Portuguese colonial rule. From that point to the present day, it's accurate to say that the country has been plagued by political instability. Initially, Guinea-Bissau began its post-independence era under a one-party system. It wasn't until the early 1990s that multiparty politics were legally instituted.⁽²²⁾ Guinea-Bissau has experienced four complete military coups, the last of which occurred in 2012, along with 17 attempted or alleged coups, the most recent being on February 1, 2022. Thirteen individuals, both military and civilian, have served as the country's president. None of these leaders completed their constitutionally mandated terms, with the exception of former President Jos» Mário Vaz, who was elected in 2014. The current president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, won the 2019 elections. Subsequently, Embaló and his government were targeted in an attempted coup and assassination plot during a meeting; however, the attempt was thwarted. Due to Embaló's party lacking a majority in parliament, a political stalemate ensued, leading to the dissolution of the legislature and the calling of early elections. The opposition won once again, forcing Embaló to come to terms with the new political reality.⁽²³⁾

On the security landscape, Guinea-Bissau is not typically associated with the zone of terrorism; however, it has yet to attain a meaningful level of security stability. This instability is largely attributable to continuous political conflicts over power, leading to enhanced security measures, curtailment of public spaces, and suppression of both civil and political liberties. This volatile atmosphere has facilitated the expansion of organized crime syndicates, which have become so entrenched that they've successfully enlisted multiple governmental officials to safeguard their operations.⁽²⁴⁾

(22) Amani Africa, "Updated Briefing on the Situation in Guinea Bissau", Amani Africa Website, Published at 12 Dec. 2022, Last Visit at 5 Sep. 2023, at 2:05 pm, at [Link](#)

(23) Dr.. Saied Nada, "After the opposition's victory: Will Guinea Bissau return to a dead end?", on the African Readings website, date of publication June 9, 2021, [Link](#)

(24) United Nations website, "Parties in Guinea-Bissau retreat after reaching the "brink of collapse" after the military coup," United Nations News, date of publication, September 29, 2003, [Link](#)



On the economic front, Guinea-Bissau is among the poorest countries in the world, with 80% of its population living on less than one dollar per day. The country's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture, livestock, and fishing. It has abundant reserves of bauxite, phosphates, and phosphorus, as well as significant potential for hydroelectric power generation. Additionally, some offshore oil fields have been discovered. ⁽²⁵⁾

7. Gabon

On the political front, Gabon has been governed by three civilian presidents since gaining independence from traditional French colonial rule in 1960. All three belonged to the Gabonese Democratic Party, which has monopolized power throughout this period. They are as follows:

Léon M'ba, who governed for over seven years from August 1960 until November 1967. He faced an attempted coup in 1964, but France dispatched forces from Senegal, leading to his release. He later died in office.

Omar Bongo, who ruled for over 41 years from December 1967 until June 2009. He also passed away while still in office.

Both presidents have been emblematic of Gabon's long-standing political stability, albeit within a single-party system. ⁽²⁶⁾

Subsequently, the ruling party nominated Ali Bongo, the son, for the presidency. He won and governed for two terms, totaling approximately 14 years, from June 2009 until August 26, 2023. On that day, the head of Gabon's election center announced Bongo's victory for a third presidential term. In response, a group of senior military officers declared a coup, seizing power, nullifying the elections and their outcome, and putting an end to the rule of the Bongo family.

The deposed president, Ali Bongo Jr, faced an attempted coup in 2019 when a group of army officers successfully took control of the national radio building. At that time, Bongo was undergoing medical treatment in Morocco.

(25) Mohamed Farhat, "Guinea Bissau...the fragile economy is in the crosshairs of France's investments," on the Al Ain News website, published on July 26, 2022, [Link](#)

(26) BBC News Arabic website, "What do we know about Gabon, which has been ruled by only three presidents since its independence?" Date of publication: August 30, 2023, [Link](#)



The officers announced the president's removal and established the "National Reform Council" to "restore democracy in Gabon." Following this, the government declared that it had reasserted its control. ⁽²⁷⁾

On the security front, Gabon also falls outside the realm of terrorism. However, like all authoritarian states, it has experienced repression and suppression. Throughout its history, it has witnessed several protests from a suppressed opposition against various governments and their policies.

On the economic front, despite having all the necessary conditions, the agricultural sector performs very poorly. Nevertheless, Gabon's rentier economy has achieved good performance rates, largely relying on the oil sector. Crude oil accounts for more than 80% of the country's exports and 45% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In addition to oil, Gabon has significant mineral wealth, including key resources like uranium, iron, and manganese.

Given the low population of about 1.5 million people, the per capita GDP significantly exceeds that of its sub-Saharan African counterparts by more than four times. It has the second-highest per capita income, at \$14,329 annually, after its neighbor Equatorial Guinea. Despite this, a third of the population lives below the poverty line. ⁽²⁸⁾

(27) France 24, "Gabon: A failed military coup attempt in the absence of President Ali Bongo," published on January 7, 2023, [Link](#)

(28) Bertelsmann Stiftung, **BTI 2022 Gabon Country Report** (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022), Pp., 14-22.



SECOND: CAUSES OF THE PROLIFERATION OF MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA

Upon reviewing the aforementioned cases, we can identify multiple underlying factors contributing to the spread of military coups in West Africa. For the sake of a more nuanced analysis, these factors will be organized into overarching categories as follows:

1. Internal causes

Elitist and Ethnic Rivalries for Control: Following the withdrawal of colonial forces, both military and administrative, and the subsequent empowerment of African elites, the previously unifying national imperatives diminished. This transition led to a fierce competition among elites for power. In some instances, this struggle has been motivated by personal interests, as observed in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Gabon. In other cases, ethnic considerations have played a significant role, as exemplified by President Bazoum's situation in Niger.

Resource Conflict (The Resource Curse): The abundance of natural resources is a common denominator among the case studies, which exacerbates the struggle for power. In Africa, the rule is that whoever controls the power also controls the wealth. This has been consistently evident across all studied cases.

Authoritarian Rule and Its Hereditary Nature: Although wielding power in an authoritarian manner may, in itself, provide sufficient reason for military intervention to remove oppressive rulers—regardless of their good or bad intentions—the observations suggest that the urgency for this intervention amplifies when authoritarian practices intensify and when the resulting negative impacts become irreparable. This has been demonstrated in various instances, including cases in Gabon and Chad.



Corruption, favoritism, and the absence of social justice: Since the primary aim of attaining power has become the accumulation of wealth, the distribution of spoils among relatives and close associates has become the ruling class's main occupation. This is done to ensure the loyalty of position holders, to buy the votes of the electorate, and for other purposes similar to what political money accomplishes. This has created a massive gap in social justice, inflaming the anger of the people. The military often exploits this situation as a pretext to seize power, as they declare in their initial statements, as we have seen in all cases.

Incompetent Governance and Weak Government Performance: When we closely examine all the case studies, we find that those in power, from the lowest to the highest positions, have primarily focused on accumulating wealth. This has led to a failure in effectively managing resources and the state, whether through deliberate actions, negligence, or a lack of competence. This mismanagement has exacerbated numerous economic and social problems, including poverty, unemployment, crime, and more. The military often uses these issues as a pretext to stage coups and overthrow the ruling authorities.

The Failure of Imported Models: Over the span of seven decades, the inability of both the socialist and subsequently capitalist models to thrive in African contexts has become evident. This can be attributed to the profound cultural distinctions that set Africa apart from the prevailing ideologies of the East and West. Success of a particular model in its country of origin does not guarantee success in a different setting. As a result, there is a recurring emphasis on the imperative need to adapt and refine governance and administrative models to accommodate Africa's unique characteristics and align more effectively with its specific requirements.



The Intersection of Civil-Military Relations: Following independence, political leaders were often the same individuals who had led the military factions during the liberation struggles. They assumed political power, and these very factions gave rise to the newly formed African armies. This fusion erased the clear lines between the military and civilian domains, fostering a culture of seizing power through military means. This culture has remained deeply entrenched to this day, as observed in all the cases.

The Rise of New Generations of Elites: Since the advent of globalization and cultural convergence, a fresh wave of African political and military elites has emerged. These new generations hold entirely different perspectives from the traditional elite class. They are firmly convinced that the West does not offer its services for free and instead depletes their nations' resources. They believe that the only way to halt this exploitation is by freeing themselves from the dominance of these external powers.

Contagion Effect (Domino Effect): It has been historically proven that political developments spread quickly through a contagious effect. We can see this clearly in the wave of democratic transitions in Africa during the 1990s, the Arab Spring revolutions at the start of the third millennium, and the recent surge of coups that have impacted West Africa.

2. External Causes

External Factors and Africa's Wealth: The West espouses lofty ideological principles like democracy, human rights, and good governance while discreetly harboring a strong appetite for exploiting the continent's abundant resources and natural wealth, which have been bestowed upon Africa by nature. There's no clearer indication of this than when their interests come into conflict with these noble values, at which point they conveniently overlook them and conjure up numerous justifications.



To ensure the realization of their objectives and ambitions, they enlist local proxies among African leaders or intimidate them with threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and revolutions, compelling these leaders to submit, whether willingly or under duress. Consequently, they consistently lend support to coups against any ruler who espouses liberationist ideals or whose loyalty appears to waver. This pattern is unmistakably evident in various case studies, including Gabon, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Guinea-Conakry. ⁽²⁹⁾

The Influence of International System Changes: The transformations taking place within the international system since the early 21st century have had a profound impact in kindling the inherent tendency among military factions to seek power. This is particularly pronounced as the rise and increased foreign involvement of Russia has granted these factions considerable room for maneuver in dealings with the West. It has also garnered them popular support from disillusioned populations, who attribute many of their worsening conditions to Western dominance over their nations' resources.

Resource Conflict (The Resource Curse): The abundance of natural resources is a common denominator among the case studies, which exacerbates the struggle for power. In Africa, the rule is that whoever controls the power also controls the wealth. This has been consistently evident across all studied cases.

Authoritarian Rule and Its Hereditary Nature: Although wielding power in an authoritarian manner may, in itself, provide sufficient reason for military intervention to remove oppressive rulers—regardless of their good or bad intentions—the observations suggest that the urgency for this intervention amplifies when authoritarian practices intensify and when the resulting negative impacts become irreparable. This has been demonstrated in various instances, including cases in Gabon and Chad.

(29) Abdelkader Ben Masoud, "The Godmother of Coups in Africa". Will France soon lead a coup in Algeria?", on the Sasa Post website, date of publication: August 6, 2019, [Link](#)



CONCLUSION


All signs point to a growing likelihood of military coups becoming more widespread in West Africa, and indeed across the entire African continent. This is because most of the conditions that lead to such coups are present in many countries, as exemplified by Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and others.

It can be asserted that this phenomenon is unlikely to fade away or diminish in intensity unless its root causes are genuinely addressed. This necessitates a profound shift in the political culture, both among the ruling elites and the general populace, aligning it with the principles of a true social contract while acknowledging the unique communal aspects. It entails safeguarding and upholding rights and freedoms, optimizing resource utilization, striving for sustainable development, and ensuring the overall well-being of the people. Ultimately, it leads to what can be aptly described as "enlightened governance."



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