Coup d'état in West Africa: A Resurgence of Military Rule in the 21st- Century?[1]

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Abstract:

Recent developments in some West African countries are a classic case of reversal of democratic rule and have raised doubts about the feasibility of democracy in Africa. This study examines the factors that have led to the resurgence of coups d'état and the possibility of constructing a new typology of coups d'état and military rule in 21st century Africa. Documented data sources were used for the study and the method of analysis was content analysis. The study compared the nature and characteristics of recent coups with those of the past and the predominant causes. The study made an attempt to identify the gap in the theories by examining the various theories on military interventions, postulating an alternative theory that can better explain the current phenomenon different from those of the 1980s. The study is an early warning that military rule could re-emerge in West Africa and Africa.

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Introduction

The military is a professional organisation with a highly structured hierarchy of officers and commands and coordinated tactical and strategic actions. States consciously build their militaries with security objectives in mind (Singh, 2014). The history of all great societies, mighty warriors, prominent leaders and world powers is incomplete without their ability to build military strength. It is assumed that the military limits its professionalism to providing nation states with internal and external security. However, this notion has been demystified by the actions of the military, particularly in the developing world in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and in the case of Africa in the 2020s (Luckham, 1990). Through coups d'état in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, the military has overstepped the boundaries of state security and interfered directly in political affairs. In this way, the infantile democratic experiment in the developing world has been halted, reversed and ended by the military's constant interference in politics (Wang, 1998).

Africa is one of the continents with the most successful coups, failed coups and attempted coups in the world (Decalo, 1973). Between the 1960s and the 1990s, more than 100 coups were documented in Africa. Although the phenomenon was thought to have ended forever, it has resurfaced in West Africa in the twenty-first century. Coups are either bloodless palace uprisings, violent civil wars or factional conflicts. Africa, which was rightly thought to be lagging behind other continents in the institutionalisation of democracy, is facing a governance crisis and increasing political instability. The recurring and seemingly unstoppable coups and counter-coups across Africa have multiple causes, such as socio-economic factors and poor governance (Albrecht & Eibl, 2018). Although Africa is rich in natural resources, it is economically underdeveloped, dependent on an asymmetric, carefully planned and Western-driven global political economy and impoverished (Kposowa & Jenkins, 1992). The situation was complicated by the ideological struggle between the US and the USSR during the Cold War, which created political instability in Africa through sponsored coups. In addition, the unstable political environment provided a breeding ground for uprisings or mutinies by military officers in Africa (Jenkins & Kposowa, 1990). Between 1956 and 1986, there were 60 coups in Africa (McGowan & Johnson, 1986).

Although coups and military rule are two different concepts, they are also closely linked, as coups often lead to military rule (Zimmermann, 1989). This study focuses primarily on coups in 21st century Africa, including their nature, causes, manifestations and changing dimensions. However, it is important to note that the link between coups and military rule remains relevant to the study. Although the focus is on coups, the relationship between coups and military rule is not ignored. The end of the Cold War in the 1990s brought with it a "third wave of democratisation" in which authoritarian states in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean began to institutionalise democratic values such as multi-party systems, civil societies, the protection of human rights and greater media freedom. Fukuyama (1996) passionately declared that Western liberal democracy had become sacrosanct as a result of this

development. However, recent developments in Africa and military takeovers have shown that democratisation is far from being achieved.

In the African context, the advocates of democracy have failed to recognise an important point: Coups are a clear sign that democracy has either failed or is failing. Therefore, military coups are seen as a solution or response to the mismanagement that results from democratic governance. This view and the theoretical postulates of military intervention in Africa are therefore analysed beyond the traditional debates. It is therefore argued that the recent coups in West Africa are the result of irresponsible governance and the mismanagement of African resources by puppet leaders supported by Western powers. Moreover, these coups are part of a movement against France's overbearing neo-colonialist intervention in Francophone countries, which has become a feature of Africa's history since independence (Attah, 2013). Although the coups mainly affected the former French colonies, they are discussed in the context of faltering democratic governance and the risks of a return to military rule in Africa. The following discussion will focus on the historical context of military rule in Africa to provide an overview of this phenomenon. We will examine the reasons for the resurgence of coups d'état in West Africa in light of the challenges facing democratic governance on the continent. We will also explore the question of whether these coups are the result of a failure of democracy or a response to neo-colonialism. Our study will aim to place the resurgence of coups d'état in West Africa in its historical context.

Historical Overview of Military Coups and Rule in Africa

The political history of Africa cannot be complete without discussing military coups and military rule. The military as a professional organisation developed successively in Africa. Pre-colonial Africa had a robust military organisation with a strong army in various political organisations with sublime strategies and sophisticated warfare techniques (Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). The colonial administrations established military organisations modelled on their own, such as the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in British West Africa (Ejiogu, 2007). The military played an enormous role in the political, social and economic development of the new states in many ways, which characterised the military's psychological orientation towards political intervention in various circumstances, as can be observed in most new states (Janowitz, 1964a; Janowitz, 1964b; Brömmelhörster & Wolf-Christian). This phenomenon is not unique to emerging or African powers. Even established democracies have given the military the appearance of an unstoppable power player because they believe that military power is an indicator of national strength (Luard, 1988).

Military intervention is not the violent removal of a democratically elected government as most people perceive it. Once the military takes power, it integrates the civilian elites and forms a diarchy. The powers of their civilian counterparts seem invisible, but they play a major role in military rule (Finer, 2002). Under different circumstances, coups do not equal a military uprising. It can emerge from revolutionary

movements and a long-term interface between the ruling class and factions within a state (Kandil, 2016). Military coups continue to be popular in Africa because the soldier is not democratic. A democratic soldier is an army that is structured as an institution that is professional, independent and law-abiding within its legal framework (Barany, 2012). Military coups have become a threat to democratisation in Africa because the army has not retreated to the barracks and can return anytime the opportunity presents itself (Onwumechili, 1998). Most military coups in Africa are rarely resisted, giving the impression that they are accepted (Feit, 1968). This scenario has implications for the process of political development in African states.

Between 1945 and 1960, there were more than 50 successful military takeovers in Africa, Asia, South America, the Caribbean and the Middle East (Huntington, 1975). In addition, there was political unrest, violence and chaos in numerous other countries. These coups were associated with several elements such as weak political institutions, highly politicised military organisations, traditional political systems, tyranny and fragile social cohesion – with this tragic development. In Africa, military coups occurred in various phases. In Egypt, there were two successful coups in the 1950s, which marked the beginning of the first wave. During the second wave, which began in the 1960s and included 23 successful coups, the West African region was the worst affected with 13 coups (Kieh & Kalu, 2021). In the third phase, there were around 20 successful coups, while the fourth wave recorded over 30. In the 1980s, there were a total of 67 successful military coups in Africa (Kieh & Kalu, 2021).

As early as the 1960s, all African sub-regions were affected by coups, with the exception of southern Africa. Due to the constant coups and counter-coups, military power had established itself as the "legitimate" standard in African administration by the 1970s and 1980s (Kieh & Kalu, 2021). There were 88 successful military coups in Africa between 1952 and 2012 (Souaré, 2014). In 48 sub-Saharan African countries between 1956 and 2003, there were 139 known coup plots, 108 unsuccessful coup attempts and 80 successful military coups, according to a database on African military coups (McGowan, 2005). According to McGowan (2006), 16 West African countries experienced 44 successful military coups, 43 violent failed coups, 82 attempted coups, 7 civil wars and about 20 other types of political violence between their independence and 2004. In less than 50 years, there have been 196 violent coups in West Africa. Since the 1950s, there have been 200 successful and unsuccessful coups in Africa, according to a study by Mwai (2023). Furthermore, Cheeseman (2021) hypothesised that there could be more coups in Africa before the end of the century, as some of them are seen as successful protests against bad administration by the so-called democratic movement.

Ngoma (2014) has proposed four models to explain military coups in Africa. The first model posits that the top military hierarchy plans, coordinates and executes coups, which was common in the 1960s and 1970s. The second model assumes co-operation between the military and civilians in the planning and execution of coups, as was common during the Cold War in the 1980s. The third model is externally orientated and involves foreign mercenaries or troops, as seen in Libya in 2013. The last model

states that middle-ranking military officers orchestrate and carry out coups against other military regimes or civilian regimes. In Africa, military coups are triggered by various factors such as economic, social and political factors. Economic failure is one reason cited by the coup plotters as justification their intervention, as can be seen in General Ankrah's justification for the coup d'état in Ghana in 1966. The quest for national unity and political stability was also used as a justification for military coups in Africa. Major General Juvenal Habyalimana's coup against the elected government in Rwanda, for example, was justified by the desire to end growing national disunity. (Carney, 2014)

Moreover, elected politicians sometimes face political crises and questions of legitimacy, which can contribute to military coups. There are other reasons for military coups in Africa. Corruption is one of them, as is the accusation that civilian governments do not respect the military profession. Ethnic rivalries have also played a role in some coups, such as the Nigerian coups in 1966. The first coup was led by ethnic Igbo military officers, while the counter-coup was led by the Hausa/Fulani military group. In some cases, internal military rivalries, as in Ghana, have led to a series of a series of coups and counter-coups in the 1960s and 1970s (Orhero & Okolie, 2023). The military has also justified its interference in African politics by citing high unemployment, extreme poverty and the misuse of public resources by civilian rulers (Adeyanju & Adeyanju, 2023).

The importance of competition for resources is an issue that is sometimes overlooked when considering military coups in Africa. According to Siollun (2009), the conflict between the citizens and the military over the management of oil wealth is at the root of the coup culture in Nigeria. Since the military benefited from Nigeria's oil wealth, they believed that direct control of the state would give them better access to this wealth than a position on the periphery of the government. Mbaku (1994) claimed that similar to Nigeria, many coups in Africa are motivated by the desire for financial gain. According to Collier & Hoeffler (2005) and Harkness (2016), Africa is caught in a cycle of coups because all countries have the same causes and there is a significant probability of repeated occurrences. According to Johnson et al. (1983), countries with rapid economic growth, high social mobilisation and unity experienced fewer coups than countries that did not.

Most justifications for rejecting military rule in Africa are: Setback to democracy, tyranny, poor governance, corruption, hostility from the international community, violation of human rights and restriction of freedom of expression. The civilian African leaders, on the other hand, are not absolved of the same accusations. According to Le Van (2015), not even the protracted democratic experiment had been able to establish a genuine democratisation process. Huntington (1975) supported this point of view and emphasised that the primary differences between governments lie not in the type of governance but in the degree of good governance, even if they profess democracy. According to Edeh & Ugwueze (2014), military coups and military dictatorships become important features and characteristics of developing countries. After the Second World War, increasing ethnic and class tensions, pervasive corruption, socio-economic policy

failures, human rights violations and disregard for the rule of law led to civil unrest, mob violence, frequent military takeovers and unstable political systems in Africa (Huntington, 1975; Kposowa & Jenkins, 1984). Furthermore, the problem of legitimacy that is often raised against military rule also applies to democratic governments in Africa, as most of their elections show (Attah, 2012). Undemocratic practises such as rigged and manipulated elections, unauthorised constitutional amendments that grant many African leaders life tenures, the suppression of multi-party competition, the denial of freedom of expression and authoritarian rule undermine the legitimacy of many civilian regimes in Africa, similar to what military rule did (Attah, 2003). Amoateng (2022) emphasises that coups in Africa are essentially the continuation of politics by other means.

The legitimacy of African military governments is often cited as one of several offences against democracy, although, as mentioned earlier, they have never questioned it. They therefore go to great lengths to demonstrate their legitimacy by governing swiftly and cutting back on spending on democracy. Each time the democratic system collapsed in Africa, the military established itself as an alternative form of administration (Ogueri, II, 1973). The military has employed several legitimisation strategies, including appointing a significant number of civilians to their cabinet posts, beginning to build key infrastructure, maintaining national political structures, upholding traditional institutions and opening up some limited freedom of debate on political issues. In other cases, they create new institutions where none existed before, as in the creation of states and local governments in Nigeria during military rule (Zolberg, 1973). In coups, however, the military is always asked to return to its barracks. Nevertheless, when coups are reversed, the military is always asked to return to their barracks.

The African Union (AU) and regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have produced and presented manuals to combat coups and anti-military regimes in Africa, but the efforts have not been successful (Witts, 2020; Ubi, 2022). At least six successful coups were carried out between 2020 and 2023, most of them in West Africa. To stop or prevent the ongoing coups, neither ECOWAS nor the AU have done enough, including enforcing good governance (Ziblim, 2022). ECOWAS has imposed strict sanctions on Mali and other countries where the military has recently taken power. According to Avoulete (2023), ECOWAS should rethink its strategy because the consequences affect the innocent people rather than the military authorities in the nations concerned. This underpins the view that the people are not included in the reckoning of democratic governance as democracy in Africa has become "rule of the politicians by the politicians for the politicians" (Bett, 2023). The inability to professionalise the army and disengage the military from direct involvement in political affairs is evidence of the failure of democracy in Africa. The challenging political and socio-economic crises that have manifested in insecurity, wars and conflicts, hunger and diseases, electoral fraud and violence as well as constitutional amendments to extend tenure and other vices have failed to distinguish constitutional democracy from military rule (Avoulete, 2023).

Although the AU is considered an ineffective body in strategically combating coups in Africa, the Lome Declaration in 2000 banned military coups and imposed sanctions on military regimes (Souaré, 2014), however, the AU has been criticised for remaining silent on the government's crackdown on citizens while it was quick to condemn the military-backed revolutions during the Arab Spring in 2011 (Ani, 2021). However, the AU is sometimes constrained by security considerations, as in the case of the 2021 coup in Chad, but the AU is perceived as the body responsible for devising policies and measures to reverse coups and counter democratic upheavals in Africa (Mohammed, 2022).

A Resurgence of Coups D'état in West Africa: Some Explanations

Coups do not take place in a vacuum. Often, the corrupt and dictatorial tendencies of so-called democrats tacitly invite military intervention (Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). Military coups originated as palace coups, armed rebellions, social upheavals and full-fledged coups d'état (Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). The idea that democracy is being fought for by the global proponents of democracy and imposed on African states resonates with the withdrawal of the military from the political sphere. This is not a popular movement of the kind that emerged in Europe and America (Ngoma, 2004). The West has internationalised democracy, denigrated the military and imposed hostile sanctions that African leaders have been unable to resist. Elections are held at regular intervals to meet the criteria for the system to be called a democracy, even if it does not satisfy the proponents of democratisation (Anyoko-Shaba, 2022). This is evident in the irony and parody of how a non-democratic institution (the military) oversees the democratisation that Africans continue to believe will bring about true democratisation (Anene, 1995). So a mere withdrawal of the military and a return to civilian rule – political control - is a simplistic view of democratisation in Africa.

The transition to civilian rule is often rushed and democracy is installed without careful consideration of the necessary conditions for good governance (Gutteridge, 1985). This practise cannot defuse military rule in Africa, as the recent coups in West Africa have shown. Due to authoritarian electoral behaviour, the absence of democratic norms and good governance, and the autocratic behaviour of African civilian leaders, democracy has not been able to curb the likelihood of military coups in Africa (Lindberg, 2008). The ease with which the military planned and executed coups in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s has facilitated the next step of military intervention (Charlton, 1983). This is because of the rampant cases that dominated the political climate in Africa during this period. One of the main characteristics of coups in Africa is the tendency of military dictators to transform themselves into civilian rulers (Assensoh, & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). These examples include Sudanese President Omar El Bashir and Muammar Ghaddafi of Libya, while others left the stage and returned as democratic leaders, such as Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria and Paul Kagame of Rwanda.

One of the theoretical explanations for military coups in Africa is the link to foreign powers and their influence foreign influence (Wikings, 1983), the Cold War, or

international conspiracies were identified as factors in the rampant coups in Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (Kalu, 2021). The ideological struggle between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War strongly influenced and inspired some coups in Africa. The Cold War led to liberation movements, regime changes and coups d'état in Africa on both sides of the competing ideological rivals, i.e. the Eastern and Western blocs. For example, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, said that the US and the CIA used unpatriotic Ghanaians to overthrow him because he was against exploitative capitalism (Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). However, the conspiracy of the world's superpowers is still present after the Cold War. For example, the West tacitly approved the coup to overthrow Morsi in Egypt in 2013, while the West not only supported the coup in Zimbabwe in 2017, but also ensured that Emerson Mnangagwa, one of the coup's backers, became president (Jawo, 2022). Similarly, France is believed to have supported the coup d'état in Chad in 2021, which is why the AU failed to take strong action against the military junta (Jawo, 2022).

Ideological predisposition is considered another theory that could explain military coups in Africa and is closely linked to the idea mentioned above. Some well-known African patriots, including Gamel Abdulnasser in Egypt, Patrice Lumumba in Zaire, Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Murtala Muhammed in Nigeria and many others, were allegedly overthrown because of their ideological differences with the West (Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001). Sometimes conflicting ideologies of the military and the rulers led to the overthrow of democratic regimes (Singh, 2014). Another explanation is that after independence, the military in Africa has become an important social institution, not only for territorial defence but also as a guardian of society (Kalu, 2021). As a result, the military sees itself as the messiah of African socio-economic and political crises by immediately intervening and taking control when they believed society was in danger of imploding (Huntington, 2000a).

The military have always cited these reasons as justification for their incessant coups in West Africa (Hoel, 2008). After political independence, the imbalanced civil-military relations meant that the military found itself in a position where it could influence the political processes to the point of invasion when necessary (Janowitz, 1984a)). The lack of a specified agenda for the military's withdrawal from politics is a problematic way of not defining a clear separation of civil-military relations. As a result, military influence on African politics remains intact (Al-Hamdi, 2014). However, Matei (2012) believes that improving civil-military relations can limit the military to its constitutional role in securing the state without encroaching into the political space. This is possible if the military is physically and ideologically separated from the political institutions, but politicians also have to play a role in ensuring good governance (Schiff, 2009).

Huntington (1975) postulates a contagion perspective as a theoretical basis for military coups in Africa by emphasising that "political organisations and procedures that are susceptible to apolitical influences from within society are also susceptible to influences from outside society. They can easily be infiltrated by agents, groups and ideas from other political systems. Thus, a coup in one political system can easily be

triggered" by similar groups in other, less developed political systems." (Huntington, 1975). This has been the historical trend in military coups in the West African sub-region since the 1960s. The recent coups in Chad and Niger, among other West African countries, have clearly demonstrated this. A situation that is already scaring other West African leaders such as Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, whose election is being questioned. Because a coup in one country can trigger another coup in a weak and fragile country the neighbouring political system instead of trying to build solid political institutions at home (Agyeman-Duah, 1990). The military finds an alibi in seizing power in this context, rather than stabilising the state through an improved security apparatus. However, the military always argue that the state will never stabilise if they have not taken over decision-making power.

Coup D'Etat in West Africa: A Democratic Failure or A Liberation Movement against Neo-Colonialism?

Huntington (2000b) took the early and premature view that the entire world democratised in the twentieth century in the third wave of democratisation. Huntington (2000b) argues that it is the democratisation phase in which African states, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe are building democracy and democratic institutions. Similarly, Clark (2007) emphasises that coups and military rule have steadily declined in Africa. This has almost convinced the world that democracy is here to stay. Unfortunately, the recent events of military coups the Republic of Chad, Guinea, Mali, the Republic of Niger and Gabon show that Africa is still a long way from democratisation in the 21st century. Onwumechili (1998) notes that there are five main reasons why military coups keep occurring in West Africa. These are the control and willingness to use arms, the declining professionalism of the military, the increasing perception of the military as a reasonable alternative to a political career, the lack of a lasting modern democratic culture and the deplorable support for military coups by some sections of the world community (Onwumechili, 1998).

The resurgence of coups in West Africa in the 21st century shows that the sub-region has not achieved any significant political development after more than half a century, apart from the ritual of holding regular elections to qualify for a nomenclature of democracy (Akinola et al. 2022). Between August 2020 and August 2023, six successful military coups were carried out after three failed attempts (Akinola et al. 2022). The military used a rigged parliamentary election to support its coup d'état in Mali in August 2020. Between March and April 2021, successive military coups took place in the Republic of Niger and Chad, the latter leading to the death of former President Idris Deby (Akinola et al. 2022). In May 2021, there was a counter-coup in Mali, followed by the coup in Guinea in September 2021. In October 2021, there was a counter-coup in Sudan, Chad's neighbouring country, against the 2019 coup that overthrew President Omar El Bashir (Akinola et al. 2022). In January 2022, there was another coup in Burkina Faso, followed by the most recent coup in the Republic of Niger on 26 July 2023 (Nsaibia, 2023).

In a seemingly unstoppable wave of resurgence of military rule in Africa, another coup was announced in Gabon on 30 August 2023, where President Ali Bongo was overthrown a few hours after the result of the country's presidential election was announced (Daily Trust Newspaper, 30th August, 2023). The removal of Ali Bongo in Gabon is another challenge to democratisation in Africa because the military claimed that the election had been massively rigged, amounting to a civilian coup d'état that is often ignored by democracy advocates. The internet and social media were shut down during the election, which was believed to be characterised by irregularities (Daily Trust Newspaper, 30th August, 2023) . Gabon is a good example of an undemocratic civilian regime where the Bongo family dynasty has held the country hostage for 55 years since political independence in 1960. Some indicators that justify the failure of democracy as a plausible explanation for the resurgence of the military are overwhelming. Most of the countries that have recently experienced coups are among the poorest in the world. The Republic of Niger is the seventh poorest country in the world, Chad the ninth poorest, Mali the eighteenth poorest, Burkina Faso the nineteenth poorest and Guinea the twenty-fifth poorest (Ventura, 2023). The five West African countries affected by coups from 2021 to 2023 are therefore fall within the 25 poorest countries in the world. The GDP of these countries, as shown in Figure 1, displays extreme poverty and impoverishment.

Global Poverty Ranking of West African States Affected by Military Coups between 2021 and 2023

S/No.	Country	Global Poverty Ranking	GDP-PPP($)
1.	Niger Republic	7	1,600
2.	Chad	9	1,787
3.	Mali	18	2,656
4.	Burkina Faso	19	2,726
5.	Guinea	25	3,218

Figure 1: Source: Ventura, 2023 (tabulated by the authors).

However, there is no connection between the natural resources of these countries and the harsh reality of their global poverty ranking. This again raises the question of the failure of democracy and the perceived neo-colonialist emasculation of France. Gold and uranium exports are Niger's main sources of income and foreign revenue, yet the country is one of the poorest in the world. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Niger earned $300 million from its uranium exports in 2019 alone, but of the uranium produced in Niger in 2021, which accounted for 311,110 tonnes or more than 5% of global production, was ceded to France as part of a repugnant neo-colonialist agreement. Similarly, despite producing about 6.5 tonnes of gold in 2019, worth about $260 million, Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 189th out of 189 (Orufa, 2023). Through proper, independent management of mineral

resources, proportional negotiations and planned development of mineral resources without the dictates of France, Niger should be able to overcome its poverty. However, the democratic leaders, who are usually France's puppets, are not nationalist in the sense of modernisers and have consequently failed to promote economic development and growth. This explains why the country's population joyfully celebrated the coup of July 2023.

Chad also has deposits of gold, silver, diamonds, quartz, bauxite, granite, tin, tungsten, uranium, limestone, sand, gravel, kaolin and salt that could have increased exports and revenues by billions of dollars if properly developed. Gold mining alone brought the country revenues of 137 million dollars in 2018 (International Trade Administration, 2020). According to the International Trade Administration (2022a), Mali's gold reserves are estimated at 800,000 metric tonnes, with a net export value of 63.4 metric tonnes worth $3.7 billion. Mali's mining sector comprises 2 million tonnes of iron ore, 5,000 tonnes of uranium, 20 million tonnes of manganese, 4 million tonnes of lithium and 10 million tonnes of limestone (International Trade Administration, 2022a). Despite these huge deposits of mineral resources, Mali still ranks 18th on the global poverty league table. Similarly, Burkina Faso is rich in minerals such as gold, zinc, copper, manganese, phosphate and limestone in significant quantities. These industries account for only 8% of government revenue, but 75% of exports in 2019, as France has been muzzled. It is estimated that the Burkinabe minerals sector will bring the country USD 4 billion in revenue each year if those responsible do not have to answer to French imperialism. Like other countries, Guinea is rich in mineral resources, including graphite, manganese, nickel and uranium, and has large quantities of high-quality iron ore. Guinea exported bauxite worth just over 4.3 billion dollars (85.7 million tonnes) and gold worth 5.8 billion dollars (3,281,600 ounces). Despite the wealth potential of these mineral resources (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2023).

Guinea, like most African countries, has not been able to overcome its underdevelopment, partly due to the poverty of its leadership. Guinea like its other counterparts is rich in mineral resources, which include graphite, manganese, nickel, and uranium, with a large amount of high-quality iron ore. Guinea exported just over $4.3 billion of bauxite (85.7 million tons) and $5.8 billion of gold (3,281,600 oz.) (International Trade Administration, 2022b). Compared to other African countries affected by the military coup, Gabon has higher development indicators and also produces oil. With a population of only 2.3 million, Gabon produces 184,911 barrels of crude oil every day. With 150 million tonnes of reserves and a production of 1.8 million tonnes since 2015, it is the fourth largest producer of high-quality manganese in the world (Arise, 2023). More than 2 billion tonnes of iron ore have been found in the nation, along with over 40 tonnes of gold and a variety of other minerals such as lead, zinc, copper, diamonds, and titanium (Arise, 2023). Unfortunately, Gabon is one of the poorest nations in the world due to the mismanagement of state resources by its leaders and continued French exploitation.

These Francophone nations are underdeveloped and extremely poor despite their vast mineral resources. Burkina Faso ranks 77th on the Corruption Perceptions Index with 42 points, Niger 123rd with 32 points, Mali 137th with 28 points, Guinea 147th with 25 points and Chad 167th with only 19 points, all affected by the recent coups in West Africa (Transparency International, 2022). According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (2022), these African countries are also among the most unstable and most vulnerable to terrorism. According to the Global Terrorism Index for 2023, Burkina Faso is the second most terrorised country in the world with a score of 8.564, Mali is the fourth most terrorised with a score of 8.412, Niger is the tenth most terrorised with a score of 7.616 and Chad is the nineteenth most terrorised with a score of 6.168. Three of the countries examined in this study are among the top 10 most terrorised countries in 2023, which illustrates the extent of political and social unrest in these countries. Burkina Faso ranks 18th, Niger 32nd, Mali 37th, Guinea 42nd and Chad 47th in terms of good governance indicators in Africa according to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation standards (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022). These are all indicators of poor governance and backwardness in nations with abundant natural resources. Compared to other African countries affected by the military coup, Gabon has higher development indicators; it also produces oil. With a population of only 2.3 million, Gabon produces 184,911 barrels of crude oil per day. Gabon is also the fourth largest producer of high-grade manganese in the world, with 150 million tonnes of reserves and production of 1.8 million tonnes since 2015 (Arise, 2022).

While the West continues to insist that democracy in Africa is inevitable, it cares less about the institutionalisation of democratic values and strong political institutions that will promote good governance and democratic dividends. The West does not care about civilian coups in the name of democracy and unconstitutional regime extensions through constitutional amendments as witnessed in Cameroon and Uganda, while it looked the other way during the coup d'état in Egypt in 2013, Zimbabwe in 2017, Sudan in 2019 and Chad in 2022. Furthermore, the global champions of democracy have failed to support good governance by imposing harmful neoliberal economic policies that continue to underdevelop Africa. Ake's (1996) observation that democracy was not meant to stabilise or develop Africa is still relevant. Perhaps the democratic crusaders feared that a true institutionalisation of democracy would liberate Africa's political economy with an increasingly enlightened citizenry that would participate in politics and hold leaders accountable. But this fear, if true, is backfiring.

This leads us to the link between the liberation of West African Francophone countries from the excesses of France and a close observation of the terrain of the coups will show that the Anglophone countries have not been affected so far. All coups originate in the francophone countries. However, the Anglophone countries could be affected if the trend continues. This is because while Francophone countries are perceived to be reacting to the domination of France, the citizens of Anglophone countries are suffering from indigenous colonisation by their democratic rulers who have failed to introduce good governance and democratic dividends with the tacit support

of the West. France refused to accept the fact that these former colonies were now independent, at least politically. While Britain completely ceded power to the colonised West African states, France continued direct colonisation in secret, a situation that was well worked out during the period of decolonisation. For example, all francophone countries in West Africa still use the French currency, the CFA. The mineral deposits in these countries are largely mined, marketed and exported to France by French companies. Ironically, countries that are rich in minerals are poor in wealth. France, which has few minerals, is rich in these francophone African resources.

France must face the fact that these coups are vehement messages against the ongoing injustice of trade imbalance and the continued colonisation of its former colonies. France must take care, rethink, remodel and adopt a new model of respectful political and economic relations before it loses its heritage and influence over its former colonies. This study theorises that other Francophone countries in West Africa will continue to rebel against France. This could spill over to Anglophone countries like Nigeria where life under the so-called democratic rulers is hell. For example, in Nigeria, with an estimated population of 220 million people in 2023, about 25 million people will be affected by acute hunger, more than 20 million children will not go to school and about 70% will live below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Successive democratic governments continue to implement harsh economic policies under the supervision of neoliberal financial institutions, making life unbearable for the majority of people. The recent removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria led to an increase in the price of fuel from N198 to N620 in a country that is a leading producer of fossil fuels, and thus drive the cost of everything into an inflation that has never been seen in this country (Abayomi, 2023). If this trend continues, such coups are inevitable, provided that neighbouring Francophone countries continue to rebel against their master, France. The fact that the coups are not protested but supported by the citizens of the countries concerned is seen as tacit approval of military rule as an alternative to democratic failure. This means that not only some parts of the elite are fed up with the democratic failure and the constant colonisation by France, but also most of the citizens of these countries. If the deposed democratically elected leaders do a good job, the citizens will protest, no matter how brutal the military might be.

Conclusion

The perspective and theory of the current coups differ from previous coups in Africa. Albert & Albert (2022) are of the opinion that the recent West African coups have not erased the past, this analysis offers an alternative perspective. Although all the elements, manifestations, dimensions and theoretical postulates are still relevant to explain contemporary coups in Africa, the West African coups show that, in addition to the earlier explanations, there is a theoretical reflection on the failure of democracy and a movement towards emancipation from the West, especially from the excesses of France in West Africa. Coups d'état are nothing new in West Africa as they have been part of Africa's political history since the 1950s when the continent began to experience military

coups and rule. The factors that led to the earlier coups are analysed to determine whether they continue to be the main causes of the recent coups in Africa. The main idea of the study, however, is that pseudo-democratisation and misrule affect democratic stability in Africa and coups are seen as an alternative to democratic failure. Most importantly, the study finds that the recent coups in West Africa have a different pattern to the events of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The French West African countries continue to suffer from the exploitation and economic dominance of France. Citizens and some military rulers are resentful of the pattern of post-colonial relations in francophone countries. French officials have fallen out of favour in states that have experienced recent coups, which have been interpreted as rebellion against the long-established French order in the countries. This simply means that France's continued control over its former colonies is coming to an end.

For France to regain its glory, it should rethink and reorganise its relations in a more reciprocal, respectful way than under the rigid control of the countries. The world's democracy advocates should heed the loud messages of the coups. Democratisation in Africa should be sincerely institutionalised and not just used to serve some foreign interests. A model that gives economic freedom to African states should work without forcing the impractical, prescriptive bitter pills of neoliberalism on Africans. If African citizens experience good governance and African civilian rulers have a free hand to initiate their own development policies, democracy will flourish and coups will be fought by the citizens from within and not come from outside. First of all, African countries need a technology transfer that enables the internal utilisation of natural resources. This will change the balance of trade from commodity production to industrialised nations. Leaders elected on the platform of democracy in Africa should be selfless, committed to genuine development and effectively utilise national resources for growth and development.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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