Revisiting Africa's Military Coup and the Restitution of the Fledging Continent

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Abstract
Military takeover in Africa has become a recurring incident, and a serious cause of concern to the generality of all. The reason for these takeovers has been attributed to the myriads of problems confronting the leadership style adopted by most of the African leaders in the name of democracy. Studies have shown that after the Cold War, a neoliberal democratic programme was inaugurated in Africa. It however promised to free the continent from authoritarianism and military seizure of power in favour of political pluralism and the rule of law. Coups in the continent were supposed to be less fashionable if not completely a thing of the past; and dictatorships, completely eradicated. However, the recent coups in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan have recounted the possibilities about coups "returning" and democracies "eroding" in Africa. Leaders in the West African region have often met under the auspices of ECOWAS to criminalise the act and dish out appropriate sanctions in order to make the coup leaders return power to civil rule. Some have been pressed to form transitional government, fight corruption from within, running to regional bodies etc.; these among others are believed to enshrine democratic principles. In conclusion, the paper posits that in order to gain true restitution, it's important for African nations to prioritize democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development. This includes fostering a culture of accountability, promoting transparency, and empowering civil society. By addressing these underlying issues, African nations can work towards creating a more inclusive and prosperous future for their citizens.
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Introduction

Military coups have been a significant part of Africa's political history, with various countries experiencing periods of instability and transitions of power through military intervention. These coups often occurred in the post-colonial era, during the mid-20th century onwards. One of the key factors contributing to the occurrence of military coups in Africa is the legacy of colonialism.

After gaining independence, many African nations struggled with the challenges of nation-building, political instability, and socio-economic disparities left behind by colonial powers. These factors created fertile ground for coups to take place. During the Cold War era, Africa became a battleground for ideological struggles between the United States and the Soviet Union. This geopolitical context further influenced the occurrence of military coups, as rival factions within African countries sought support from these superpowers to gain or maintain power. It's important to note that not all military coups in Africa were driven solely by power-hungry individuals. Some coups were motivated by a desire for political change, addressing corruption, or seeking social justice. However, regardless of the intentions behind these coups, they often led to political instability and hindered the development of democratic institutions, which ultimately indicates their failure (Barkey, 1990).

The recent military coups in Africa, including the July 2023 coup in Niger, have raised concerns about the region's stability and democracy. The coups have been condemned by various international organizations and countries, including the United States of America (USA), France, United Nations Organisations (UNO), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), calling for a return to the status quo. The then Nigeria's Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama expressed that the coups are a setback for democracy in West Africa and emphasized the need for the restitution of African art works from European countries, stating that it is key to changing the perception of Africa in Europe.

The issue of restitution is not limited to political matters but also extends to cultural heritage. For example, the transitional government of Gabon has initiated a legal battle to restitute an antique African mask, highlighting the ongoing efforts for the restitution of African cultural heritage. The coups and the call for restitution are intertwined with the broader challenges of governance, democracy, and geopolitical dynamics in the region. The restitution of African cultural heritage and the restitution of political stability are interconnected in shaping the future of the continent. Throughout the years, the continent has experienced its fair share of political upheaval and transitions brought about by these coups. They've played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of many African countries. In understanding the history and impact of military coups in Africa helps us to grasp the challenges that the continent faces in terms of governance and stability. It allows us to examine the consequences these coups have had on political structures and development of the African continent. Irrespective, the military is a professional body that has nothing to do with the political governance of the state as they ought to remain professional with their given mandate which is the defense of the territorial integrity of the state (Janowitz, 1960). In expatiating on this, we can also explore on the causes and impact of the coup on the continent, the efforts made to restore democratic governance and the initiatives taken at the local, regional and global levels to address military coups by way of forestalling it.

Military coup in Africa: The Zimbabwe and Mali Experience
Robert Mugabe had been in power since Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980. He was initially hailed as a hero for his role in the country's liberation struggle, but his rule

became increasingly authoritarian and marked by human rights abuses, corruption, and economic mismanagement. In 2017, Mugabe, who was 93 years old at the time, was widely expected to run for re-election in 2018. In the months leading up to the coup, tensions within ZANU-PF were high. Mugabe had fired his Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, in early November 2017, accusing him of disloyalty. Mnangagwa, who had been a close ally of Mugabe for decades, fled the country and vowed to return to Zimbabwe to challenge Mugabe's rule.

On November 14, 2017, the Zimbabwean military took control of the state broadcaster and other key institutions in what they called a "bloodless correction." The military denied that it was a coup, but it was clear that they were taking control of the government. Mugabe was placed under house arrest, and his wife, Grace Mugabe, who was seen as a potential successor, was also detained. After days of negotiations, Mugabe finally resigned on November 21, 2017, following pressure from the military, ZANU-PF, and the public. His resignation was met with celebrations in the streets of Zimbabwe, as many saw it as an opportunity for a new beginning for the country. (Burke, 2017).

Following Mugabe's resignation, Emmerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as President of Zimbabwe on November 24, 2017. Mnangagwa, who had been a key figure in the ruling party for decades, promised to usher in a new era of democracy and economic growth. However, his presidency has been marked by continued political repression and economic challenges. The coup in Zimbabwe in 2017 marked the end of Robert Mugabe's long and controversial rule. While many Zimbabweans celebrated his ousting, the country continues to face significant political and economic challenges under Mnangagwa's leadership.

The military took control of the government and placed President Robert Mugabe under house arrest. This coup marked the end of Mugabe's 37-year rule. While some Zimbabweans celebrated the coup as an opportunity for change, others were concerned about the military's involvement in politics. The coup resulted in a transition of power, but the long-term effects on governance and stability are still unfolding. Another case worth mentioning is the military coup in Mali in 2020. The coup was led by military officers who ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. The coup was met with mixed reactions, both nationally and internationally. While some Malians saw it as an opportunity to address corruption and governance issues, others were concerned about the impact on democratic processes.

In August 2020, Mali experienced a military coup led by Colonel Assimi Goïta and other members of the Malian Armed Forces. The coup came after months of nonviolent protests demanding the resignation of then-President Ibrahim Keïta. Mali faced a long history of political instability, military coups, and violence. The country had previously experienced a coup in 2012, which led to regional instability The 2020 coup was preceded by months of anti-government protests, fueled by the government's failure to resolve conflicts, respect democratic norms, and provide basic services. On August 18, 2020, mutinous soldiers took up arms at a key base in Kati, a garrison town near the capital, Bamako. Armored tanks and military vehicles were seen on the

streets, and the coup leaders initially pledged to organize elections in nine months. However, on August 24, the coup leaders amended their timeline, stating that they would review the foundations of the Malian state and continue coordinating for three years, during which time they would organize elections.

The coup was widely condemned by the international community, with the main regional bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspending Mali from its institution, shutting borders and halting financial flows with the country (Al Jazeera, 2021). The African Union and France, the former colonial power in Mali, also condemned the coup. The coup in Mali has had significant implications for the broader region, particularly in the Sahel, a region in West Africa facing interconnected challenges increasingly exploited by terrorist groups. Instability in Mali has led to destabilization in the Sahel, further exacerbating the existing security situation. In September 2020, the military government arrested the interim civilian president and prime minister, who had been appointed following the August 2020 coup.

In May 2021, the coup leaders released Keita, who returned to his home in the Sebenikoro district of Bamaks Talks between the coup leaders and ECOWAS mediators seeking a return to civilian rule were ongoing as of August 23, 2021, but no deal had been reached. In conclusion, the 2020 Malian coup d'état was a complex event rooted in the country's long history of political instability and military coups. The coup has had significant implications for Mali and the broader region, highlighting the need for regional and international support to promote democracy and address the security challenges faced by the country.

The coup led to a transitional government and efforts to restore stability and democratic governance in the country. Unlike the coup in Niger in July, or previous ones in Burkina Faso and Mali, Gabon is not facing the jihadi insurgencies and rising civilian fatalities that were used as an excuse by military leaders there to oust elected governments. Instead, the military officers of the Committee of Transition and Restoration of Institutions claimed they were responding to the country's severe institutional, political, economic, and social crisis. Ironically, Nguema is not only from the same Haut-Ogooué clan as the Bongo family but also had long been close to certain factions of the family, having served as the aide-de-camp to the late President Omar Bongo before eventually becoming the intelligence chief of the Republican Guard and then securing the commander position." (Danielle, 2023).

However (Mark, 2023) maintains that "Niger's coup challenges the conventional wisdom that reform-oriented, democratic governance are an antidote to coups and power grabs. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea were all experiencing structural divides such as manipulated elections, constitutional referendums to extend terms, and jihadist-driven attacks. But Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou was making strides in improving democracy. He has complied with the two-term limit in office, reduced jihadist violence, expanded girls' access to education, and seemed to listen to a range of voices". These case studies highlight the complex nature of military coups and their impact on governance and stability. Each situation is unique, and the outcomes

can vary widely. It's important to consider the specific context and dynamics of each country when analyzing the effects of military coups.

The impact of coups on national and regional security architecture

The impact of military coups on governance and stability in Africa is quite significant. When military coup occurs, it often disrupts the existing political order and can lead to a power vacuum. This usually has far-reaching consequences for governance and stability in the affected country. Firstly, military coups can undermine democratic processes and institutions. They often result in the suspension or dissolution of democratic institutions such as parliaments and constitutional frameworks. This leads to the absence of checks and balances, diminishing the ability of citizens to participate in decision-making processes and hold their leaders accountable.

Secondly, military coups can perpetuate a cycle of instability and political violence. When power changes hands through force rather than through peaceful and democratic means, it can create a sense of uncertainty and instability within the country. This can further lead to divisions, conflicts, and even civil wars, as different factions vie for control. With the amount of the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the region, it makes it even more fertile for instability and insecurity to triumph (Abang, Atelhe and Theophilus, 2023).

Coups and the Governance of the African Continent

The impact of coups on African governance and stability can be analyzed through the following points:

1. Democratic backsliding: Coups challenge the notion that democratic governance is an antidote to power grabs and coups. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea experienced structural divides such as manipulated elections, constitutional referendums to extend terms, and jihadist-driven attacks.

2. Niger's coup challenges conventional wisdom, suggesting that democratic governance may not be as effective in preventing coups as previously thought Regional and international implications: The recent spate of coups in Africa has raised concerns about the broader impact on regional stability and cooperation. For example, the African Union (AU) and its international partners should focus on addressing the root causes of instability to reverse the trend of coups

3. Legitimacy and constitutional orders: Coups often result from leaders elected in flawed elections or through non-democratic internal party selection mechanisms lacking widespread acceptance and legitimacy. Constitutional orders are also repeatedly manipulated by elites in the region, such as Gabon's President Bongo, who changed the constitution to his advantage in April 2023.

4. Coup deterrence: Despite the recent spate of coups, Africa has a broad normative framework against unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs). The three main pillars of this framework are the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the 2000 Lomé Declaration on Unconstitutional Change of Government, and the 2007 African Charter of Democracy, Elections, and Governance. However, the effectiveness of this framework

        in deterring coups remains uncertain.

5. Future prospects: The ultimate outcome of coups, such as the one in Gabon, is uncertain. Will they become gatekeeper coups that become repressive and violent, or caretaker coups that hand over power in elections? The motivations and trajectory of these coups vary, and the threat of contagion is a concern.

The impact of coups on African governance and stability is multifaceted, with potential implications for regional and international actors. Addressing the root causes of instability and strengthening democratic governance are crucial steps to prevent future coups and promote regional stability. Moreover, military coups can have negative impacts on social and economic development. The instability and uncertainty caused by coups often deter foreign investment, disrupt economic activities, and hinder development efforts. This can result in economic decline, increased poverty, and a decline in public services, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the population.

However, it's important to note that not all military interventions have the same outcomes. In some cases, military coups have led to positive changes; such as the removal of corrupt or oppressive regimes and this is a pointer to the fact that united, we can stand and conquer whatever that poses a threat to our nation building (Belkin, 2005). Nevertheless, the overall impact on governance and stability in Africa has been largely negative.

Restitution Efforts

The issue of coups and their impacts on democracy in Africa has been a subject of debate. West Africa has experienced several coups in recent years, renewing concerns about the return of coups and the decline of democracies in the region. To address this issue, international avenues for punishing coupists must be supported by global powers, and global intergovernmental bodies must check and resist coups. Additionally, African regional organizations must resist and promote democratization in Africa. In the context of coups, the restitution of political stability is essential for maintaining regional peace and security. The recent coups in Africa, such as those in Niger and Burkina Faso, have been met with condemnation from international actors, including the US, France, UN, ECOWAS, and the African Union, calling for a return to the status quo.

These coups have further complicated the restitution efforts for African cultural heritage, as the focus must be on addressing the political instability and promoting stability in the region and not international pressure and neocolonialism especially in francophone countries within Africa. After a military coup, efforts to restore governance and stability often involve a combination of domestic and international initiatives. These efforts aim to establish a legitimate and inclusive government, rebuild democratic institutions, and promote reconciliation and justice.

One common restitution effort is the establishment of a transitional government. This temporary government is tasked with organizing elections, drafting or amending constitutions, and implementing reforms to address the root causes of the coup. The goal is to create a more

inclusive and accountable political system, Transitional government is a method that can be used to address coups in Africa. In many instances, coups have had significant popular support from civilians who are fed up with civilian-led governments that have failed to address deepening inequality, corrupt administrations, and fragile ethnic and cultural accords. Weak democratic processes have often failed nations in Francophone West Africa and the Sahel, which in turn attract paternalistic superpowers that are keen to extend their influence, Transitional governments can help to address these issues by providing a temporary solution that allows for the establishment of a more stable and democratic government.

One example of a successful transitional government is in Burkina Faso, where a transitional government was established after a popular uprising in 2014 that ousted President Blaise Compaoré. The transitional government was able to organize free and fair elections, which resulted in the election of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in 2015. Another example is in Sudan, where a civilian-military transitional government was established after the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. The transitional government has been working towards establishing a democratic government through a power-sharing agreement between the military and civilian leaders.

However, transitional governments are not always successful. In Mali, a transitional government was established after a coup in 2020, but it was overthrown by another coup in 2021. In Guinea, a transitional government was established after a coup in 2021, but it was overthrown by another coup in 2022; just as was the case in Nigeria of the Ernest Shonekon led interim government of 1993 that was ousted by Gen. Sani Abacha. It is there important to point out that transitional government can be an effective method to address coups in Africa, but its success depends on various factors such as the willingness of the military to relinquish power, the establishment of a democratic government, and the support of the international community. it is essential that the whole principles of democracy is respected and implemented properly because "While flawed elections are undesirable, indefinite military rule is also clearly not a solution. Indeed, the degree of control and surveillance that is needed for effective military engagement, does not lend itself to a culture of democratic governance. Several erstwhile military leaders that have re-branded themselves as civilian presidents — such as Nguesso, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, and Rwanda's Paul Kagame — have ruled their countries for decades. Likewise, the military ouster of Mugabe failed to lead to a new dispensation in Zimbabwe." (Danielle 2023).

Another crucial aspect is the promotion of reconciliation and justice. This involves addressing human rights abuses and holding those responsible accountable. Truth and reconciliation commissions are often established to investigate past atrocities, provide a platform for victims to share their experiences, and promote healing and national unity.
International organizations and neighboring countries also play a significant role in supporting restitution efforts. They may provide financial assistance, technical expertise, and diplomatic support to help stabilize the country and facilitate the transition to democratic governance. These

efforts often include promoting dialogue among different political factions and facilitating negotiations to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Also, incorrupt and competent government institutions are crucial for preventing coups and promoting political stability. Corruption is a significant problem in many African countries, and it has been linked to the rise of coups and the decline of democracies in the region. To address this issue, there is a need for transitional justice mechanisms that can investigate allegations of grand corruption, fraud, and state capture. Additionally, there is a need for international support for African-based state and non-state actors in securing permanent unconditional returns to the continent of Africa. The fight against corruption is a global effort, and it requires the development of effective institutions and the rule of law in developing countries to ensure fair, predictable, and transparent systems. The elimination of corruption and the promotion of good governance are essential for preventing coups and promoting political stability in Africa. The military can however join hands with civil government in their nation building effort (Koonings and Kruijt, 2002).

Conclusion

The recent military coup in Africa has raised concerns about the stability and future of the continent. It is a complex issue that requires careful analysis. Coup d'états have historically had mixed outcomes, with some leading to positive change and others causing further instability. In order to achieve true restitution, it's important for African nations to prioritize democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development. This includes fostering a culture of accountability, promoting transparency, and empowering civil society.

Efforts should also be made to address the root causes of political instability, such as corruption, economic inequality, and social unrest. By addressing these underlying issues, African nations can work towards creating a more inclusive and prosperous future for their citizens. It's crucial for the international community to support African countries in their journey towards restitution. This can be done through diplomatic engagement, economic assistance, and capacity building initiatives. Collaboration between African nations and international organizations is essential for sustainable development and peace building efforts. Finally, the military coup in Africa highlights the challenges and complexities faced by the continent. Achieving restitution requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development. With concerted efforts from both African nations and the international community, a brighter future for Africa can be realized.

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