

THE CULTURE OF INCREASING COUPS D'ÉTAT IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Coups d'état have been prevalent in different countries globally. However, Africa has been the most affected, leading to significant consequences for its socio-economic growth and democratic governance. In the last few years, the frequency of coups d'état has increased, thus compromising the progress of making the continent more democratic and peaceful. This paper set out to investigate the culture of increasing coups d'état in Africa and its implications on democratic institutions. Underpinned by the Modernization theory, the study adopted a qualitative method. The unit of analysis was based on interviews and secondary sources. The study explores the various types of coups d'état and the reasons for the coups d'état in Africa. Results proved that leaders who have stayed in power for too long attempt unconstitutional changes to the constitutions which later result in the unconstitutional ousting of them. The study also found out that the Militarisation of Politics and entrenchment of guns have accounted for increasing coup d'état in Africa of recent. The study therefore concludes that Africa needs to have stronger institutions than stronger men for their democratic process to be stronger and recommends that military juntas should call for democratic elections as fast as possible to enable a peaceful transition

Keywords: *Coup d'état, Democratic Institutions, Culture, Africa.*

Introduction

A coup d'état is a form of political instability. Specifically, a coup attempt can be defined as an “illegal and overt attempt by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive” (Powell & Thyne, 2011 as cited in Simcic, 2013). A successful coup is one in which the ruling power transfers to a different executive for at least a notable period, or the overthrow of a government. This is a major issue that continues to affect many African countries today. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the number of coups d'état increased year by year. Coups d'état harm democracy and development and are detrimental to socio-economic growth and foreign investment. The

African continent has long been known for its instability, economic and political challenges, and social upheavals, of which coups d'état have been a prominent feature. In the recent past, there have been gloomy indications that coups d'état is increasingly re-emerging norms of governance throughout Africa. African States have experienced over 200 military takeovers between the 1960s and 2023. The sudden overthrow of a democratically elected government in Africa by military junta insurgents is symptomatic of the reemerging pattern of this coup over the years. According to Habiba & Mthuli (2012), Every coup d'état has different origins, In Mali, it is principally reflected in soldiers' grievances over the government's weak handling of the Tuareg-led rebellion in the northern part of the country. They argued "that many other African countries have also succumbed to military forces over the past five years, including Mauritania (August 2008), Guinea (December 2008), Guinea-Bissau (December 2008 and April 2012), and Niger (February 2010 and 2023). This poses them to ask several questions: What makes Africa such a volatile region". To Tametong & Tsafack (2022) the military coup against President Kaboré is due to a set of factors that are both endogenous and exogenous. On the endogenous level, the security crisis, the socio-political upheaval, and the gradual breakdown of the pact of trust between the president and his army appear to be the most immanent causes. According to Olayinka Ajala (2023), there is no doubt that the rise in insecurity and declining economic prospects contributed to fragility in the country. Despite the increase in foreign forces, especially from the US and France, and military bases in Niger, the leadership has been unable to stop insurgent attacks. There are several insurgent groups, such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates, as well as Boko Haram operating in the country. Several other African countries have had their coup. In July 2013 the Egyptian Military led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, ousted President Mohamed Morsi who came to power through democratic elections. In 2017, the Zimbabwean military placed President Robert Mugabe under house arrest, leading to his resignation

after nearly four decades in power. The military intervention was seen as a de facto coup. In 2019 following months of protest in Sudan against President Omar Al-Bashir's regime, the Sudanese military staged a coup and removed him from power. According to Tazoacha (2022), the military coup d'états are not new in Africa. Since independence, many African nations have been experiencing military takeovers. However, the beginning of the century saw a reduction in the trend. Just within the year 2021, Africa has had seven successful military coups d'état.

Despite the trend, the military takeovers signal a threat to democratic consolidation of the continent's nascent democracies." The findings of this paper will examine the fundamental drivers behind the resurgence of these military takeovers and the attendant implications for democratic institutions in affected countries Tazoacha (2022).

The study adopted mostly qualitative methods of sourcing data. Data was sourced from organizational policy papers, books, newspapers, publications from international media organs, and the constitutions of some African countries. Besides, the study also made use of interviews. Some ten scholars of Political Science across Africa were randomly selected to have their views on the implications of increasing coup d'état in Africa and its implications on democratic institutions.

Theoretical framework

This paper is carried out within the ambit of the modernization theory. Modernization theory argues that socio-economic modernization and rapid societal changes can generate social tensions that challenge the institutions of democracy. When economic growth and development are unevenly distributed, this can create political instability, which may lead to coups d'état. In other words, coups d'état can be seen as a consequence of incomplete modernization or modernization processes being interrupted. Takyiwa Manuh (2006) in her article "Democracy and Political Crisis in Africa: The Case of Ghana" examines how political crises

occur when social tensions rise due to uneven socio-economic development, resulting in popular unrest that can lead to coups d'état. She argues that such crises can erode democratic institutions and create uncertainty within a democratic institution Walt Whitman Rostow: Rostow's book "The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto" (1960) is often cited as one of the foundational works of modernization theory. In the book, Rostow developed a model that outlines how developing countries can move from traditional societies to modern, industrialized ones. He argued that modernization is a universal process and can be achieved through a series of stages, including traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, and high mass consumption. On his part, Lipset's research focused on the relationship between economic development and democracy. In his book "Economic Development and Democracy" (1959), Lipset argued that the process of modernization leads to the democratization of societies. He posited that as societies become more affluent and better educated, they become more likely to demand political freedoms and to hold their governments accountable. David Apter (1965) argues that modernization requires a fundamental transformation of traditional societies. He posited that political and social modernization involves changes in values, beliefs, and customs, as well as structural changes in society's political and economic institutions. Apter argued that successful modernization requires a strong and effective state that can maintain the rule of law, promote economic growth, and prevent violent unrest.

Conceptual Clarifications

The concepts discussed here include coups d'état, the types of coups, and democratic Institutions. Marinov & Goemans (2013) define the coup d'état as the seizure of effective executive authority through the threat or use of force. The actors perpetrating the coup may include the military, the police, a domestic armed group, a member of the governing elite, or some other set of domestic actors. The use of force may be overt, such as

fighting in the capital, or may come in the form of tacit support by the military and security apparatus of the power grab.

Samuel P. Huntington (1964) has classified military coups into four categories:

Guardian Coup: A new military regime leaves the prevailing economic system intact, brings about minor change, and installs an interim administration to provide stability before handing power back to civilians.

Veto Coup: This occurs when the military supplants a civilian government that is committed to radical social and economic reforms that will be to the detriment of the wealthier classes in society.

Anticipatory Coup: This occurs when the military intervenes to pre-empt power passing to a revolutionary or radical government. The 1991 coup in Algeria when the military prevented the Islamic Salvation Front from taking over after winning the general elections in the country is often cited (Smith 2002). The annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election in Nigeria also illustrates this form of intervention.

Reforming Coup: This is when the military itself carries out a fundamental restructuring of the state and society and introduces a new ideological foundation. The Gamel Nasser's coup of 1952 in Egypt was a case in point. Whatever the forms of intervention carried out by the military, what is critical when a coup occurs is that the fundamental civil-military divide is blurred. The government no longer emerges through the ballot but by bullet and coercion replaces consensus as a basis of administration. Where the cases of Burkina Faso and Mali are glaring as the military juntas are trying to reform the governance process. In summary, A military coup is a sudden and illegal seizure of power by a group of individuals, usually members of the military or security forces. It involves the overthrow of an existing government, the dissolution of the

constitutional order, and the installation of a new ruling authority usually led by military officers (N'Daw & Adebayo, 2018).

According to Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Coup d'état is a legal concept, referring to the overthrow of a political regime by the military or other armed forces of the state. They argued that coups d'état is an important aspect of African political history and have played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of the continent. Bratton and van de Walle argue that coups d'états are the result of the breakdown of state institutions and the collapse of state authority. They occur in situations of political crisis and instability where the legitimacy of government is in doubt and where there is a weak or vacillating political center. Coups have hurt democracy in Africa as they tend to replace democratic institutions with military rule and authoritarian regimes. Britton & van de Wallae (1997) argue that coups have contributed to the erosion of democratic norms and practices and have hindered the consolidation of democratic governance in Africa. Military coups are often seen as a threat to democracy because they involve force to overthrow a democratically elected government.

Concept of Democratic Institution

Kaldor and Vejvoda (2002, 1–24), see “democracy as a set of formal institutions, a way of redistributing power and a way of life.” On his part, Mimiko (2007, 303–316) argues that democracy is desirable because it promotes development; facilitates governance, especially of plural societies; and is consistent with human rights and fundamental freedom of citizens. The above conceptualization of democracy implies that any society that deprives its citizens of actively participating in the democratic process of electing their political leaders in a free and fair manner may find it difficult to get the support of its citizens when it comes to the point of implementing its policies and programmes necessary for development to take place in that particular society

Democratic institutions such as Elections bodies, Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, and the Police are put in place by the Constitution of any country to act as mechanisms for the smooth conduct and enthronement of political leaders through periodic elections. However, these institutions could not perform well due to the prevailing circumstances of the environment in which they are situated weakened moral thresholds, and poor ethical values (Abubakar 2011, 1–2). Ingraham (2005) sees capacity as the “ability to marshal and use available resources people, money, talent, and time— in the best possible way.” She argues that capacity is not just about structure and system alone; but it involves creative, committed, and talented people who make the system work. Thus, military coups undermine democratic institutions and processes and they create a culture of fear and insecurity in society

Justification of Military coups in Africa

It is difficult to generalize the reasons or theories behind military coups in Africa because the motives for coups differ from one country to another. Yet we can identify some factors that can singly, or in combination push the military to seize power. They include:

The inability of Civilian Government to Govern Effectively: Once a civilian government fails to maintain law and order, and is unable to cope with the challenges of governance, that government is inviting a military coup. This was the case in Nigeria in the first Republic when the government could not maintain essential services and had to rely on the military to restore order after it practically broke down in the old Western region (Luckham 1991:17). This was also true of Sudan in 1958, Congo in 1965, and Malagasy Republic in 1972 (Jemibewon 1978:4). Jemibewon (1978) disclosed that Colonel Afrifa, a prime mover of 24th February 1966 coup hinted that the coup option would not have been considered if there was any other to remove Nkrumah from power. To MO, 2022 Mali has also seen declines in its rule of law, most notably in the executive’s compliance

with the rule of law. In no other country on the continent has this declined more than in Mali. Frustration over flawed legislative elections in 2020 when results for 31 legislative seats were overturned in favour of President Keïta, growing insecurity through increasing violent extremism and accusations of corruption led to popular protests against President Keïta and are believed to be the main triggers for the coup in August 2020. In the same light, the rule of law situation in Guinea was already on a negative trajectory before President Condé amended the constitution in 2020 which allowed him to run for two more terms. The grievances behind the flawed 2020 presidential elections and President Condé's third mandate were among the main motivations behind the 2021 coup in Guinea.

Corruption among Political Leaders: This is either by diverting public funds to party coffers or for the personal enrichment of officeholders, to the detriment of public welfare. In January 1966, Nzeogwu claimed his coup was aimed at removing "ten percenters" from power. Abacha leveled similar charges against Nigerian politicians in his coup broadcast of December 1983. The bad social and economic engagement was the reason accounted for the Military junta in Niger for their takeover.

Absence of Peaceful Means of Changing Governments: During the 1960s, most civilian governments in Africa turned their countries into authoritarian one-party states and where there was more than one party, the ruling party rigged elections to remain in power. Once all opportunities for coming into power through peaceful means have been blocked, the opposition encourages and openly calls on the military to intervene. During the Second Republic in Nigeria, the opposition popularized the axiom "Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable".

Personal and Corporate Interest of the Military: Coups in Africa have been attributed to the personal ambition of individual army officers, and at

times, the corporate interest of the army as a whole. It is generally believed that the army does not move against a civilian government except its interest has been threatened. For example, when President Ahomadegbe of Benin Republic humiliated his chief of Army staff, a coup was staged in the next stage to remove him from power. In Nigeria, Ben Gbulie (1981:13) observed that Zak Maimalari's meteoric rise from the rank of Captain to Brigadier in three years was a major cause of disaffection within the armed forces, which remotely spurred aggrieved officers to stage the 1966 January 15 coup to remedy what they considered "unmerited promotion... "as scandalous as concentrating all the most important of Nigeria's military installations and its best institutions in the North."

Fragile and Weak Political Institutions: African states have yet to develop strong political institutions to manage and resolve political crises. This is unlike in advanced countries, where institutions have been tested, are matured, and have developed self-regulating mechanisms to cope with political tensions. But in Africa where the military is the only institution sufficiently organized, in addition to its monopoly of instrument of violence, there is an added incentive for it to come in when there is conflict as a strategically placed arbiter. This view which was largely attributed to Huntington was corroborated by S.F. Finer (1962:21) thus: "Where public attachment to civilian institutions is weak or non-existent military intervention in politics will find wide scope in manner and substance."

Psychological/Contagious Effect: This is the tendency of military officers to emulate their colleagues who have successfully staged coups in neighboring countries. What is otherwise called the "bush fire effect" or what Ali Mazrui once called pan "African empathy" was carefully chronicled by Jemibewon (1979). The army mutinies in East Africa started in Zanzibar on 12 January 1964 and later spread to Tanganyika

on 20 January, to Uganda on 23rd Jan., and to Kenya on 26 Jan 1964. Also, the first four coups in Francophone countries began in Zaire on 20th Nov. 1965, Benin Republic on 22 December 1965, the Central African Republic on 1st January 1966, and Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso on 3rd Jan. 1966. In Anglophone West Africa, Nigerian and Ghanaian coups were staged on 15th January and 24th February 1966 respectively. The case of Burkina Faso has been glaring given that they have had many coups and more young soldiers try to emulate the examples of their seniors.

International Conspiracy: This theory attributes military coups to foreign agents like the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and powerful multinational corporations. A de-classified CIA report later confirmed the widespread rumour that the intelligence body was involved in the coup against Kwame Nkrumah (Odetola 1978: 32:33). In the final analysis, explaining military interventions in Africa is not markedly different from the analysis of military intervention in other societies, especially Latin American countries. Broadly, we can group these factors into two: environmental and organizational approaches. Much of our discussion has emphasized factors and issues specific to Africa, which suggests that the environmental explanations are more relevant to Africa. It is alleged that the coup d'état in Chad and that of Gabon was orchestrated by France.

Discussion on implications on Democratic Institution

Findings from this study reveal that the increasing coups that are occurring in Africa recently have certain implications for African democratic institutions. Jackson and Rosberg (1982) argued that coups d'états hinder the consolidation of democratic norms and practices as they often result in the erosion of democratic institutions and the perpetuation of repressive and abusive regimes. To them, coups often result in decades of authoritarian rule and political instability. Also, The role of external actors, including France, The United Kingdom, and the

United States in supporting and legitimizing coups in Africa. According to Williams (2013), the United States and France have a long history of supporting military coups in Africa, often to advance their strategic and economic interests. These external actors in supporting and legitimizing coups d'états are thus important factors to consider in understanding the impact of coups on African democracy and stability. According to Garang (2020), the fall of Colonel al-Gaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011 spilled over conflicts Southward to Sub-Saharan African countries and enhanced the armament of Islamists, Tuareg rebels and Boko Haram in the Sahel and Western African regions respectively. This has exacerbated militarisation in the regions and made the regions susceptible to insurgencies and coups. On the other hand, the history of militarisation of politics in countries like Sudan, Chad, South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso et cetera has established a dominant military aristocrat whom Majak D'Agoot calls the "gun class." The re-emergence of coups in the African continent through the spate of the gun class in the continental coup belt is a precautionary signal to the susceptible states in the region and weakening democratic institutions (Garang, 2020). Garang (2020) went further to argue that such undemocratic constitutional changes did not lead to an ultimate change of regimes but upset the social tranquillity with the deadliest confrontation between the regimes and the civil uprisings. The public institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and independent electoral commission are gradually attenuated and effectively designed to serve the executive by a ruling dominant military class that ascends to power through a coup. This, in effect, does constrain the element of the rule of law in any democratic dispensation. On its part, the security sector and the electoral commission is deliberately deliberately weakened and highly bloated with low-ranking non-commissioned officers whose allegiances to their chiefs are indubitable in the susceptible states. The dominant military métier in these states coerces the population despite resistance to persevere with

the new term limits as they appear in the amended constitutions. D'Agoot once again argues that "While African warlords may seek to legitimise their rule through the exercise of illiberal democracy and the holding of elections, they generally fail to secure the consent of the governed." The constitutions are changed to constitutionalize tyranny while disparaging the mandate of the governed (Garang,2020).

According to Adeleke & Munjah who held the same views Burkina Faso experienced a coup in 2015, which led to the suspension of the country's democratic transition. The military seized power, dissolved the transitional government, and stifled civil society and media freedoms. Despite the subsequent election of a civilian government, the country's democratic institutions continue to be fragile and have struggled to recover from the coup. They went further to argue that Mali has experienced two coups in the space of a year, the first in August 2020 and the second in May 2021. The military seized power, dissolved the transitional government, and suspended democracy, undermining the country's fragile democratic institutions.

Coups d'états have also led to conflict and instability, limiting economic development and contributing to humanitarian crises. Coups d'états can affect the credibility of elections and democratic institutions, as they tend to create political instability, making it difficult to hold fair and free elections. In many instances, military governments may suspend or delay elections, leading to an erosion of democratic institutions and practices.

Gabon is one of the countries in the Central African Sub-region where there have historically been several unsuccessful coup attempts. These attempts have recently resulted in the ousting of President Ali Bongo after, the electoral commission declared him the winner for the third time after being in Power for 14 years. This has undermined democracy and weakened democratic institutions in Gabon. This further shows that African institutions are weak. Coups d'états can trigger the use of force

and violence, leading to extensive human rights abuses and humanitarian crises. Wars cause the displacement of populations, impact long-term economic development prospects, and significantly undermine human security.

Similarly, Chad experienced a coup in April 2021 following the death of President Idriss Deby, which suspended democratic institutions and sparked political tension and social unrest. The coup has resulted in instability, insecurity, and humanitarian crises in the country. This is an indication that the structures put in place are weak to be able to counter the coup staged. The respondents interviewed in this study believed that Niger has experienced four coups since gaining independence in 1960. The most recent saw President Mohamed Bazoum who was democratically elected in 2021 ousted by the military junta, The coup has undermined the decision of the constitutional court that declared Bazoum a winner and eventually inaugurated him as president of the Niger. The coup affected the democratic consolidation process in Niger. Coups d'états undermine the rule of law, as they involve violating the constitutional order and replacing it with a military or authoritarian regime. This weakens legal institutions and reduces the likelihood of fair and impartial administration of justice. The result is often a disregard for human rights, violations of civil liberties, and the suppression of political dissent.

Another respondent thought that coup d'états pose a significant threat to democratic institutions in Africa. It undermines the principles of democracy and the rule of law and often leads to the erosion of human rights and civil liberties. Coup d'états typically result in the suspension of constitutional rights, the dissolution of elected institutions, and the concentration of power in the hands of military or autocratic leaders

According to the respondents, African democracy is different from other democracies. African countries are trying to practice liberal democracy

but they do not have structures to take care of liberal democracy. The institutions that are supposed to uphold the democratic process, parliament, the legislative and the judiciary institutions as well as the rule of law, the preservation of power, and accountability that are found in a liberal democracy are not possible in the type of democracy that we have in Africa, because of that, there will be the tendency of coup d'etat. He further argued that if one kills Biden, he can be replaced by the Vice president. The institutions are strong and they will uphold the system. Same with France, Britain, and other countries, it is not the same situation in Africa. To the respondent, we have weak institutions that have been weakened by the powerful men who are in power. Once the institutions are weakened, those who are in power are not protected by those same institutions again

In the case of Gabon according to Molua (2023), Bongo's father, who was president for 40 years died and was succeeded by the son, an approach that distorted the constitutional succession. As a result, the structure of the state was weakened by one family, that could not protect Bongo, the son, himself today. If the institutions were strong, it means that those institutions would have carried out a proper free, and fair election and Jean Ping would have likely been president. From the result of the last election, Bongo lost. Because the institutions were under his control, he was able to cling to power using those institutions that he weakened. So, it does not mean that the military junta cannot practice democracy. Yes. Except democracy is defined only in the limited sense of liberal democracy where they are looking only at democratic institutions like elections, human rights, and so on. But if you look at it from the collective will of the people to vote, if you saw the euphoria that took place in Burkina Faso, the people's power, where people come to the rule like that, have they ever turned out to vote like that? No.

According to Munjah (2023), There have been regular elections and an increasing number of contestations of the election results. Contesting

elections by the opposition has increased with the argument that elections were marred by fraud. When election results are contested, it means that democracy is not taking root. Democracy is supposed to take its root when the opposition and the people who have won embrace the process and agree that this person has won. That is why they usually say that the person who has lost should call the person who has won the election to congratulate him. When you call, it means you have accepted that this person has defeated you on the field. But when you have contestation in the court, it means that the process was not fair. So, by and large, these are the things that have been happening in what we call the democracies. For the fact that the people have not risen is just that the people are afraid of the political power. And the political power is with the military.

Conclusion

The implications of increasing coups d'états on democratic institutions are far-reaching, affecting not only institutional practices but also the social and economic well-being of citizens. This is the suggestion by the modernization theory as used in this study that economic development and modernization lead to an increased democracy as well as the occurrence of coups d'états and their implications to democracy. The theory emphasizes that economic development is a driving force for political instability and democracy, however often fails to address the issue of economic inequality that arises during the modernization process. Addressing the root causes of coups d'états and promoting democratic institutions' strengthening and consolidation is crucial to preventing future coups and building stable, peaceful, and prosperous African societies. Better policies must prioritize human rights, accountability, and socio-economic development to reduce inequality and prevent the conditions that can lead to coups d'états. African countries must take responsibility to reduce the incidence of coups d'état to ensure that the continent can build on the gains of peacebuilding, economic

growth, and social development so far achieved. There is a need for African leaders to be more accountable to their citizens and to foster economic growth and regional integration to discourage coups d'états. Simultaneously, significant efforts are needed at the continental and global levels to curb the spate of coups d'état in Africa and support democratic governance and institutions. It is only through these initiatives that Africa can develop to its full potential and avoid the human costs and economic consequences of coups d'états. The constitutional coups through unconstitutional changes of constitutions to accommodate term and age limits, failure to adopt human security, militarisation of politics, and entrenchment of the gun class have contributed to the rise of coups and the decline of democracy.

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Interviews

Prof. Adeleke Peter (2024) Interviewed on the 9/02/2024 at 9: pm

Dr. Walla Mua (2024) Interviewed on the 07/02/2024 at 10:30

Ugochuku B. Onuzulike (2024) on the 08/02/2024 at 7 pm

Dr. Mengnjo Thomas (2024) Interviewed on the 9/02/2024 at 4 pm

Dr. Munjah Vitalis (2023) interviewed on 14/9/2023 at 17:20:46

Dr. Molua Patrick (2023) Interviewed on 14/09/2023 at 12:06:28

Bravo Allend (MSc) (2023) Interviewed on the 16/09/2023 at 10:11:29

Chick Edmond (MSc) (2023) Interviewed on the 18/09/2023 at 1:11:20

Dr. Ameli Valentine (2023) Interviewed on the 15/09/2023 at 8:10

Dr. Ude Valentine (2023) Interviewed on the 14/09/2023 10:12:45

Ndum Charlotte (2023) Interviewed on the 18/09/2023 7:14:30

Echam Roland Msc (2023) Interviewed on 17/09/2023 at 11:2:38

Forka Laurentine PhD researcher (2023) Interviewed on 17/9/2023 at 3:4:30

Abbo Williams PhD Researcher (2023) Interviewed on 16/09/2023 at 8:2:45