

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-IV (July – August) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



## The Aftermath of Coups in the 21st Century Africa and its implications for Democracy and Effective Governance.

**Dr. Pippie Hugues**

Policy Analyst in Governance and Democracy at Nkafu Policy Institute

| **Received:** 10.06.2024 | **Accepted:** 16.06.2024 | **Published:** 04.07.2024

**\*Corresponding author:** Dr. Pippie Hugues

Policy Analyst in Governance and Democracy at Nkafu Policy Institute

### Abstract

*The manner in which coups have become very rampant within the African continent is a call for concern. Once there is a coup, democracy is being tampered with. It is often incumbent on juntas to lead the nation back towards democracy and good governance. Most coups come as a result of poor governance, non-respect of constitutional provision, political satiety and to an extend violation of human rights. Democracy and good governance are indicators of a stable economy. The events across the continent about juntas is them not wanting to release power after coups. They try as much as possible to remain in power. Even when elections are organized, they participate in the elections and are eventually declared winners, thereby transforming their reign to civilian reign. Some even extend the transition period just to keep themselves in power. Many military juntas come to power with the intention of guiding their nations towards democratic rule, only to become the very embodiment of the evil they initially fought against. This observation leads one to suspect that most of these juntas harbor hidden agendas prior to staging their coups. It is for this reason that we shall now explore the post-coup era's impact on democracy and good governance in Africa.*

**Keywords:** Coups, Democracy, Governance, Central Africa

### Introduction

The Egyptian army's overthrow of King Farouk in 1952 signaled the commencement of military involvement in Africa's political landscape. Subsequently, military interventions have emerged as a recurring element in the pursuit of political power, resulting in 100 successful coups across 35 countries<sup>1</sup>. Hence, although there is

mounting apprehension regarding the recent surge in coup attempts, it is important to acknowledge that this phenomenon is not novel.

The occurrence of coups in Africa in recent decades has been directly linked to the dynamics of politics and the responses of citizens. This connection arises from the significant role politics plays in the emergence and perpetuation of various factors that

<sup>1</sup> Abdrashid, S. (2016), Voter Turnout Trends around the World'. Sweden: International IDEA.

contribute to grievances among citizens. This trend experienced a decline during the mid-90s. However, in the past decade, the number of coups in Africa has doubled, eliciting mixed reactions from individuals as well as sub-regional, regional, and international organizations. The concerning aspect of these coups lies not in their frequency but in the aftermath. Many military juntas come to power with the intention of guiding their nations towards democratic rule, only to become the very embodiment of the evil they initially fought against<sup>2</sup>. This observation leads one to suspect that most of these juntas harbor hidden agendas prior to staging their coups. It is for this reason that we shall now explore the post-coup era's impact on democracy and good governance in Africa.

## Evolution of Coups in Africa

During the period following independence, the political climate gave rise to a series of coups between the 1960s and 1970s. This era witnessed the overthrow of liberation leaders who held conflicting political visions and ideologies with the major colonial powers. Additionally, these leaders failed to fulfill the economic and developmental aspirations of their citizens<sup>3</sup>. The actions of senior military officers were influenced by a combination of factors, including the intense rivalry between superpowers during the Cold War and the rise of one-party states and dictatorships.

These coups were often violent and resulted in the deaths of numerous African leaders, as well as extrajudicial killings and widespread human rights abuses, particularly in West Africa<sup>4</sup>. While some coups were commended for putting an end to one-party rule and lifelong presidencies, the initial wave of coups ultimately led to a significant reconfiguration of Africa's political landscape after independence.

Of recent, Africa has witnessed a surge in coups, occurring in countries such as Sudan, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon. These recent coups exhibit distinct characteristics compared to those of previous decades. Notably, there has been a notable change in the driving force behind these coups. Some of them have been prompted by concerns regarding the erosion of democratic values, including the manipulation of national constitutions to extend term limits, compromised electoral processes, deteriorating security conditions, and a resurgence of anti-colonial sentiment<sup>5</sup>. The coup-makers in Niger, for example, claim that their actions were driven by the ongoing decline in security and poor management of social and economic affairs. In Guinea, the junta criticized Alpha Conde for his mismanagement, corruption, and inadequate governance. Although certain coups, such as those in Guinea and Gabon, have been portrayed as efforts to reinstate democracy, the underlying factors and consequences are multifaceted and diverse.

<sup>2</sup> Ezimiri, G, Nnamani, K. C. and Nnaegbo, O. (2016), Democracy at the Cross Roads: EthnoRegional Power Contestations and Democratization in Diversified Nigeria, 1960-2015.

South East Journal of Political Science Review Vol 2 No 1.

<sup>3</sup> Gray, M. and M, Caul (2000), Voter Turnout in Advanced Democracies. 1950-1997.

Comparative Political Science Review (33) 2.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.stlpr.org/show/st-louis-on-the-air/2024-04-05/eligible-voters-are-done-with-politics-why-voter-apathy-threatens-democracy>

<sup>5</sup> Adejumbi, S. (2000). Elections in Africa: A Fading Shadow of Democracy? *International Political Science Review*, 21(1): pp.59-73

## Intentions of Coup Makers

The nine military coups in Africa since 2020 exhibit a range of causes and objectives, highlighting their lack of homogeneity. Despite this diversity, a common thread among the coup leaders is their strong desire to cling onto power for an extended period. The surge in coups can be attributed to the inconsistent responses at regional, continental, and international levels, with some coups being acknowledged while others are not<sup>6</sup>.

The support of the populace, or at least the perception of it, plays a crucial role in the success of this power retention strategy. Certain coups garner public backing by addressing issues such as blocked political successions, as seen in Gabon and Guinea, where disillusioned voters embraced military intervention. Putschists capitalize on concerns regarding accountability and tenure length to justify their actions<sup>7</sup>. In contrast, in countries like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, they tap into anti-colonial and anti-French sentiments among the youth to maintain grassroots approval. External actors like Russia fuel anti-western sentiments and offer protection to these juntas against counter-coups. Whether genuine or not, coup leaders leverage popular support to negotiate prolonged transition periods before returning to constitutional governance.

The recent elections in Chad which saw the emergence of the Junta leader as president, an election marred by high level fraud, thread, irregularities, and the prolongation of the Junta rule in Burkina Faso are examples to show the true intentions of these coup makers. They have no intentions of handing power, they will do everything to stay in power, an act which defeats democracy and good governance.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

From 1950 to September 2023, a total of 491 coups d'état were documented, with 245 of them being successful, across 97 countries. Latin America and Africa emerge as the two regions that have experienced the highest number of coups, accounting for 29% and 44% of the recorded instances, respectively. Since the 1990s, Africa has consistently witnessed a greater number of coups compared to other parts of the world. In the past decade, these attempts, primarily concentrated in the Sahel region, have displayed a higher rate of success than in previous years<sup>8</sup>. Military coups have been a recurring theme in Africa's political history. Since 1952, the continent has experienced close to 100 successful coups. Despite the positive shift towards democratization in the 1990s, the recent increase in coups matches the total number of coups in the entire last decade (2010 to 2019) and reflects the dark era of authoritarian regimes from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s<sup>9</sup>. The aftermath of coups often leads to prolonged political turmoil, insecurity, and, as evidenced in Sudan, the looming threat of more coups and full-blown conflicts. This serves as a clear warning for

<sup>6</sup> Nieburg, N. L. (1969). *Political Violence: The Behavioural Process*. New York, St.Martins Press

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.michigandaily.com/opinion/voter-apathy-the-silent-killer-of-democracy/>

<sup>8</sup> Abegunde, O. (2010). "Electoral Politics and Political Violence in Nigeria" in Omotosho, F. Ibadan; university of Ado-Ekiti Press

<sup>9</sup> Payne, R and Nasser, J (2003), *Politics and Culture in the Developing World*. New York:

Pearson Education Inc.

nations to protect themselves against coups by enhancing the quality of democracy and redefining the social contract with their citizens. To effectively build resilience against coups, it is crucial to adopt more people-centered perspectives. In countries where recent military coups have occurred, historical patterns of military rule have been prevalent.

The need for a reset in civilian-military relationships in coup-affected states calls for the history of military governance to be taken into account. Meaningful civil-military dialogues are essential in achieving this goal. By giving priority to dialogue, we can bridge the gaps between institutions, uphold democratic principles, and reinforce the rule of law. The establishment of trust and understanding between civilian leaders and the military is crucial in safeguarding the democratic aspirations of the region and guiding it towards sustainable progress and genuine democratic renewal.

In order to address the risks and spirals of coups, preventive measures offer a sustainable pathway. However, in the event of a coup, a robust and timely response becomes necessary to navigate the complex challenges. The recently launched African Facility to Support Inclusive Transition (AFSIT) by UNDP and the AUC serves as a timely intervention tool. It provides an opportunity to contribute to the political transitions of countries that have recently experienced coups through analysis, assessment, and targeted interventions that complement existing programmatic responses.

Military Junta's must learn to lead the country towards a civilian rule by restoring the rule law, ensure the respect of state institutions and ensure the compliance with constitutional provisions, support democracy and good governance through the organization of free, fair, transparent and credible elections. They should avoid legitimizing military longevity and rebranding Juntas to civilians like the case of Chad.

## Reference

1. Abdrashid, S. (2016), Voter Turnout Trends around the World'. Sweden: International IDEA.
2. Abegunde, O. (2010). "Electoral Politics and Political Violence in Nigeria" in Omotosho, F. Ibadan; university of Ado-Ekiti Press
3. Adejumobi, S. (2000). Elections in Africa: A Fading Shadow of Democracy? International Political Science Review, 21(1): pp.59-73
4. Birch, A. (1995) The Concept and Theories of Modern Democracy. London: Routledge.
5. Ballington, J (2001), Youth and Political Participation: Trends or Turnout. Stockholm: International IDEA
6. Ezimiri, G, Nnamani, K. C. and Nnaegbo, O. (2016), Democracy at the Cross Roads: Ethno Regional Power Contestations and Democratization in Diversified Nigeria, 1960-2015.
7. South East Journal of Political Science Review Vol 2 No 1
8. Mahmud, S (2015), "The 2015 General Elections: Voter Turnout, Voting Behaviour and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria". Paper presented at the Post Election Conference organized by the Electoral Institute Abuja.
9. Nieburg, N. L. (1969). Political Violence: The Behavioural Process. New York, St.Martins Press
10. Gray, M. and M, Caul (2000), Voter Turnout in Advanced Democracies. 1950-1997.
11. Comparative Political Science Review (33)