




Chapter Six

Military Coups in West Africa and the Sahel as Impediments Towards the Achievement of the African Union–Agenda 2063, Aspirations (3) and (4)

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Abstract

In an attempt to transform Africa into a global powerhouse of the future, the African Union (AU) championed Agenda 2063, which serves as Africa's developmental blueprint towards achieving inclusive and equitable socio-economic development over 50 years. However, close to 10 years after its implementation, Africa is still battling with challenges such as a resurgence of military coups and Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG). Recently, these military coups occurred mainly in West Africa and the Sahel regions. Although AU–Agenda 2063 is founded on seven Aspirations, this chapter will focus on Aspiration 3 (good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law) and Aspiration 4 (a peaceful and secure Africa). Findings are that the resurgence of military coups in West Africa and the Sahel are hindrances towards attaining AU–Agenda 2063 Aspirations 3 and 4. Instead of these states consolidating their democracies and adhering to the rule of law, they experienced democratic reversals and the rise of authoritarianism. Ultimately, this impedes Aspirations 3 and 4 of the AU. Thus, instead of silencing the guns by 2030,



the military has turned these guns against their own states. Furthermore, demerits of military rule include the suppression of human rights, limited opposition, and lack of capacity to address the many pre-coups socio-economic challenges which pose security threats in both regions. This qualitative literature assessment will adopt content analysis to produce the study findings. This chapter intends to respond to three related objectives: (i) to explore the root causes of military coups in West Africa and the Sahel, (ii) to examine how military coups in these regions serve as impediments towards the achievement of the AU-Agenda 2063 Aspirations (3) and (4), and (iii) to evaluate the AU's response to these coups d'état and UCGs.

Introduction

The African continent has been more susceptible to coups than any other region in the world, with a total of 222 coup attempts since the year 1946 (Powel *et al.*, 2016). The first ever successful coup in Africa, which occurred in Togo in 1963, set a bad precedent in the political terrain of Africa and continues to haunt the contemporary African states (Nugent, 2012). Although Africa remains the continent with the highest recorded number of coups and unconstitutional changes of governments (UCGs), the two controversial regions of West Africa and the Sahel have contributed a high number to these coups. Suleiman and Onapajo (2022) asserted that between 1958 and 2008, West Africa recorded the highest number of coups on the continent, which were prone to occur in former French colonies. For example, since 2010, there have been more than 40 coups and attempted coups in West Africa and the Sahel regions (Zounmenou, 2010). Meanwhile, since 2019, these regions have witnessed seven coups (five successful and two failed). In this regard, West Africa has been dubbed the “coup belt” of Africa; meanwhile, a country such as Sudan has become known as the “coup capital” of the world due to its longstanding history of coups d'état.

Recent military coups and UCGs in West Africa and the Sahel are not new phenomena. Since the early days of independence, West African states have been characterised

by military coups; for instance, the first successful coup in Africa was seen in Togo in 1963. Later, in independent Ghana, the country's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was removed from power through a putsch. Nevertheless, the recent coups d'état and attempts in West Africa and the Sahel have become emergent threats to democratisation in Africa, hence tempering the success of the African Union's developmental blueprint of Agenda 2063. This is Africa's initiative to become an equal partner within the international domain. The African Union's Agenda 2063 expounds seven (7) Aspirations, which seek to guide a developmental, sustainable, equitable, and safer Africa (African Union, 2007). However, it is key to mention that, for this chapter, only two (2) aspirations of AU-Agenda 2063 will be discussed extensively, which are Aspiration 3 (an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law), and Aspiration 4 (a peaceful and secure Africa).

In ensuring that its member states adhere to the principles of democracy, the African Union designed numerous legislative frameworks to guide every individual state's behaviour. Amongst these are the 2000 Lomé declaration and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) 2007. Both of these normative frameworks take a strong position against coups d'état and UCGs and thus define any of the following situations as a UCG: (i) a military coup d'état against a democratically elected government; (ii) an intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government by armed dissident groups and rebel movements; and (iii) the refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party after free, fair, and regular elections (Lomé Declaration, 2000; ACDEG, 2007).

Despite all these efforts to stabilise Africa, the continent continues to witness numerous challenges, predominantly in West Africa and the Sahel region, which continue to hamper peace and security. Both of these regions are home to vast challenges of security and governance. First, these regions are exposed to large numbers of violent extremist groups, which have extended their operations throughout both of these regions. For instance, Boko Haram, which started its operations

in Nigeria, has now expanded its activities to neighbouring countries such as Niger and Cameroon. Also, there exist in these regions other terrorist organisations which are affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter group from Boko Haram, which focuses its operations mainly in the Sahel region. There is also Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is a terrorist group based in the Maghreb and West African countries such as Mali, including parts of Burkina Faso and Niger (Sempijja & Mongale, 2022).

The prevalence of these groups in West Africa and the Sahel has worsened the security crisis in both regions. These challenges were brought about by *kleptocratic*¹ governments in both regions because most of the countries where violent extremism is prominent are where there are high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor governance, and corrupt politicians. As such, these groups emerge as a counter mechanism to the power held by government officials, and they seek to change all the ways of doing things, especially where they do not work for the general populace. The name Boko Haram translates to “Western Education is Forbidden.” This name refers to education and any way of doing things according to the Western way of living, including Western political systems (Sempijja & Mongale, 2021:423).

West Africa and the Sahel had suffered a long period of declining democracy, with states preferring autocracy over democracy. Hence, instead of consolidating their democracies, some countries in these regions have reverted to authoritarianism. For instance, West Africa and the Sahel have seen a wave of coups d'état and UCG in the past three years. This was the case in Mali in August 2020, where the Committee for the Salvation of the People publicly alleged that the government of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was corrupt and called for his removal. In Guinea, in September 2021, the President of

1 Kleptocratic – government by those who seek chiefly status and personal gain at the expense of the governed (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2023) Accessed at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kleptocracy>

the country, Alpha Conte, was deposed from power by a military junta organised by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. Elsewhere, in Burkina Faso, President Christian Marc Roch Kabore's regime was toppled by a coup led by Lt. Col. Paul Henry Damiba, who executed the coup under the pretext of trying to bring about stability in the country, especially considering the threats posed by the Islamist groups. These military juntas in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso had promised to pave the way for a transition to civilian government; however, the prospect of elections in these countries remains a far-fetched dream. This would impede the prospects of implementing Agenda 2063 Aspirations (3) and (4), which seek to ensure an Africa of good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, including a peaceful and secure Africa. In light of this, the next section will delve into a review of the literature on the causes of coups d'état and UCGs in Africa.

The causes of military coups in Africa – A review of literature

The root causes of military coups in Africa are complex and diverse. According to Thomson (2010), there are dominant schools of thought on the root causes of military coups in Africa. These schools contend that military coups occur due to a state's socio-political environment. They contend that a military coup will likely occur when the state lacks proper and credible institutionalised political cultures and suffers economic hardships and social divisions. Other schools are more concerned about the organisational ability and character of the military. They believe that when the military is professional and is driven by patriotism rather than its own narrow political interest, this will be the driving factor for the military to intervene to get rid of a corrupt civilian government that does not have the interests of its citizens at heart.

There is a common denominator across the African continent regarding socio-economic issues, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and systematic political and economic corruption. According to Biekpe (2013), military

coups are known to produce no meaningful economic or social benefits to the citizens of a country. Meanwhile, these military coups can have dire repercussions on the socio-economic prospects of the country; in many cases, once the military coup occurs, the economic markets react very badly, and the country's currency is impacted negatively. Both domestic and international organisations have adopted sanctions as a means of punishment for those countries governed through a military coup, which is legislated in the AU Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the ACDEG of 2007. Sadly, these sanctions pose a greater threat to the populace at large than the coup leaders. For example, economic sanctions over a country ruled through a coup tend to worsen poverty levels in that country while leading to economic decline with rapid inflation rates; such was the case in Zimbabwe under the rule of the country's strongman, Robert Mugabe. Furthermore, systematic political and economic corruption is one of the major determinants of military coups in Africa. The study conducted by the Afro Barometer on policy states that in countries like "Guinea and Mali, rising perceptions of corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy formed the backdrop for military coups" (Afro Barometer, 2023, p. 21).

Poverty is also being singled out as one of the root causes or determinants of military coups. Chin *et al.* (2021) indicate that poor states are susceptible to regime change as a result of the social status of the citizens of the country; when the state is unable to improve the living conditions of the people, there will always be uprisings in a state to push for better living conditions. Food security in Africa has been one of the causes of conflict, and even military insurgencies have used poverty as a tool to perpetuate their illicit activities. To attest to that, Ujunwa *et al.* (2019) state that "armed conflicts in West Africa could primarily exacerbate food insecurity, poverty, hunger, hopelessness, and the greenhouse effect" (Ujunwa *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, Fagbadebo and Dorasamy (2021) add that the poverty levels in Africa are dreadful. This is evident in the global poverty ranking, which indicates that about 422 million people in Africa live in poverty (Ujunwa *et al.*, 2019). Africa is a continent that is very rich in terms of natural resources, yet it is still underdeveloped.

Many contributing factors are essential to understanding why Africa remains poor and undeveloped. According to Rwafa (2017), Africa remains poor and underdeveloped mainly due to inadequate resource management; in the argument presented by Mongale (2021), this is due to corruption and greed from individuals who use government positions to amass wealth.

These natural resources play an integral role in the sustainability of a coup because these mineral resources are used to finance the activities of the military coups (Donovan, 2014); the minerals are exported and provide “lucrative financial windfalls” (Donovan, 2014:62). Hence, once there is a military takeover or unconstitutional change of government, those in charge of the military coup will seize strategic centres of the economy and national key points. For instance, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is rich in mineral resources. In certain strategic regions in the country, such as the northern Katanga province, some military insurgency groups and leaders collaborate with politicians to loot these mineral resources for their benefit. In support of this, Rwafa (2017) states that in the DRC, the Mai Mai militias supported by the government are implicated in the looting of mineral resources.

In the past, the AU has been accused by some sectors of society of not using a common approach when it comes to military coups and UCGs. The AU approaches some member states with kid gloves, while others are approached with an iron fist. In its defence of the criticism, the AU indicates that, to some extent, it cannot interfere with the internal affairs of its member states based on the “AU’s principle of sovereignty,” and even all member states are of the view that constitutional amendments are the sole prerogative of the internal affairs of the state itself (Woldemichael *et al.*, 2022). The recent case which seems to have caused serious concerns about the approach of the AU on issues of military coups on a country-by-country basis was the recent coup which took place in Zimbabwe. Many critics are very sceptical of the AU’s approach to what is considered the acknowledgement and the rubber stamping of a soft coup or UCG in Zimbabwe. However, in Zimbabwe, the AU seems to have taken a different approach to its own declaration. Phakathi

(2018) states that the AU was not swift enough to condemn the coup in Zimbabwe, unlike its approach to the coup in Burkina Faso or Mali.

Evers (2014) states that military coups have been more successful in West and Central Africa than in East Africa. West Africa and the Sahel are the most conflict-ridden regions in Africa. They are at the receiving end of military coups, with the “wave of recent military coups in Chad, Mali, Sudan, and Guinea in 2021 and two in Burkina Faso just in 2022” (Afro Barometer, 2023:1). On the other hand, Kyirewiah (2022) states that some West African coups result from leaders trying to amend their country’s constitution to remain in power. The manipulation of constitutions in Africa remains a serious concern; He further states that from 1952 to the present, the countries in West Africa which experienced the most military coups are Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Bissau, Ghana, Benin and Sierra Leone. Ghana and Sierra Leone led the pack with about ten military coups each (Kyirewiah, 2022). According to Kandeh (cited by Adebajo & Rashid, 2004), during the first two decades of independence of states in Africa, military personnel were the masterminds behind military coups, both from the senior and junior ranks. Furthermore, he states that Nigeria incurred more military takeovers of government than any other country in West Africa for approximately twenty-nine years (Adebajo & Rashid, 2004).

For many years, the Nigerian government has been battling with the scourge of military issues and forms of military insurgency groups such as the famous Boko Haram. According to Ezeani *et al.* (2021), Boko Haram has been a major threat to the security of the Nigerian state, especially in the Northeast of the country, for the past two decades (Sempijja & Mongale, 2021). West Africa and the Sahel regions have experienced a series of military insurgency groups disguised as religious groups. These groups have been causing serious instabilities and acts of terrorism in both West Africa and the Sahel. Zamkowska (2022) states that groups that subscribe to IS-like ideals have established themselves in the Sahel region with a long history.

Military coups in West Africa and the Sahel as impediments towards the achievement of the AU Agenda 2063 Aspirations (3) and (4).

To transform the African continent into a global powerhouse, the African Union (AU) adopted Agenda 2063 as a blueprint to guide these developmental aspirations. Amongst these aspirations are those that seek to ensure an Africa of good governance, peace and security. As such, the recent waves of military coups in West Africa and the Sahel pose a serious threat to the AU's ability to realise and achieve these goals, as enshrined in the Agenda 2063. In terms of legislative frameworks that will support the implementation of Aspirations (3) and (4) of the AU Agenda 2063, in 2007, the AU produced a document titled "African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance", which focuses on issues of democracy, elections and governance within the jurisdictions of the member states. This document was a direct response to several critical issues which hamper good governance in the continent, such as military coups or unconstitutional changes of government and electoral, political, and economic corruption, which continues to plague the continent.

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (African Union, 2007) serves as a guiding principle which emphasises the significance of "good governance, popular participation, the rule of law and human rights" (African Union, 2007). Although the Charter is very strong, this study will limit itself to good governance, peace, and security issues that align with Agenda 2063. Article twelve of the treaty indicates that member states shall "Promote good governance by ensuring transparent and accountable administration and ensure that they strengthen political institutions to entrench a culture of democracy and peace" (AU, 2007:07).

As a regional body, the AU has made concerted efforts over the years to ensure and promote good governance in the region and to encourage the member states to ensure that principles of good governance are adhered to and implemented in their respective countries or territories. However, Africa is

increasingly becoming riddled with issues of bad governance, from electoral, political and economic corruption, which is rife in Africa, to mismanagement of state resources and mineral resources, which benefits a few individuals, corrupt civilians in the form of business people who are colluding with politicians and government officials to loot state resources and mineral resources. Umunakwe and Osaren (2023:138) note, “Political leaders under the disguise of political positions divert public funds through looting, embezzlement, and unjustified preferences to allies and family members”

Governance in Africa

The 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance Report defines governance as “the provision of the political, social, economic and environmental goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their state, and that a state has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens” (The Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2013:7). The socio-economic and political state of governance in Africa is gradually declining for several reasons, including political and economic corruption. This practice remains a pressing challenge for Africa’s good governance. Corruption remains a serious factor that curtails political, social, and economic governance in Africa (Mongale, Molohe & Tomodi, 2020). Many African states cannot provide public goods to their constituents, which is sparked by corrupt practices by greedy politicians who use political office as a tool to squander state resources and for self-enrichment (Mongale, 2021).

In the arguments provided by Fagbadebo and Dorasamy (2021), the governance crisis in Africa should be attributed to the leadership issue. This is because many African elites loot state resources for their personal use. (Fagbadebo & Dorasamy, 2021). The AU advocates for promoting good governance based on the principle of transparency and accountability (AU, 2007). However, there seems to be an erosion of good governance in Africa because of systematic corruption and lack of political will to deal with deficiencies in governance generally. This was evident in the case of Sudan, where the former president, Omar al-Bashir, who had served as the president of Sudan for almost

30 years, had used the state's resources (i.e. oil) to consolidate his power and enrich himself. Due to his *kleptocratic* rule, in December 2018, protests against the al-Bashir regime broke out in Atbara, and these pro-democracy protests were against poverty, corruption, and unemployment. Within a few days, these protests spread to Sudan's capital, Khartoum; with rising discontent, the demands shifted, and calls were made for al-Bashir to relinquish power (Aljazeera, 2021).

Following pro-democracy protests, al-Bashir was removed from power by Sudan's military in April 2019. After his removal, the power vacuum was exploited by opportunistic military personnel who seized power and suspended the country's constitution. Nevertheless, although al-Bashir was replaced by a transitional military government, civilians are still advocating a civilian-led government. The socio-economic and political crisis in Sudan reflects what Fagbadebo and Dorasamy (2021) had alluded to, "the notion that African countries are under the siege of the governance crisis is not an exaggeration". High levels of unemployment, low income, poverty, and mismanagement of funds remain some of the issues that spell out the state of governance in Africa, factors that highlight governance challenges in the continent.

Elsewhere in West Africa's Sahel region, in Mali, President Ibrahim Keita had been re-elected with a 67% majority in the 2018 presidential elections. However, allegations of vote rigging had been made. Also, like the government of al-Bashir in Sudan, Ibrahim Keita's government has been widely seen as corrupt and unaccountable to its constituents for several years (News African, 2021). As a result of it being unaccountable to its constituents, protests against Keita's government broke out in Mali in 2020. They thus led to the removal of Keita in a coup led by Colonel Assimi Goïta. Consequently, these practices of corruption and failure by governments to provide public goods, grant the military a right to governance, as they use the existing discontents as a pretext to enter into political affairs by unconstitutionally assuming political power. As a result, this tampers with Aspiration (3) of the AU Agenda 2063, which seeks to create an Africa of good governance. Alpha Conde, the first

democratically elected President in Guinea in 2010, was deposed from power through a military coup. The coup against Conde was orchestrated by Mamady Doumbouya, who dissolved the government, cancelled the country's constitution, and closed the country's borders (New African, 2021).

The 2021 coup in Guinea was also executed under the pretext that Conde's tenure was marked by poor governance, a declining economy, suppression of opposition parties, and a crackdown during pro-democracy protests. In addition to these challenges of bad governance, Conde went as far as changing the country's constitution to allow him to serve for more than the prescribed two terms in office. In his utterances, as Yusuf Akinpelu (2021) quoted, Mamady Doumbouya proclaimed that the army had no other choice but "to give the people their freedom". He quoted the late Ghanaian former president, John Rawlings, who also led through a coup in Ghana. Doumbouya was quoted making these proclamations: "If the people are crushed by their elites, it is up to the army to give the people their freedom" and "The duty of the soldier is to save the country. We will no longer entrust politics to one man. We will entrust it to the people." (Akinpelu, 2021).

African leaders' tendency to circumvent prescribed two terms in office continues to impede democracy in the continent. Sadly, this tends to instigate military coups, executed under the pretext of restoring constitutional order by disposing civilian-led government out of office. Although Mamady Doumbouya (the junta leader) had promised to restore democratic processes such as elections, the reality is that the military in Guinea continues to entrench itself in government.

The status of democracy in West Africa and the Sahel regions has been deteriorating, while authoritarianism has been on the rise. This is evident in the recent waves of military takeovers in both regions, which have been showing a setback to democracy since 2020. In Guinea, for instance, although the military had seized power from Alpha Conde under the premise of upholding democratic principles, the rule by the military in the country has not kept up the principles of democracy because

the military had failed to arrange transitional elections to elect leaders democratically. Meanwhile, Guinea is subjected to the rule of a self-imposed government and a decline in political rights, actions which resulted in the country being downgraded from being partly free to not free status by Freedom House (2021). In this context, the reversal of democracy in Guinea is witnessed through the self-imposition of the military on governance because, in a democracy, a legitimate government is chosen by the people through the electoral process. Therefore, the absence of free and fair elections in the selection of government indicates a democratic deficit.

Guinea's history of military coups illustrates a troubling cycle of instability and interrupted governance. Since the first coup in 1984 led by Lieutenant Colonel Lansana Conte (Odubajo & Ishola, 2024:56), the country has witnessed several attempts, with three being successful. The December 23, 2008, coup marked a significant moment, as Captain Moussa "Dadis" Camara seized power following Conte's death. The most recent coup on September 5, 2021, further deepened the crisis when Col. Mamadi Doumbouya and his forces stormed the presidential palace, detaining then-President Alpha Condé and forcing him to resign. Doumbouya's declaration of a suspended constitution and dissolved government echoed the typical rhetoric of coup leaders who frame their actions as necessary for restoring order and democracy. Despite promises to return to civilian rule, Guinea remains under military control nearly four years later, with no clear path to elections or constitutional governance. According to Odubajo and Ishola (2023:50), "The coupists frame the ouster of an elected government as a defence of democratic legality and make a public promise to hold elections and restore democracy as soon as possible."

This protracted situation raises concerns about the junta's commitment to democratic principles and the will of the Guinean people to choose their own leadership. Jalloh (2024) has opined that there is a rising discontent in the Sahel region, reflecting a significant frustration among civilians toward the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Promises of a swift return to civilian rule have largely gone unfulfilled, leading

to growing impatience and scepticism among the populace (Jalloh, 2024).

Despite this, the juntas appear to have entrenched their power, often justifying their continued rule through narratives of stability and security. The ongoing military rule has not only stifled political progress but also hindered the potential for economic and social development in the country. This situation not only undermines hopes for democratic governance but also poses challenges for regional stability and development in West Africa and the Sahel. ECOWAS's economic sanctions aimed to pressure the military juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger to abandon their unconstitutional methods of governance. In response, these regimes withdrew from ECOWAS and formed a military alliance, signalling a determined shift toward a more autonomous approach to security.

This pact represents a strategic move to consolidate their military capabilities against persistent insurgencies, reflecting a belief that external interventions, such as those from ECOWAS, have been ineffective. Kaledzi (2023) states, "The organisation is failing to achieve its objectives. Worse, the legitimate ambitions of our countries of making the G5 Sahel a zone of security and development are hindered by institutional red tape from a previous era, which convinces us that our process of independence and dignity is not compatible with G5 participation in its current form". This development raises concerns about the implications for regional cooperation and the prospects for returning to civilian rule. The juntas' withdrawal from ECOWAS could hinder collaborative efforts to address broader security and governance challenges in the Sahel, potentially leading to further isolation and a prolonged state of military rule.

In Chad, following the April 2021 death of strongman and long-time serving president Idriss Deby Itno, his son, Mahamat Idriss Deby, seized power through a military putsch. Following this coup, which can be labelled as a 'dynastic coup,' the Transitional Military Council suspended the country's constitution and declared that elections would be facilitated

within 18 months. However, up to now, Mahamat Idriss Deby is still the president of Chad. The actions executed by Mahamat Idriss Deby to deal with pro-democracy protests sent a strong message that Chad is continuously led by a strongman. This was evident in the violent crackdowns on every opposition against his rule; a case in point is the pro-democracy protests that occurred on 20th October 2022, which the Chadians call “Black Thursday” (Nodjimbadem, 2022). These pro-democracy protests led to mass arrests, and several pro-democracy protestors were killed, while others suffered malicious body injuries. Due to its chaotic nature, “Black Thursday” remains one of the worst repressions in Chad’s history. The suppression of freedom of association and political participation (protest action) hinders democratic consolidation. This is because, in a democracy, people should enjoy freedom of expression, association and participation through formal mechanisms, such as electing their government or unconventional participation, such as freedom of assembly and protest. Nevertheless, this was different in Chad as the country was ruled by a military leader who was not voted into power, depicting that the government of Chad was illegitimate.

Countries such as Côte d’Ivoire have proven their desire to move towards a full democracy by subscribing to the norms and principles of democracy, such as good governance, peace and security, since the end of the 2011 conflict. However, the country’s democratic momentum faltered in 2020 after President Alassane Ouattara circumvented the constitutional term limit of two (2) terms and assumed a third term of office. Not only did he circumvent the constitutional term limit, but he went as far as disqualifying candidates who showed themselves as a political threat to his power. This resulted in widespread political violence, while the opposition parties boycotted the elections (Freedom House, 2022:13). Nevertheless, in the March 2021 parliamentary elections, improvements seemed to exist in the country’s democratic processes, as there was less violence during elections, and several opposition candidates freely registered and participated in the elections. Meanwhile, the

Ivorians enjoyed their freedom of expression and participation through organised public gatherings (Freedom House, 2022:13).

In essence, these unconstitutional changes of government impede Aspiration (3) of the AU Agenda 2063, which seeks to ensure an Africa of good governance and democracy. Instead of progressing towards democratic consolidation, African states have been susceptible to coups d'état; this continues to be against the norms and principles of democracy. Also, these military takeovers are not only impeding the implementation of Agenda 2063, but they also violate the African Union's legislative frameworks, such as the 2000 Lomé Declaration and the ACDEG of 2007, including the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Sadly, the prospects of democracy in this sense remain a farfetched dream, especially if countries in both West Africa and the Sahel continue to align themselves with global hegemony such as Russia and China, whose political systems are nowhere near democratic. In this sense, when taking a closer look at the recent waves of coups in West Africa and the Sahel regions, countries that have experienced military takeovers have detached themselves from Western powers such as the USA and its European allies (e.g. France). Hence, the exit of former neo-colonialists in countries such as the Central Africa Republic (CAR), Mali, and Sudan has coincided with the prevalence of Russia's 'missionary' group (Wagner Group), which has replaced the French troops who have been combating insecurity threats in the region.

Peace and security in Africa

In their concerted effort to ensure peace and security in the region, the AU has established the Peace and Security Council under Articles 24 and 25 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Peace and security remain very critical components of a healthy democracy, and they ensure that civilians live in a peaceful environment that is conducive to economic development (ACDEG, 2007). Some parts of Africa have been experiencing instability for a very long time due to wars. Sadly, security threats in Africa interfere with Aspiration (4) of the AU Agenda 2063, which aspires to a peaceful and

secure Africa for all those who live on the continent. Multiple factors create instability and insecurity in regions such as West Africa and the Sahel. Amongst these challenges is the drying of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB), which had been a source of livelihood and survival over many years; hence, its drying has resulted in increased violent competition for resources. In this context, climate change and its impact on the drying of the LCB has presented itself as a threat intensifier in the region, adding to the cocktail of insecurities such as communal violence (between herders and farmers), the rapid spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW), and the Islamist militants, who continue to launch terror campaigns in these regions.

In the arguments presented by Sempijja and Mongale (2022), both the Sahel and West Africa are compounded by a growing threat of insurgency groups who operate throughout both regions. The prevalence of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State, and Al-Qaeda affiliated groups have contributed to deteriorating security, which requires an intense response from various governments in the Sahel and West Africa. The emerging reality is that African troops fighting these insurgent groups are often underpaid, undersupplied with ammunition and underappreciated (Venter, 2020). Perhaps it is in this context that coups in Africa do not occur in countries with rapidly developing economies. However, these coups are likely to take place in those struggling democracies, where weak economies exist with low standards of living and minimal opportunities for the rapidly increasing youth population. This is the case in West Africa's Sahel states, which are characterised by high youth unemployment. Sadly, due to these socio-economic challenges, wherever the state seems unable to provide public goods, insurgent groups tend to fill this vacuum by offering the vulnerable youth the opportunities to work under them. As such, it becomes difficult for state security forces to drive out terrorism in these regions because, in some communities within the Sahel and West Africa, groups such as JNIM are recognised as legitimate groups through their operations as they tend to provide governance where the government seems to be absent

(Sempijja & Mongale, 2022). The growing number of affiliates to terrorist organisations in both the Sahel and West Africa, therefore, exacerbates security challenges throughout these regions, hence tampering with the prospects of AU to implement its developmental blueprint of Agenda 2063, especially Aspiration (4), for an Africa that is peaceful and secure. Furthermore, West Africa and the Sahel have become home to terrorist organisations affiliated to or owing their allegiance to ISIS and Al-Qaeda terrorist groups, thus contributing to the Islamic State franchise in Africa, fulfilling the sole mandate of the Islamic State to build its brand throughout the entire globe, as it aspires to be the world's biggest terrorist organisation (Sempijja & Mongale, 2021).

The growing number of insecurities in the region has served as one of the causes of coups d'état in some of West Africa's Sahel regions. For instance, one of the reasons behind the overthrow of Colonel Paul Henry Damiba, who seized power through a coup in Burkina Faso, was due to intensifying terrorist attacks in the country. As such, Captain Ibrahim Traore, whose status has been relatively associated with Thomas Sankara (the jewel and demi-god of Burkina Faso), removed Colonel Damiba from power after he had failed to fight attacks launched by JNIM and ISIS in the Greater Sahara. Victims of these terrorist attacks included state security forces, civilians, humanitarian workers, as well as religious, political, traditional, and community figures (Human Rights Watch, 2022). As a result of these attacks caused by insurgent groups, over 237,000 people were forced to flee their homes in 2021 (Human Rights Watch, 2022), resulting in the number of internally displaced people since 2016 rising to over 1.4 million, which is equivalent to 6% of the population.

The level of instability and insecurity in West Africa and the Sahel continues to be on the rise as both regions enter 2023, Siaplay and Werker (2023) posit that the resurgence of coups worsened these instabilities in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. It is worth noting that these military takeovers occurred amidst the ongoing conflicts in both regions, violence which has led to the displacement of more than 2.5 million people, while it has been projected that these violent conflicts have led to the deaths

of an estimated 8,000 individuals in 2022 (Shurkin, 2022). What has also become apparent is that these conflicts have started to affect previously peaceful countries in West Africa. This was the case in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, where in 2021 and 2022, these countries started to witness fatal attacks associated with armed groups. Thus, efforts have been made to enact counter-terrorism mechanisms in these countries to curb the spread of violent extremism. As Kwarkye (2022) alluded, the states of Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo have conducted military operations facilitated through their collective means within the confines of the Accra Initiative. In Operation Koudanlgou 4, Zone 2, which was last conducted in November 2021, these countries deployed about 6,000 soldiers and arrested 300 suspected members of extremist groups (Reuters, 2021). Through such operations, these states are attempting to implement the aspiration of the AU Agenda 2063, which seeks to ensure that security prevails in Africa and that the people are protected from any threat. However, violent extremist groups continue to threaten these initiatives and aspirations of the AU and its developmental blueprint of Agenda-2063.

The recent governments which assumed power through military coups in Burkina Faso and Mali, for instance, have not brought any stability to their countries, even though these military governments had executed these coups under the pretext of offering security to the people. These military governments are yet to provide security and stability in West Africa and the Sahel regions, which are rocked by violent extremism. Also, the internationalisation of the region's insecurity led to the involvement of Russia's 'missionary' group, the Wagner group, alongside Russia's disinformation campaign in Mali at the end of 2021. However, Wagner has not produced any security and stability in Mali (Siaplay & Werker, 2023). Instead, there have been allegations of human rights violations by the Wagner group in Mali, Sudan, and the CAR, actions which are in contrast to Aspirations (3) and (4) of the AU Agenda 2063, which aspire to see an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, including a peaceful and secure Africa.

In essence, although these military coups had been successful in countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Sudan, the Central Africa Republic (CAR), the Republic of Chad and the recent coups in Niger (which was staged later in 2023), there have been allegations of failed coups in Guinea Bissau including a coup attempt in Gambia (Wally, 2022). These coups came as a result of state fragility in both West Africa and the Sahel region, where there exists bad governance, insecurity, high unemployment rates (with a population of 429 million youths in West Africa alone), high poverty levels that are worsened by erratic changes in climate which have led to the drying of the Lake Chad Basin. Hence, intra-communal conflicts between herders and farmers are rising, with deteriorating livelihood sources exacerbating conflicts over resources (Sempijja & Mongale, 2022). In this regard, the quest for survival is always accompanied by risks to human security in both the Sahel and West Africa, making it difficult to implement the Aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063.

The African Union's Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa

The African continent has been pounded by numerous threats to good governance, peace and security. Hence, the recent waves of military takeover serve as a threat intensifier to the already existing challenges of religious extremism, drug and weapon smuggling, and other forms of transnational organised crime. As such, all these challenges impede the AU and its mandate of placing Africa as an equal partner in the world. To achieve this mandate, the AU adopted the 2000 Lomé Declaration and ACDEG 2007 as legislative frameworks, supporting the AU mandates of a free and safer Africa and peace, security and good governance. However, despite all these efforts, the AU, including regional bodies such as ECOWAS, has been less effective in responding to military coups and unconstitutional changes of government (UCG) in West Africa and the Sahel.

Some of the shortcomings of coups d'état and UCGs include struggling economies with few prospects for development;

hence, there is a need for supranational bodies to treat these actions with an iron fist. However, what has become apparent in Africa is that regional bodies such as the AU have been reluctant to deal strictly with coups and UCGs, which continue to pose a threat not only to stability and security in West Africa and the Sahel but also to the AU's implementation of Agenda 2063. Apart from military coups, West Africa and the Sahel have been exposed to constitutional coups, where democratically elected presidents circumvented their constitutional term of office and thus prolonged their terms in office. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara, the country's President since 2011, amended the country's constitution to allow himself a third term in office.

These incidents, such as the one in Côte d'Ivoire, tend to set a bad precedent in West Africa and the Sahel's political domains. For one, due to a successful coup (whether military or constitutional), other African leaders also follow these acts because, in Africa, regional bodies and continental bodies such as the AU have failed to take decisive action by holding accountable those who assume power through unconstitutional means. The AU and ECOWAS condemned countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea following their waves of coups, and economic sanctions were imposed against these states. This has not been adequate to curtail coups, especially against military leaders who staged coups in their states. Hence, countries such as Togo, (President Gnassingbe) and Guinea (former President Alpha Conde) and Cameroon (Paul Biya), have also amended their constitutions to allow the presidents to serve for more than the prescribed two terms of office. Instead of effectively dealing with the plotters of these constitutional coups, the African Union reacted only through rhetoric by condemning these actions. Such was the case with Guinea, whose coup was condemned by the AU without imposed sanctions. Meanwhile, in Mali, following the military's takeover of the government, both the AU and ECOWAS imposed sanctions against the country, thus denouncing the coup as unconstitutional and therefore unacceptable (Maluleke, 2022).

In addition to this reaction, French President Emmanuel Macron and the United States of America reacted by condemning these UCGs and calling for the rapid return of democratically elected governments. Meanwhile, no calls were made for these states' governments to address the key factors that had resulted in these UCGs and coups d'état. In this sense, neglecting to address these pre-coup challenges will often result in new coups, together with the emergence of violent insurgent groups. Amongst these challenges are poor economic conditions, bad governance, and high unemployment rates, with little or no development (Gerits, 2022).

In Chad, following the death of Idriss Deby Itno, when his son Mahamat Idriss Deby seized power through a coup, the AU, ECOWAS and France (expert in the former French African colony), from the international community, applied double standards to the unconstitutional change of government. Furthermore, the support for Mahamat Idriss Deby's reign was witnessed after the October 20th 'Black Thursday' protests, when Deby executed fatal crackdowns against pro-democracy movements and violated people's basic human rights, actions which resulted in the punishment and coercion of everyone who was against Mahamat Deby's rule (Ramadane, 2022). If Mahamat can rule through the culture of impunity, it simply means that the regional bodies (AU and ECOWAS) and the international community have accepted this practice. Nevertheless, these actions by Mahamat Deby could be sparked and motivated by Chad's reputation for providing stability in the Sahel through the reputation of its armed forces.

In the Sahel and West Africa regions, Chad continues to be one of the leading countries in military assistance to combat the spread of violent extremism in both regions, with its long-standing experience of preserving peace and security. Chad has been a key partner in international strategies such as France's Operation Barkhane, the United Nations-backed counterterrorism G5 Sahel Joint Task Force, the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, and the Multinational-Joint Task Force created in the late 1990s to combat jihadist group Boko Haram in Nigeria. Perhaps it

is due to its militaristic role in fighting for peace and security in the already fragile region of the Sahel. Chad continues to enjoy biased reactions from the AU, ECOWAS and the international community. This brings into question whether in Africa there are ‘good coups,’ which are accepted based on their justifications, and ‘bad coups,’ which are not acceptable and thus face condemnation from African regional bodies and the global communities. In support of these assertions, when attending the funeral of the late Idriss Deby Itno, the French President declared that his country would not “let anyone, either today or tomorrow, challenge Chad’s stability and integrity” (Pelz, 2021).

At the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, called for a democratic transition in Chad. Still, in her utterances when she paid tribute to the late Deby, she announced him as “a leader and a partner who dedicated his life to fighting against violent extremism” (Nodjimbadem, 2022), forgetting the very fact that he served as the country’s strongman for almost 30 years. In contrast, democracy permits each president to serve only two terms in office, while each term can amount to five years. Hence, the reaction towards a coup in Chad validated that a coup is only a bad coup when facilitated by a leader not advocated by certain global hegemony. Lastly, in May 2021, the European Union foreign policy chief, Joseph Borrell, when paying tribute to Deby, advised that the country should return to constitutional order facilitated through democratic processes but also added that it was “necessary to ensure that the country remains stable so that it can continue to play a role in the fight against insurgency in the region” (Nodjimbadem, 2022). In essence, this could mean that for as long as Chad continues to stabilise both regions of West Africa and the Sahel through its military contribution, the nature of its government or political system does not matter if peace and security are preserved within these regions.

Conclusion

In its effort to ensure peace and security in the continent, during the celebration of its golden jubilee, the AU declared to end

violent conflicts by 2020, or what is to be known as ‘silencing the guns by 2020.’ This is also part of the AU Agenda 2063’s aims and objectives. However, the set target by the AU to silence the guns by the year 2020 seems like a farfetched ideal because many parts of the continent are still experiencing a proliferation of guns, violence, and conflicts. In West Africa and the Sahel regions, the military, vested with the responsibility to take control of their state’s arms, have turned their arms against the same state they had sworn to protect. Hence, in 2020, during the year in which the AU had wished to silence the guns in Africa, countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Chad, Sudan, and the Central Africa Republic (CAR) witnessed guns blazing loudly in calls for the removal of governments that the people had elected, while others still had long-standing regimes. Amongst the causes of these military coups and unconstitutional changes of governments in West Africa and the Sahel are factors such as lack of development, poor governance, high-level corruption, historical injustices and grievances, flawed electoral processes, including circumvention of the constitution to allow for a third term in office, and violent extremism, to name but a few. Sadly, these factors of state fragility serve as reasons behind the undemocratic means of assuming power, whereby the military is using citizens’ genuine grievances to seize power under the pretext of addressing all these human security challenges.

In conclusion, the chapter expounds that, for the African Union to reach its implementation of the developmental blueprint titled Agenda 2063, the continental body needs to approach every case of unconstitutional change of government or military coup in a holistic way. Unlike applying double standards to certain cases, the AU needs to be fair when condemning unethical and illegitimate practices that impede the implementation of Aspirations (3) and (4) of the AU-Agenda 2063, as already discussed under the chapter’s findings. Moving forward, the African Union should also find ways to deal with governments where democracy is flawed because it is in such fragile states where these unconstitutional government changes are likely to occur. Hence, failure to devise a mechanism to deter bad governance will lead to democratic backsliding in Africa,

where everyone can do as they please within their states due to the culture of impunity. In this regard, for the Aspirations of the AU-Agenda 2063 to be achieved, African states need to deal with every existing challenge leading to state fragility in the continent.

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