

Journal of African Union Studies (JoAUS)

ISSN 2050-4306 (Online) ISSN 2050-4292 (Print)

Indexed by: SCOPUS, IBSS, JSTOR, EBSCO, COPERNICUS,
ERIH PLUS, ProQuest, J-Gate and Sabinet

Special Issue

Towards the Africa We Want: The AU and the Quest for Peace and
Development in the Era of Polycrisis
pp 11-33

African Union Agenda 2063 and the Resurgence of Military Coup d'état in Africa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2023/s1n1a1>

Yemisi Olawale

*Department of History,
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria
Oi.yemisi@ui.edu.ng*



Idris Ridwan Tosho

*Department of History and International Studies,
Al-Hikmah University,
Ilorin, Nigeria
Idrisr1994@gmail.com*

Abstract

The resurgence of military coups in Africa has raised significant concerns at regional, continental, and global levels, particularly regarding their impact on democratic governance. Despite ongoing assessments of democratic progress in Africa, recent military takeovers from 2020 to 2023 in countries like Mali, Gabon, Burkina Faso, and Niger have challenged the notion of Africa's shift toward sustainable democratic values. The article uses secondary data to explore the implications of these coups on the African Union's (AU) vision, particularly its Agenda 2063. Although the AU has actively condemned and responded to coups, the effectiveness of these measures remains debatable. The article argues

that military coups seriously threaten the AU's long-term goals, including the fundamental objectives of Agenda 2063.

Keywords: *Africa, African Union, Agenda 2063, Democracy, Military Coups.*

Introduction

One of the significant characteristics of post-independence African states' political space has been the challenging path to nation-building, especially in sustainable governance based on democratic indices. Despite the emphasis on democratic and constitutional governance processes, African countries have witnessed a series of military coups d'état, threatening democracy and continental nation-building. Apart from the widespread military takeover that was witnessed in the immediate post-independence years (the 1950s–1980s), many African countries, especially in West and Central Africa region with countries such as Mali, Chad, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Sudan, and more recently, Niger, Zimbabwe, and Gabon, are now plagued by the ominous spectre of military coups despite the wave of democratisation that swept across Africa in the 1990s and 2000s (ACCORD, 2015). These successful and other thwarted coups have continued to pose a puzzling problem for stakeholders and policymakers, leading to concern about a possible resurgence and proliferation of coups in Africa and its implication on some continental building projects (Mbara & Graham, 2023).

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and African Union (AU) have continued to emphasise the need to pursue a resolute commitment to achieve political stability, conflict-free Africa, continental peace, and sustainable democracy to achieve a prosperous reality for all Africans devoid of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations and humanitarian disasters (ACCORD, 2015). The challenges persist and multiply despite these commitments, often documented in various normative frameworks. Despite the instrumentality of the Lomé Declaration, which prohibited military coups and imposed sanctions against unconstitutional regimes that gained political power through undemocratic means (Souaré, 2014), it has not been enough to stem the tide of military interference in African political affairs since the 2000s. Also, the AU's Agenda 2063, which strongly emphasises a peaceful and secure Africa, promoting good governance and functional democracy as the bedrock for realising the development and regional integration plans for the

continent (Amani Africa, 2020), is currently threatened by the resurgence of coups in Africa.

Although the military has a long history of involvement in African nation-building and politics, the enduring culture of military involvement in African politics cannot be underestimated (ACCORD, 2015). The military is expected to refrain from interfering in civilian and democratic affairs. Thomson (2010) rightly argues that once the military leverages its power for personal gain or the interests of political allies by involving itself in democratic governance, democracy is jeopardised. In a democracy, the military should remain non-partisan and subordinate to civilian government. However, since the post-independence period, the military's involvement in African political space has challenged these narratives. The AU's response to the military takeover in Africa involves condemning and suspending countries from the continental organisation due to undemocratic and unconstitutional political power changes. However, there has been a cacophony of voices criticising the AU's response to military coups in Africa and the debate about the implications of military coups for Africa's peace and security architecture and the Agenda 2063. Hence, this study interrogates the rise of military coups in Africa and the AU's responses, especially in light of the Agenda 2063, which focuses on "Silencing the Guns" (peace and security), illuminate the governance process and the proliferation of unconstitutional change in government on the continent.

This paper provides insights into the challenges faced by the AU in maintaining political stability and the impact of coups on regional security and governance. The study will also enhance the understanding of the AU's capacity and limitations, contributing to discussions on regional security frameworks and democratic governance in Africa. The paper is divided into four sections, including the introduction and conclusion. The next section analyses the military coup resurgence on the continent. This is followed by an examination of the AU's response to military coups within the context of the democratic and political transition normative framework. The last section assesses the implications of the proliferation of military coups for Agenda 2063. The paper relied on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journals, books, AU reports, and relevant periodicals that discuss the rise of military coups and AU responses.

Coups and Warning Shots in Africa: The Resurgence of Military Intervention in Africa

The growth of military coups in the contemporary international order has been a significant phenomenon met with dismay in Africa (McGowan, 2003; Akinola, 2024; Taruvinga, 2023; Grewal, 2023). Military takeovers in the democratic space of Africa are not a recent development, but the global wave of democratic dispensation and African leaders and institutions like the AU, regional cooperation, and other external institutions have identified democracy and its institutions as an essential parameter necessary for Africa's path to sustainable human and resource development. The military incursion into the politics of Africa did not fit the immediate post-independence expectations of the continent's political space. However, economic development and sustained nation-building were the top priorities for newly independent governments. However, the period of military intrusion into politics was defined by economic crises and political unrest that raged during this time (Darkwa, 2023). Military overthrows, particularly between the 1950s and 1980s, became Africa's most infamous political process and method for governance and administration (Wiking 1983). In 1958, Sudan witnessed one of the early military interventions in African politics. Following the coup in Sudan headed by Major General Wahhab and Lieutenant General Ahmed Abboud, African nations began a phase of military intrusion into politics. Between 1958 and 1980, there were military takeovers in several African nations, including Togo (1963), Sudan (25 May, 1969), Togo (1963, 1969), Dahomey (1963, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1972), Congo Zaire (1965), Central African Republic (1966), Upper Volta (1966), Ghana (1966, 1972, 1978, 1979), Nigeria (1966, 1975), Burundi (1966, 1976), Rwanda (1973), Sierra Leone (1967, 1968), Mali (1968), Somali (1969) (Wiking 1983) until the early 1990s, when another wave of democratic dispensation swept across Africa, the prevalence and multiplication of military coup caused political retrogression.

Table 1: Coups carried out in the world since the 1950s

Region	Coup attempts	Successful	Failed
Africa	220	109	111
East Asia	49	27	22
Europe	17	8	9
Latin America	146	70	76
Middle East	44	21	23
South Asia	16	10	6
Total	492	245	247

Source: Megan & Brian, (2023).

While few have attempted to justify military interventions, including internal and foreign factors, there is no single explanation for the rise in military coups in Africa between the 1950s and the late 1980s (Abang, 2022). Internally, military coups are driven by various African nations' socio-economic and political conditions (Ironya, 2018; Darkwa, 2023; Hendrix and Salehyan, 2017). At the same time, external factors include Cold War-era ideological rivalries, contagion effects, and uprisings against the dominance of external actors or foreign troops in the affairs of sovereign African states (Darkwa, 2023). In the case of internal actors, coup plotters have used various justifications for seizing power over time, including general democratic misrule, corruption, political power struggles among democratic leaders, a lack of encouraging nation-building indicators, political instability, and economic failures (Amoateng, 2019; Chigozie et al., 2022). A thorough examination of the extant literature based on military intervention and the benefits and drawbacks of military coups finds that some researchers continue favouring past military regimes. The harmful effects of military intervention in African politics outweigh the positive, notwithstanding the optimism and exceptionalism that military leaders like Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Moammar Gaddafi of Libya, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt are points of challenging these narratives (Darkwa, 2023).

Since the 1980s, Africa has been actively pursuing democratic governance. This movement gained momentum in the 1990s and 2000s, transitioning from military rule to democratically elected administrations in countries such as Benin, Mali, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, and others (Diamond & Plattner, 2010). As part of their economic strategies, these countries often seek financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Accessing funds through SAPs requires adherence to economic reforms like fiscal discipline, deregulation, privatisation, trade liberalisation and democratic principles (Badi, 2022).

The IMF has increasingly emphasised governance and democratic reforms in its lending conditions. This shift reflects a belief that democratically elected governments are better positioned to implement and sustain economic reforms effectively. The IMF aims to enhance economic programs' stability and long-term success by promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance practices. This approach underscores the recognition of the interconnectedness between political stability, effective governance, and sustainable development across the globe. The notion that the African military had given control

of African political affairs to democratic government and was moving toward sustainable democratic practice was one of the key results of this wave. However, despite what appears to be progress made by African nations in the areas of democratic political participation, election administration, the expansion of civil societies, and public opinion, recent events in some African nations have cast doubt on the idea that the continent's militaries have stepped back from politics. Mali (2012), Guinea Bissau (2012), the Central African Republic (2013), Egypt (2013), Zimbabwe (2017), and Sudan (2019) are just a few of the African nations that have had military coups between 2012 and 2019 (Bukari and Braimah, 2023; Moses and Ige, 2023; Taruvinga, 2023).

However, nine military coups took place in Africa in the three years between 2020 and 2023, raising the question of whether the continent has once again entered a period of political meddling by the military. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keta was ousted in Mali in August 2020, and Colonel Assimi Gota then installed Bah Ndaw. Additionally, a coup attempt in Niger was documented in March 2021. In April 2021, President Idriss Deby of Chad, who had governed for more than 30 years, was overthrown in what was the third coup in the Sahel region (Akinola, 2022). Assimi Gota struck once more in May 2021, ousting President Ndaw and establishing himself as the leader of Mali. Alpha Condé, the president of Guinea, was ousted by Special Forces commander Mamady Doumbouya in September 2021 due to the spillover effect of the waves of coups throughout the region.

Omar al-Bashir was overthrown in 2019 by a military coup led by General Abdel Fattah Burhan, who took office as civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in October 2021. (Akinola, 2022). Lt. Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba also overthrew President Roch Marc Christian Kabore on 24 January 2022, and Captain Ibrahim Traore replaced Lt. Colonel Paul-Henri's administration on 30 September 2022. Similar to how General Brice Oligui overthrew President Ali Bongo Ondimba's government in Gabon on 30 August 2023, Colonel Amadou Abdramane and Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum's democratically elected government in Niger between 26 July and 28 July 2023 (Moses and Ige, 2023). Between 2020 and 2023, there were nine successful military coups. There are also several failed coup attempts in countries like the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe.

Table 2: Eight Coups in Africa, 2020-2023

S/N	African States	Period	Coup Plotters
1	Mali	18-19 August 2020	Colonel Asimi Goita
2	Chad	20 April 2021	
3	Mali	24 May, 2021	Colonel Asimi Goita
4	Guinean	5 September, 2021	Colonel Mamady Doumbouya
5	Sudan	25 October, 2021	General Abdel Fattah al-Burham
6	Burkina Faso	24 January 2022	Lt. Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba
7	Burkina Faso	30 September, 2022	Captain Ibrahim Traore
8	Niger	26-28 July, 2023	Colonel Amadou Abdramane and Gen Abdourahamane Tchiani
9	Gabon	30 August, 2023	General Brice Oligui

Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: Meanwhile, the Chad coup was contested as it was not recognised by the AU. AU, Communique of the 99th Peace and Security Council meeting on considering the fact-finding mission report to the Republic of Chad, 14 May 2021, 16 June 2021 (Peaceau.org, 2021).

Importantly, not all coups can be unequivocally labelled as negative or detrimental; their outcomes vary significantly depending on context and motivations. While coups often arise from governance deficits, insecurity, economic mismanagement, and external influence, they can sometimes lead to positive changes or prevent further deterioration. In Madagascar, the 2009 coup led by Andry Rajoelina against President Marc Ravalomanana exemplifies how political instability and economic hardship can fuel public support for regime change. Ravalomanana's government faced accusations of corruption and authoritarianism, prompting the military to support opposition leaders like Rajoelina, illustrating the politicisation of armed forces in national politics (Atta-Asamoah, 2023).

Similarly, the July 2023 coup in Niger was driven by escalating insecurity and economic mismanagement under President Mohamed Bazoum. The military cited the deteriorating security situation due to Islamist insurgencies as a critical factor, compounded by internal governance deficits and nepotism within the military ranks. The elite presidential guard's proximity to power facilitated the coup, later gaining broader military support. Burkina Faso's 2022 coups reflected similar internal challenges exacerbated by external factors (Ellen, 2023). Persistent security threats from Islamist militants and perceived

government failures to address them led to military dissatisfaction (Atta-Asamoah, 2023). External influences, including anti-colonial sentiments and the involvement of foreign military elements, further complicated the political landscape, supporting the coup dynamics (Muhammad & Onapajo, 2022).

These examples may be situated in how coups can sometimes respond to governance failures and security challenges, but they also underscore their risks. Coups are prone to abuse of power, repression and prolonged instability, leading to human rights violations and economic downturns. Therefore, while acknowledging potential positive outcomes like regime change and temporary stability, it remains essential to prioritise constitutional mechanisms, the rule of law, and inclusive governance to ensure sustainable development and democratic progress.

African Union Democratic Framework and Coup Response

To properly interrogate the AU normative framework for political and democratic transition in Africa, it is crucial to examine the rationale of these eight military coup plotters as the reality of Africa's political economy (Daniel, 2023). At the most interrogative level, the political and economic situation in these African countries has been the primary driver of the military takeover of democratic government. The Nigerien military junta declared in 2023 that the country's economy and security situation were supposedly deteriorating, and France's domination over Niger was at risk (The Conversation, 2023; Daniel, 2023). Despite being the seventh-largest supplier of uranium globally, Niger, the seventh-poorest nation in the world, comes in at number 189 on the UN Human Development Index for 2022. The country is also plagued by the Boko Haram insurgency and other domestic security issues amid the theft of funds and resources. Also, the coup plotters in Gabon cited the fraudulent electoral process and election results by Ali Ondimba Bongo, whose family has been in power for nearly 56 years (sit-tight syndrome) as the primary rationale for the junta's decision.

In Mali, the military coup was justified based on social problems, contested election results, political corruption, and an eight-year violent Islamist insurgency (The Prospect, 2020). The number of contributing factors in Mali has increased the level of poverty. Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba noted the deteriorating internal security situation in Burkina Faso, which he attributed to the country's escalating Islamic insurgency and the democratic government's incapacity to handle the situation effectively (Ornella, 2022). President al-Bashir's overthrow in

Sudan was motivated by the persistent unrest and Bashir's tendency to sit tight. Al-Bashir became the president in 1989 following a military takeover (Mwai, 2022; Daniel, 2023). Regardless of the motivation for the coups, the plotters frequently claim that the primary agenda for seizing power was to reinstate democracy in the country. However, the degree to which the military junta intended to adhere to this pledge is controversial. At the most fundamental level, the cases of Mali and Burkina Faso coups within coups are crucial illustrations that support the idea that military coups can further complicate the governance process, making it challenging to implement democratic governance indicators.

Questions regarding the efficiency of the AU's normative framework for the democratic transition in Africa and its response to military coups in Africa have always been at the forefront of coups d'état discourses in the continent (Powell et al., 2016; Ani, 2021). During the 1950s through the 1980s, which witnessed the proliferation of coups in Africa, the then OAU's non-interference principle in the internal affairs of African states was one of its main flaws. These non-interference principles guided the OAU's responses to domestic crises, including military takeovers and civil wars threatening Africa's democratic space (Ani, 2021). Despite refraining from interfering, the OAU also put much effort into making unconstitutional government changes illegal. The OAU issued the Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government at the 36th Assembly in Lomé, Togo, in July 2000, which saw the adoption of the Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Government Changes (Kieh, 2021). This Declaration strengthened the prohibition of unconstitutional government changes, including military coups, armed rebellions, and the refusal of an incumbent government to cede power to a victorious political party following free, fair, and regular elections.

However, the transformation of the OAU to the AU witnessed a radical departure from the OAU's non-interference principle. The Constitutive Act of the AU set several legal instruments to ensure democratic transitions. Article 3(g) of the AU Constitutive Act urges member states "to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance." Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act went further to prohibit all unconstitutional changes in government, thereby highlighting the continent's zero-tolerance policy on military overthrows of democratic governments. Article 7(h) of the AU Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC) protocol provides sanctions against member states that come to power through unconstitutional changes.

Also, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), adopted at the 8th AU Summit in January 2007, builds on the previous declarations and commitments of the AU Constitutive Act. The ACDEG was meant to be the AU's comprehensive and actionable guidance regarding issues relating to political transition. Article 23 of the ACDEG prohibits:

- (1) Any putsch or coup d'état against a democratically elected government.
- (2) Any intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government.
- (3) Any replacement of a democratically elected government by armed dissidents or rebels.
- (4) Any refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party or candidate after free, fair and regular elections or
- (5) Any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments infringes on the principles of democratic change of government.

In January 2011, African leaders further adopted the African Governance Architecture (AGA) to ensure continent-wide coordination of efforts relating to good governance and democracy at the levels of member states, regional economic communities (RECs) and the AU. The AGA enables African institutions to monitor the governance structures and democratic processes at the national level. The AGA secretariat located at the AU is expected to develop annual reports on the State of Democracy and Governance in Africa to facilitate the monitoring and sharing of best practices in AU Member states, including holding states accountable to democratic values. The AGA's African Governance Platform (AGP) also provides a platform for dialogues among key African stakeholders on governance and democratic issues. The AGA, the ACDEG, the AU Constitutive Act, and its founding declarations have led to more outstanding regional commitment against overt subversions of democracy involving military and armed groups (IDEA, 2018).

Since the resurgence of military coups in Africa, the AU response has been within the purview of these democratic normative frameworks. Immediately, the military of any African country seized power from a democratic government. The AU's immediate response included the condemnation of the coup plotters and demands that political power be returned to democratic government. The AU's response has been described as mechanical and shows the organisation's intolerance to political conditions that are not democratic. In most coup cases, the AU

did not relent in suspending the affected states from its activities pending the restoration of constitutional order. This is in line with Article 30 of the Constitutive Act, which stipulates that “governments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union.” The refusal to return to a constitutional order could result in sanctions targeted at the regime, ranging from visa denial, restrictions on government-to-government contacts and trade restrictions in line with Article 23 of the AU Constitutive Act.

The AU Constitutive Act further allows the AU to intervene to protect democratic principles when unconstitutional changes occur. Notably, Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act notes that the AU has the right “to intervene in a Member State according to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity” as well as a severe threat to legitimate order. The last clause of Article 4(h), “as well as a serious threat to legitimate order,” allows the AU to preempt and intervene in political situations, such as unconstitutional government changes. The AU Assembly could authorise intervention in its member state with a two-thirds majority. The AU has deployed peace operations in member states, with the consent of the state parties, according to Articles 4 (h) and 4(j), which bestows member states rights to request intervention to restore peace and security.

However, AU responses to military coups in Africa have continued to generate debates. In the instance of military coups in Africa, the AU’s strategic response has been a sanctions policy that entails the ‘condemnation, rejection of Unconstitutional Change of Governments’ and the suspension of State involvement till the constitutional government is restored (Organisation of African Unity, 2000a: 4p). The AU also employs various diplomatic pressure and coordination with Member States, regional organisations, and other international actors to ensure the restoration of constitutional rule. The sanctions policy of Unconstitutional Change of Governments’ is entrusted to the AU-PSC. Although the AU response has been considered fit based on the need to ensure that the sanctity of democracy is protected, it has also received wide criticism.

These criticisms are based on the appropriateness of these responses to Africa’s socio-economic and political realities. One of the major criticisms against the AU’s emphasis on the return to constitutional government has been its support for the incumbent government. Mlungisi (2017) contends that when responding to coups, the AU has

always favoured the incumbent government and the preservation of constitutional order regardless of the popularity of the coup. This act has led scholars and policymakers to ask if the AU was a club of incumbents. Apart from the incumbency crisis, the AU response has also been described as inconsistent as democratic leaders clinging to power (sit-tight syndrome), suppressing democratic institutions or amending/manipulating constitutional provisions to cling to power do not receive criticism from the AU even when the military junta seizes power. Also, the AU's response has neglected circumstances that birth military putsch, such as widespread insecurity, corruption, low human development index, poverty and perennial growth and development crises. Chris Akor (2022) criticised the responses of AU and RECs, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to coups. The AU has continued to dialogue, assess and deploy various sanctions and diplomatic pressure to ensure that the nine countries that witnessed military takeovers between 2020 and 2023 are returned to constitutional government; it is evident that some AU dealings with previous coups have shown that the AU's response is not entirely inadequate but has contributed significantly to efforts at institutionalising democracy and constitutional change in government in Africa. Indeed, the AU's response to the Togo (2005) and Mauritania (2005 and 2008) coups prompted new developments that shaped the Union's approach to subsequent coups. During the resolve of both coups, the coup plotters - Faure Gnassingbe, Colonel Mohamed Ould Aziz, and François Bozizé (Central African Republic (CAR) in 2005 yielded to the AU's demands but participated and won under democratic election, thereby using AU-UCG to legitimise their military usurpation of power in the democratic process (Eki, 2021).

Upon the Togo and Mauritania's development, the AU began to change the context of demand for constitutional return. In the instance of Guinea (2008) case, the 15 January 2010 Joint Declaration of Ouagadougou, which established a framework for transition and barred, inter alia, members of the military junta, members of the transitional government, and members of the Defense and Security Forces in active service from participating in the presidential elections (Eki, 2021). This act was also replicated by the AU in Madagascar (2009). Paul Williams (2007) observed that the AU was obliged to "condemn the coup d'état in principle" even though it was aware of the prevailing socio-economic and political condition leading to the coup and local support for the coup plotters. However, from the AU response (in Mauritania in 2005 and 2008 and Niger) to military coups, the emphasis has always been on

ensuring that democratic governance through constitutional means is the primary means of political power acquisition, even if such a coup has domestic support. Hence, it appears that the AU policy systematically refuses to recognise regimes that come to power through coups, irrespective of the precise circumstances. However, the danger of African policy on the restoration of constitutional order is that it may shore up the position of a regime that lacks legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, leading to the allegation of it as a 'club of incumbents'.

In relation to this is the debate whether military coups can advance the state of democracy in African countries where incumbent democratic leaders displaced by these coups have undermined democratic processes and institutions. The Union's response to ensuring the return to constitutional government has also featured in monitoring military transitional government agreements between stakeholders to ensure that proper processes are well laid out and followed, such as the conduct of democratic election, constitutional supremacy and rule of law. The Union's policy has the democratic merit of forcing the junta to promise to hold democratic elections in which they will not participate. However, in the light of recent coups with evidence of leaders that have undermined democratic institutions, it might be more appropriate to grant recognition for a fixed period to a government that comes to power through a coup if the ousted regime had undermined democratic institutions. The new regime appears likely to respect those institutions. As things stand, the AU's failure to adopt a more moderate approach leaves it open to the criticism that it continues to protect incumbent governments rather than advance the cause of democracy and citizenry welfarism on the African continent.

Africa continues to face sustained military coups due to internal and regional factors. Key drivers include widespread governance failures marked by corruption, ineffective handling of socio-economic issues and a decline in public trust in democratic institutions. For instance, citizens' aspirations for democratic change through electoral processes are continually manipulated, as seen in the failed political transitions in Chad, Sudan, Guinea, and Mali, reflecting the resurgence of military coups. These shortcomings create conditions ripe for military intervention, viewed by some as necessary to restore order and accountability. In addition, historical tensions between civilian governments and the military¹, compounded by legacies of past coups, maintain a delicate

¹ The overthrow in Niger resulted from months of conflict between Bazoum and his chief guard over Bazoum's efforts to step out of his predecessor's shadow. Similarly, tensions between military officers (former National Council for the Safeguard of the

power balance favouring military involvement in politics. Instances of civilian leadership crises, such as corruption scandals or electoral fraud, further incentivise military factions to intervene, often under the pretext of safeguarding national stability. Complicating matters are some of the ongoing challenges like Islamist insurgencies in most of the African countries, for instance, Mali, weakness in dealing with the Islamist threat was a factor in the 2021 takeover, which strained governmental capacity and legitimacy (Hubert, 2023, p.5).

Despite the efforts of regional bodies such as the AU, they face substantial challenges in effectively addressing military coups despite having robust legal frameworks designed to prevent unconstitutional government changes. Investments in policies like the ACDEG and the AU Constitutive Act have not fully empowered the AU to deter coups due to several factors. The AU and RECs often react rather than act proactively, limiting their ability to predict and prevent coup attempts. While responses have condemned coups, they have relied mainly on economic sanctions as per Article 30 of the AU Constitutive Act. However, these sanctions and the refusal to recognise coup-led regimes no longer deter such actions (Hubert, 2023, 6). This reactive stance diminishes their effectiveness in forestalling coups and undermines the credibility of their anti-coup norms, exacerbated by uneven enforcement and sanctions among member states. Divergent approaches between the AU and RECs further complicate coordinated responses to coup incidents, reflecting varied regional contexts and internal political dynamics that weaken collective efforts. (Hubert, 2023)

Moreover, the resurgence of military involvement in African politics challenges continental and regional efforts to uphold democratic governance. Increasing military intervention, often justified by governance failures or security threats, blurs distinctions between anti-coup principles and pragmatic governance strategies. The AU's PSC and RECs struggle to hold member states accountable amid these complexities, emphasising democratic accountability and conflict resolution while contending with enduring military-political influence (Hubert, 2023). It is pertinent to note that the AU must reassess its responses to the resurgence of military coups in Africa, balancing anti-coup principles with pragmatic governance approaches. Enhanced coherence, proactive measures, and consistent enforcement are essential for the AU and RECs to effectively promote democratic governance and

Homeland leaders) and Bah Ndaw's transitional government contributed to the 2021 coup in Mali led by Assimi Goïta.

peace across the continent. Hence, addressing entrenched military influence requires institutional reforms and strengthened regional cooperation to bolster democratic institutions and mitigate socio-economic instability.

Silencing the Guns of Military Coups: The Complexities of Coups for Agenda 2063

In 2013, the AU celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. It became imperative to address some of the challenges and successes recorded in the past fifty years by the union and Africa and develop a plan for moving the continent forward. Thus, the AU's fifty-year plan came up due to this backdrop. This was tagged the "2063 Agenda" equally known as "Africa We Want." Agenda 2063 is an ambitious and people-oriented continental vision with a carefully crafted action plan to position Africa for growth over the next 50 years. It incorporates lessons and experiences from Africa's past (Michael, 2018). It equally took into cognisance successes and challenges recorded in the past fifty years in the African continent since the formation of the union in 1963.

The Agenda 2063 was centred on a shared strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development and a global strategy to optimise Africa's resources for all Africans. Seven well-articulated aspirations were drafted by the committee that was set up to draft a workable plan to position Africa in global and world affairs and make the continent a force to be reckoned with. These aspirations were drawn from the eight priorities of the 50th anniversary solemn declarations. These eight priorities are African Identity and Renaissance; Continuing the struggle against colonialism (neo) and the right to self-determination; The Integration Agenda; the Agenda for Social and Economic Development; Peace and Security Agenda; Democratic Governance; Determining Africa's Destiny; and Africa's Place in the World. Agenda 2063 also emphasised the need to build on existing frameworks and integrating the flagship programs in the first ten years' implementation plan. These plans, as outlined in the AU framework documents, are anchored on The Integrated High-Speed Train Network; African Virtual and e-University; African Commodity Strategy, Annual African Forum; Continental Free Trade Areas; A Single African Airspace; African Passport and Free Movement of People; Continental Financial Institutions; The Grand Inga Dam Project; The Pan African e-Network; Silencing the Guns and Outer Space.

As the above formed the basis of the AU Agenda 2063, the resurgence of military coups is becoming an emerging stumbling block to the realisation of Agenda 2063. The AU's inability to achieve the "Silencing the Guns by 2020" target underscores the magnitude of the challenge posed by conflicts and instability in Africa. Despite the Declaration by African leaders of their commitment to ending all forms of conflict and silencing the guns on the continent postponed to 2030, the resurgence of military coups alongside other existing armed conflicts prompts a sobering reflection on whether the aspiration for "a peaceful and secure Africa" is a realistic goal or merely an unattainable dream. To achieve its vision of a "peaceful and secure Africa," as outlined in Agenda 2063, the AU must confront the underlying factors that give rise to conflicts. Notably, the AU deserves commendation for recognising Africa's persistent armed conflict and unconstitutional government changes, notably through military coups, as an impediment to Africa's growth and development. The AU's commitment to eradicating this recurring problem is essential for fostering socio-economic development across the continent. Among the implications of military coups in Africa is political instability (Mushoriwa, 2023).

Military coups often create a power vacuum and political instability, which terrorists, insurgents, and other violent non-state actors' groups quickly exploit. This disruptive interruption of governance and security apparatus provides fertile ground for these groups to gain influence and expand their activities, a phenomenon prominently observed in the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions. The internal political challenges within countries experiencing military coups result in a leadership vacuum, a detrimental state of affairs that undermines states' capacity and determination to combat the security threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism. The absence of stable and effective governance weakens the ability to respond robustly to these pressing security concerns (Méryl & Mathis, 2023).

Burkina Faso, for instance, faces a significant challenge in the form of a growing terrorism and insurgency threat within its borders. According to the 2023 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) Reports, terrorism caused 1,135 deaths in 2022. Religious fundamentalism has afflicted the Sahel region for an extended period but has become a central hub for terrorism. In recent years, Burkina Faso has emerged as a focal point of this threat. In January and September 2022, the military coups cited this terrorism threat as a primary reason for their actions (Hardaou, 2023). By September 2022, non-state armed groups had gained control over 40 per cent of Burkina Faso, highlighting the severity of the issue. The recurring

notion in Burkina Faso that crises can be resolved through the forceful removal of governing parties has significantly undermined the very concept of stable governance. While some coups, such as Sankara's, have led to positive changes like social campaigns, their overall nature has inflicted considerable damage and instability, ultimately leading to further depositions. In recent years, this fragility has been exacerbated by the surge of terrorism in the Sahel region. The combined impact of military coups and the growth of terrorism creates a complex security challenge for the affected nations and the broader African continent.

Also, Niger, one of the most terrorist-inflicted states in the Sahel region, has been embroiled in a complex security landscape due to a coup. For instance, it faces the challenges of multiple Boko Haram insurgents, ISIS and other Islamic State-affiliated groups operating within the Sahel and Lake Chad regions. This precarious security situation can be exacerbated by military coups, potentially further destabilising the region and impeding efforts to counter terrorism and insecurity. According to the GTI 2023 report, the regions near Burkina Faso's borders with Niger, Benin and Mali experienced the most terror attacks, accounting for 71 per cent of all attacks in 2022.

Military coup implications for Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) are profound and multifaceted. The AfCFTA represents a critical component of the broader Agenda 2063, aimed at creating a single market for goods and services, stimulating economic growth, and enhancing regional integration across the continent. However, military takeovers in several African countries have introduced challenges that threaten the successful implementation of the AfCFTA and the broader agenda. The military coups in Africa have introduced substantial challenges to the realisation of Agenda 2063, with specific consequences for implementing the AfCFTA successfully. These coups have led to political instability, the emergence of regional factions, uncertainties about membership, diminished political support, and economic sanctions that isolate countries from intra-African trade. Addressing these challenges and restoring political stability is imperative to achieve the ambitious goals of the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 (Akinwumi, 2023).

Conclusion

The article provides a brief survey about the state of African continental building within the context of the resurgence and proliferation of military coups in Africa and the role of the AU. Military coups in Africa are not a

new phenomenon. Between the 1950s and 1980s, the continent witnessed a series of military takeovers of power, contributing to democratic retrogression. However, with the wave of democracy that swept across several African countries in the 1990s and 2000s, the narratives have centred on the fact that the military has withdrawn from Africa's civil and political space. Hence, the dominant narratives have always emphasised Africa's path to sustainable democratic practices that meet global best practices. However, recent events in the last decade have witnessed the resurgence of military coups, proliferation of various African countries' political structures and endangering the state of democracy in Africa. However, under the auspices of the Union, Africa has pursued a sustainable framework to achieve a peaceful and secure Africa over the years. However, the rise of military coups, among other insecurity crises, has continued to hamper the AU's progressive thoughts.

The AU usually condemn military coups, suspends the military junta government, and calls for the return of power to the democratic government. In contrast, the causes of the coups are considered secondary in state affairs and have received wide criticism. Although the Union's position about coups may remain inadequate given the realities of the African political economy, which has served as rationale and justification for the military, the organisation's emphasis on recognising only democratic government and condemning unconstitutional change remains appropriate. It has also supervised transitional government and applied diplomatic pressure to ensure the military junta returned power to a democratic government. Military coups hamper Agenda 2063 in several ways, including prolongation of terrorism and insurgency, given the effects on the political and security sector, and affecting continental free trade agreement by militarising the movement of persons, goods and services, among several others. Hence, the AU, pursuing a continental building project, must reinforce the existing normative framework to ensure that unconstitutional changes in government remain an aberration in Africa's political and governance space.

References

- African Union. (2014). Silencing the guns, owning the future: Realising a conflict-free Africa, October 21-23. <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/arusha-au-high-level-retreat-report-web.pdf>.
- Akinola, A. O. (Ed.). (2024). *The Resurgence of Military Coups and Democratic Relapse in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Akinola, A. O. (2020) The coup in Mali and the intelligence fiascos of Ecowas, the AU, the UN and France, *Daily Maverick*, 14 September, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-14-the-coup-in-mali-and-the-intelligence-fiascos-of-ecowas-the-au-the-un-and-france/>
- Akinpelu O. O. & Adebuseyi I. A. (2011). Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in Akinpelu O. Olutayo, Adebuseyi I. Adeniran, eds., *Regional Economic Communities: Exploring the Process of Socio-economic Integration in Africa*, CODESRIA, Dakar.
- Akinwumi, O. (2023). The Effect of Recent Coups in Africa on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, 20 September. <https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/analysis/effect-recent-coups-africa-african-continental-free-trade-agreement>.
- Akor, C. (2022). How can the AU and ECOWAS respond to the spate of coups in Africa? <https://businessday.ng/columnist/article/how-can-the-au-and-ecowas-respond-to-the-spate-of-coups-in-africa/>
- Amani Africa. (2020). Critical Appraisal of the Agenda of Silencing the Guns in Africa. Policy Brief 3.
- Amani Africa. (2020). Critical Appraisal of the Agenda of Silencing the Guns in Africa. Policy Brief 3.
- Amoateng, E. N. (2022). Military coups in Africa: A continuation of politics by other means? *Conflict Trends*, 2022(1), 3-10.
- Ani, N. C. (2021). Coup or not coup: The African Union and the dilemma of “popular uprisings” in Africa. *Democracy and Security*, 17(3), 257-277.
- Aning, K., & Bjarnesen, J. (2024). Ecowas' dilemma: balancing principles and pragmatism: West Africa's regional bloc faces disintegration after failed sanctions against military regimes.
- Atta-Asamoah, A. (2023). Africa's three waves of coups. *ISS Today*, 20 October. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-three-waves-of-coups>

- Bebington, K. (2021). African Coups and Silencing the Guns Agenda in 2021. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/african-coups-and-silencing-the-guns-agenda-in-2021/>
- Chigozie, C. F., & Oyinmiebi, P. T. (2022). Resurgence of Military Coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5, 52-64.
- Chikwanha, A. B. (2020). Silencing the guns. *Africa Insight*, 50(1), 6-24.
- Daniel Baltoi (2023). A deeper look into the West African Coup. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/01/a-deeper-look-into-the-west-african-coup-wave/>
- Darkwa, S. K. (2023). Military Coup D'états in Africa: A Survey. In *The Political Impact of African Military Leaders: Soldiers as Intellectuals, Nationalists, Pan-Africanists, and Statesmen*, 21-37. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- DeGhetto, K., Gray, J. R., & Kiggundu, M. N. (2016). The African Union's Agenda 2063: Aspirations, challenges, and opportunities for management research. *Africa Journal of Management*, 2(1), 93-116.
- Diamond, L., & Plattner, M. F. (Eds.). (2010). *Democratisation in Africa: Progress and retreat*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Durokifa, A. A. (2023). Security, Africa's Development and Agenda 2063: Contribution and Contradiction. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 12(1).
- Eki Y. Omorogbe. (2021). A Club of Incumbents? The African Union and Coups d'Etat, 44 *Vanderbilt Law Review* 123, <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vjtl/vol44/iss1/3>
- Ellen, I. (2023). What's behind Africa's recent coups, Not all coups are the same but they do have some important commonalities. VO. <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/9/10/23866908/africa-coup-gabon-niger-mali-burkina-faso>.
- Esther Yiadom (2023). Causes and consequences of military takeover in Niger. <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/08/10/causes-and-consequences-of-military-takeover-in-niger/>
- Gowreesunkar, V. (2019). African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and tourism development in Africa: contribution, contradiction and implications. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 5(2), 288-300.
- Grewal, S. (2023). Military Repression and Restraint in Algeria. *American Political Science Review*, 1-16.
- Grütjen, K. (2024). *Current developments in West Africa's regional integration: Challenges for the future design of foreign and development policy* (No. 6/2024). IDOS Policy Brief.

- Hardaou, S. (2023). A history of insurgencies: the case of Burkina Faso. 4 October. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/2023/10/04/a-history-of-insurgencies-the-case-of-burkina-faso/>.
- Hendrix, C. S., & Salehyan, I. (2017). A house divided: Threat perception, military factionalism, and repression in Africa. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61(8), 1653-1681.
- Hubert K. (2023). Coups are back in Africa: what are continental and regional responses missing? Institute of Security Studies (ISS), Policy Brief. <https://issafrica.org/research/policy-briefs/coups-are-back-in-africa-what-are-continental-and-regional-responses-missing>.
- Institute for Security Studies-Peace and Security Council Report. (2023). Is the AU failing coup countries? <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/is-the-au-failing-coup-countries>
- Iroanya, R. O. (2018). Coups and counter coups in Africa. *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development*, 243-258.
- Karsen, J. (2020). Silencing the guns in Africa: Achievements and stumbling blocks. Africa Portal. <https://www.africaportal.org/features/silencing-guns-africa-achievements-and-stumbling-blocks/>.
- Khadiagala, G. (2015). Silencing the Guns: Strengthening Governance to Prevent, Manage, and Resolve Conflicts in Africa, New York, International Peace Institute, 2.
- Kieh Jr, G. K. (2021). The African Union's Anti-Coup Regime. *Democratisation and Military Coups in Africa: Post-1990 Political Conflicts*, 191.
- Muhammad, D. S. & Onapajo, H. (2022). Why West Africa has had so many coups and how to prevent more. *The Conversation*, 15 February. <https://theconversation.com/why-west-africa-has-had-so-many-coups-and-how-to-prevent-more-176577>.
- Mbara, G.C. & Graham, S. (2023) Dissecting the impact of recent coups in Africa on democracy and good governance. *African Renaissance*, 20(2):91-115.
- McGowan, P. J. (2003). African military coups d'état, 1956–2001: frequency, trends and distribution. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41(3), 339-370.
- Megan, D. & Brian, W. (2023). By The Numbers: Coups in Africa. *VOA*, 3 October. <https://projects.voanews.com/african-coups/>.
- Méryl, D. & Mathis, B. (2023). "Unravelling the Niger coup and its implication for violent extremism in the Sahel. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), 4 August. <https://www.icct.nl/publication/unravelling-niger-coup-and-its-implications-violent-extremism-sahel>.

- Mlambo, V. H. (2021). Silencing the guns in Africa beyond 2020: Challenges from a governance and political perspective. *Cogent Social Sciences* 1;7(1):1995222.
- Moderan, O & Koné. F.H. (2022). What caused the coup in Burkina Faso? *ISS Today*, 3 February. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-caused-the-coup-in-burkina-faso>
- Moses, I. K., & Ige, T. S. (2023). Political Instability in Africa; An Account of The 2023 Niger Coup. *Best Journal of Innovation in Science, Research and Development*, 2(8), 109-111.
- Mules, I. (2019). Stemming the flow of illicit arms in Africa. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/stemming-the-flow-of-illicit-arms-in-africa/a-49761552>.
- Musau, Z. (2020). Silencing the guns in Africa by 2020 African Union's 2020. Africa Renewal. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2019-march-2020/silencing-guns-africa-2020>.
- Mushoriwa, L. (2023). The African Union's quest for a "peaceful and secure Africa": An assessment of Aspiration Four of Agenda 2063. *Law, Democracy and Development*, 27, 55-92.
- Mwai, P. (2022). Are military takeovers on the rise in Africa? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46783600>
- Okumu, W., Atta-Asamoah, A., & Sharamo, R. D. (2020). Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020: Achievements, opportunities and challenges. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/monograph-203-3.pdf>.
- Phakathi, M. (2018). An analysis of the Responses of the African Union to the coup in Burkina Faso (2015) and Zimbabwe (2017). *Journal of African Union Studies*, 7(3), 129-145.
- Powell, J., Lasley, T., & Schiel, R. (2016). Combating Coups d'état in Africa, 1950–2014. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 51, 482-502.
- Rao, P. (2017). Gambia's democracy survives political turbulence. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-july-2017/gambia%E2%80%99s-democracy-survives-political-turbulence>
- Taruvunga, G. R. (2023). The Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa: The Case of West Africa and the Sahel. In Akinola, Adeoye, *Contemporary Issues on Governance, Conflict and Security in Africa* (pp. 147-157). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). (2015). Silencing the Guns, Owing the Future: Realising a Conflict-free Africa. Process Litho, Durban, South Africa

- The Conversation. (2023). What caused the coup in Niger? An expert outlines three driving factors. 31 July, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/what-caused-the-coup-in-niger-an-expert-outlines-three-driving-factors-210721>
- The Prospect (24 August, 2020). Behind the causes of the coup in Mali—and what happens next. <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/40504/behind-the-causes-of-the-coup-in-maliand-what-happens-next>
- Thomson, A. (2010), an introduction to African politics, 3rd Edition, London and New York: Routledge.
- Wiking, S. (1983). *Military Coups in Sub-Saharan Africa: how to justify illegal assumptions of power*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Williams, P. (2007); *From Non-Intervention to Non-Indifference: The Origins and Development of the African Union's Security Culture*, 106 AFR. AFF. 252, 271
- Williams, P. D. (2011). *The African Union's conflict management capabilities*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.