

The resurgence of military coups and implications for democratic stability in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract: Since the late 1980s, with no choice, there has been a strong wave of democracy and democratization in the continent with most of African countries beginning to move away from one-party or military dictatorships to multiparty democratic rule. There have been coup d'états on the African continent since the 1960s. However, the aim of this research is to examine the recent resurgence and growth of coups which is contrary to the consolidation and stability of democracy in Africa. It seeks to present the main trajectory of military coup d'états in sub-Saharan Africa focusing on its implication to democratic stability in the region. To achieve this, researchers engage a qualitative research method with in-depth assessment of coups and their impact on the growth in sub-Saharan Africa. The results of this research show that recent military takeovers have brought attention to a troubling trend in African politics: a rise in the use of unconstitutional methods to change governments. Military coups are to certain extent direct responses to citizens' complaints considering bad governance, deteriorating citizens' living conditions, and rising levels of insecurity. This research, therefore, concludes that military coups expose sub-Saharan African to human rights violations. Due to these unpleasant conditions of sub-Saharan polity, men in uniform align to the view that it is through coups that they can oust out this civilian governments that have mutilated constitutions to allow them to rule their countries without term limit.

Keywords: Coups, democratic stability, military resurgence, Sub-Saharan Africa.

INTRODUCTION

During the euphoric wave of independence in the 1960s, often referred to as the "year of Africa" many nation-states in Africa deemed it wise to adopt the political culture, norms, and institutions of their former colonial masters, hence they practiced the Western democratic system of governance which at that time became the "hot cake" for most African nation-states. Africans, however, needed time to learn and acclimate to the system because it was "foreign" to them politically.

Thus, this new internally adopted system of democratic governance was soon going to wane amidst a decayed political system, bad governance, economic crisis, rising levels of poverty, and insecurity that gave the impetus for the military men to usurp political power through unconstitutional means. The first military coup took place in 1952 in Egypt, it did not overthrow a democratically elected government but rather a constitutional monarchy. Egypt was the first African nation to experience a military takeover of power. Nevertheless, the Egyptian coup inspired several other coups against democratic governments on the continent, starting with Sudan in 1958, Ethiopia in 1960, Zaire (Kinshasa) in 1960, Togo in 1963, Congo (Brazzaville) in 1963, Benin (Dahomey) in 1963, Gabon in 1964, Algeria in 1965, Burundi in 1965, the Central African Republic in 1966, Burkina Faso (Upper Volta) in 1966, Ghana in



1966, Nigeria in 1966, Sierra Leone in 1967, Mali in 1968, Libya in 1969, Somalia in 1969, etc. (First, 1970). Since then, military takeovers have remained an enduring feature of Africa's political landscape (Eshiet, 2022).

Moreover, in the 20th and 21st centuries, Africa experienced more political coups or military interventions than any other continent (Falola, 2022). From historical context, coups started gaining traction in Africa in the 1960s, right after independence. Additionally, the continent has seen more than 200 coups to date, both successful and unsuccessful. As a result, Africa is a continent engulfed with frequent coups, with around 41 governments on the continent having either seen unsuccessful or successful coups. Recent coups in Africa have been generally attributed to a few problems, including a lack of democratic practice, poor leadership, misgovernance, economic crisis, the greed of the military, youth, and citizen discontent.

African military coups have primarily occurred in West Africa. Between 1960 and 1969, during the early postcolonial era of Africa, the region was responsible for 51.3% of coups. From 1970 to 1989, 49.5%, and from 1990 to 2010, a startling 53.7% of coups were committed there. Out of the 200 coups that have occurred in Africa, West Africa has been the scene of 104 (including unsuccessful and successful) coups. It has been disturbing to see the rise of coups across Africa, particularly in West Africa, in the current.

Decentralization of growth is frequently the goal of democratization, and nations throughout the world use it as an important barometer of effective governance (Rahayu, 2023). The failure to strengthen and develop democratic gains in sub-Saharan and western Africa has been linked to this uptick in coups in the region (Powell et al., 2019). There are many instances of bad governance in the region, including corruption, a lack of free, fair, and legitimate elections, and escalating security issues, among other things. It is no longer shocking that the populace welcomes the military's return to politics. Numerous appeals on the international world, in particular regional bodies like ECOWAS, to address this long-perpetuating threats to democratic rule, and political upheaval in the subregion have been made as a result of the worrisome and spreading nature of these coups in sub-Saharan Africa. The subregional body (ECOWAS) has launched and adopted various measures in an effort to respond to coups. These procedures include the levying of financial penalties, the breaking off of diplomatic relationships, the expulsion of military officials from the international community, etc. For ECOWAS, the resurgence of coups in West Africa has various political, economic, and security repercussions.

The ability of ECOWAS to uphold democracy in the sub-region is one obvious implication. It is argued that the increasing occurrence of coups in sub-Saharan Africa is an indication that democracy has continued to down the spiral (Harkness, 2016).

The novelty of this research is to examine the resurgence of military in sub-Saharan Africa and its effects on democracy. This is quite special considering the current state of political upheaval in this subregion as spearheaded by military interventions through toppling democratically elected governments.

The popularity of military governments in sub-Saharan Africa started to decline in the 1990s, and the wind of democratization began to blow over the continent. As a result, from three in 1990 to 24 in 2008, more countries transitioned to democracy (Plessis et al., 2015). Similar to this, coups started happening less frequently.

This is due to a variety of elements. First, years of military misrule made the general public aware that the military was never the “Messiah” and that civilian regimes might have performed better if they had been given the opportunity to rule for an extended period of time, during which they could have learned the nuances of good governance. Public support for coups started to decline as a result of this new perspective, and coups d'état were no longer welcomed as enthusiastically as before. People agitated for a rapid change to civil rule rather than applauding coup plotters. Coup plotters also became cognizant of this new reaction and changed their behavior. They became less swift to take over government at the slightest chance and whenever they did, referred to themselves as a ‘transitional government’, with a promise to return to civilian rule within a short time.

This clearly differs from earlier times when military leaders had no qualms about carrying out coups because they were in style. Second, military coups have been discouraged by a shift in continental and regional organizations' attitudes toward an illegitimate takeover of power. Although the 1963 OAU Charter, which established the concept of non-interference, declared military coups to be illegal, the OAU at the time was reluctant to act decisively when coups d'état occurred due to its adherence to this principle. As a result, the OAU typically recognized whatever government had actual control over the region and let that government speak on behalf of its state inside the organization. The number of coups on the continent increased as a result of this action. The African Union (AU), which succeeded it, has been less tolerant of illegitimate coups d'état. Broad guidelines for promoting democracy and good governance are outlined in the AU's Constitutive Act (2001) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (2007 edition), which also forbids unconstitutional changes to government.

However, in a military dictatorship, the army plays the most significant role on stage and has less control over its authority, which can lead to kleptocratic regimes, where the dictator can amass vast amounts of wealth and ensure his survival through the divide-and-conquer strategy (Adetiloye & Adekunle, 2013). There are three prominent viewpoints in the literature on military control in Africa. Some believe that the military is the most well-organized organization and that it can effectively manage social change in

underdeveloped nations. This is dependent on the military institution's ability to maintain the required stability for economic growth given its high level of discipline.

On the contrary, Others contend that revolution is the only way to achieve growth and reform, which is why they see this as the main barrier to change in developing countries. This is due to the military institution's inherent conservatism and oligarchy, which always supports the center when it comes to maintaining the status quo because it serves their class interests. The final viewpoint holds that the military is unable to put forth genuine efforts to create long-lasting political institutions. According to Huntington (1969), he views the military as conservative and ineffective. The 1960s were previously referred to as the "military decade in Africa," as the continent was rife with coups at the time (Adetiloye & Adekunle, 2013).

The dynamics were changed following the third wave of democratic wind that swept most of these regimes away and ushered in regimes that could lay claim to power through multi-party electoral processes. These changes witnessed at the national political levels also played out in international relations. Apart from development partners insisting that African countries must democratize to have access to funds, regional institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS and the African Union AU have enshrined it in their protocol and charter that only democratically elected officials would be allowed to have dealings with the institutions respectively.

The political history sub-Saharan Africa has a lengthy, arduous, and perilous history of military coups. Nearly all of Africa's newly independent countries have seen military coups and political interference rapidly replace civil government. Between 1950 and 2010, 36.5 percent of all coups worldwide occurred in Africa. Military officers involved in coups in so as to remove a leader who had been in power for an extended period of time, replacing the democratic method of selecting leaders in several countries (F.C. & T.O., 2022).

African politics have continued to be marked by instability since the continent gained independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While there are three basic kinds of instability—social, political, and economic—the focus in the African setting frequently centers on political instability brought on by coups and countercoups. These three types of instability are intricately intertwined and reinforce one another. The prevailing premise, however, seems to be that political instability in Africa, as evidenced by the repeated overthrow of governments, has a detrimental effect on democratic governance as well as the social and economic stability of African states (Iroanya, 2018).

Moreover, other assumptions underscore the military's intervention and involvement in African politics and governance. The rationale that portrays the military as the "saviours" of the people through political and economic stabilization put forward many is rather false. Military coups, according to academics, are the result of the military's greed and desire to share state riches with the civilian population.

Therefore, they contend that the military's professional duty of preserving territorial integrity has been interfered with and distracted by the primitive looting of state resources that have engulfed and produced coups.

The threat of democratic paralysis in the subregion is a key consequence of the uprisings and military takeovers that are occurring more frequently in sub-Saharan Africa. Democracy is incompatible with the use of the military in government. The military proposes and carries out policies that advance democracy backward in an effort to maintain stability. The prior attempts at democratic progress have been undermined by actions like suspending the constitution, dissolving parliaments (people's representatives), and the climate of fear they foster for civil society engagement.

The failure of African governments to preserve democratic rule and promote its consolidation in the polity is both a cause and an effect of coups in the continent. As democracy fails, the resurgence of coups in sub-Saharan Africa is a result of the region's (so-called democratic nations') failing to ensure that civilian government keeps the promise of preventing autocracy in governance, which causes the fourth democratic wave between the 1990s and the present. In fact, it is observed that democratic elections, particularly in Nigeria and Africa, are a formula for authoritarianism and have established civilian impunity.

Ultimately, the military gets involved in politics because it has the power to. Soldiers are in charge of the state's most powerful institutions in terms of coercive power. They are the ones with immediate access to the tools of state violence, after all. Although many coups are bloodless, this should not be used as an excuse to conceal the fact that the military has the organizational skills and technological capabilities to confront any other party within the state, or even within civil society. Therefore, few can stop the military if it is willing to employ violence to achieve its political objectives. However, this fact cannot alone explain why military coups have taken place so frequently in Africa. Most modern states around the world keep militaries, but only a few of these have violated their professional ethics of non-intervention. For this reason, it is contended that in order to persuade the military to intervene, there must be the necessary socio-political conditions in addition to the capability to do so.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted on the sub-Saharan region of Africa. These countries are among others include Burkina Faso, Mali and Republic of Niger to represent differences, impacts and the trajectory of Africa's politics and its orientation to geopolitics as France and other States take interest in these current political shenanigans. During President Emmanuel Macron's leadership, the notion of multilateralism as a cornerstone of the international order frequently served as the foundation of French foreign policy discourse. However, the French strategy was not driven by idealistic principles. The Fifth Republic's ties to Africa should be strengthened on a worldwide scale, according to the French president



(Magadeev, 2022). It is not a coincidence that Africa is constantly on the radar of international institutions, like the United Nations Security Council, who are looking for a long-lasting solution to stop the barrels of guns and put democratic governance systems in place in Africa, given the continent's well-known political instability and ongoing coups (Musavengane & Zhou, 2021). However, this well-thought approach is counteracted by the unprecedented emerging coups.

Prior to this current phase of democratic upheaval, the post-colonial African states were victims of coups starting from the 1960s. The imperialist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started to wane after the Second World War. The Africans separated themselves from the Whites by working together and fighting for their rights. Despite achieving independence, they were unable to comprehend that it was simply a cunning power exchange between their departing overlords and a select group of their loyal descendants. Africa's colonial history is comparable to that of other former colonies including India, China, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Their history of inequality and oppression is equal. African colonial history began with the Berlin conference on November 13, 1884, and continued through February 26, 1885 (Shafiqur Rahaman, 2017). It is this well-calculated stratagem that paves the way to not only linguistically divided Africa but also a continent believed to be suffering armed conflicts from this Berlin conference after more than a century ago.

This research's objective is to present the dominant trajectory of military coup d' etats in Sub-Saharan Africa focusing on its implication to democratic stability in the region. Sub-Saharan Africa saw a sharp rise in the number of military coups between 2020 and 2022. The continent experienced a decline in democracy and an increase in authoritarianism because of the military incursions in Guinea (September 2021), Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Chad (April 2021), Sudan (April 2019 and October 2021), and Burkina Faso (January 2022). Additionally, coup attempts occurred in Guinea Bissau (February 2022) and Niger (March 2021)(Elischer & Lawrance, 2022a). The Gambia, the smallest mainland country of Africa, tucked in the extreme west of the continent and bounded by the North Atlantic Ocean and the Republic of Senegal also had its moment of a failed coup on 20 December 2022. However, Republic of Niger did not relent as they military launched a successful one on 26 July 2023. Gabon is currently the new kid on the block as the military also mounted a successful coup d' etat thereby ousted out President Ali Bongo Ondimba on 30 August 2023.

This study applies a qualitative research method. Desk study was conducted using documents that are relevant to the emergence of military coups in sub-Saharan Africa. Journal articles are the principal materials that are engaged during this task and are being supported by books, newspapers, reports and other materials that are germane to it. These data were processed through analysis and discussion which help in reaching an informed conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In almost all the successful coups committed in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the juntas promised to return their respective countries to civil and democratic rule. In the aftermath of most coups in sub-Saharan Africa, limitation of freedom of expression of the citizenry (Nkinyangi, 1991). All military takeovers have been examined to this point in an anti-democratic perspective in academic legal literature. That traditional framework views military coups as wholly anti-democratic and presupposes that all coups are carried out by militaries with a desire for power who want to overthrow established governments to rule their countries eternally. According to the dominant theory, all military coups represent a threat to legitimacy, stability, and democracy (Varol, 2012). While Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”, military governments are for long time in sub-Saharan Africa endeavour to limit this right not in accordance with the dictates of the constitutions.

Every political figurehead must figure out a way to maintain their position. This can be especially true for dictators, who frequently lack the ability to defend their reign with electoral legitimacy and who live in continual fear of being overthrown by both the populace and the elites. Dictators can use repression as a technique of repression to lessen these risks. The characteristic of autocratic rule is repression. It is a method of sociopolitical repression employed by authorities against people living in their territory to stop certain behaviours and viewpoints deemed dangerous to the political system (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014). Research show that military strongmen and military governments are more likely than civilian dictatorships to violate human rights and spark civil conflicts (Geddes et al., 2014). Military-led regimes are shockingly weak, despite their expertise in the use of force. Of course, officers who take over countries continue to have influence over both the personnel who wield weapons and the weapons themselves. Thus, they would have unique advantages when it comes to coercive power. Compared to other ruling parties, the capacity to intimidate opponents into submission and to rely on force to overcome opposition (Svolik, 2013).

Also, in practice, effective term restrictions are less common in sub-Saharan Africa than they are in constitutional documents. An examination of the incumbency bias follows, demonstrating that transfers of power occur more frequently when an incumbent is not present but that incumbents who run frequently win elections (Reyntjens, 2020). When the military take over governments, the tendency for them to relinquish power is very low even after returning to civilian rule. This is manifested in twenty-two years of Yahya Jammeh’s rule in The Gambia, the continuous rule of Paul Kagame in Rwanda since 1994, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni in Uganda since 1986, and the octogenarian Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea since 1979 – the second-longest serving president consecutively-serving current non-royal national leader in the world (after Paul Biya in Cameroon).



In Africa, military interventions are still common. Only in the twenty-first century have more than fifteen coups been executed successfully (Rabinowitz & Jargowsky, 2018). Along with the introduction of multi-party elections, the sub-Saharan wave of democratic changes in the 1990s also included term-limit restrictions for presidency. In a continent where personal power has a long history, presidential term limits are essential for the advancement of democracy. However, the exploitation of this constitutional edict has developed into a recurrent method of “autocratization”, whereby aspirant overstayers from sub-Saharan Africa weaken executive restraints, contaminate political competition, and restrict the ability of voters to pick their leaders (Cassani, 2021).

Approximately 220 successful and attempted coups occurred in Africa between January 1950 and July 2023, according to the following graph, accounting for nearly half (44 percent) of all coup attempts globally. Sudan has experienced the most coups d'état among African nations since 1950, with a total of 17, including unsuccessful attempts. Burundi (11), Ghana, and Sierra Leone (10) are the nations with the most coup attempts since the middle of the 20th century, followed by Sudan (Fleck, 2023). Political scientists over the past decades tried to understand and explain the causes of this ordeal as economies of states continue to totter. Even Senegal appears to be in a different pantheon in terms of being vindicated from series of coup d' etats in the Sub-Saharan Africa is had had its share of a failed coup 1962 – barely two years after regaining its political independence (McGowan, 2003). It has been suggested that perhaps it is the political orientation of Senegal from France that saves it from coups or their cultural framework that vindicate them.

However, this postulation does not in any way establish a profound truth. First, as regards the erstwhile French colonial state, Senegal is the only exempted one from successful coups. In fact, majority of coup d' etats occurred in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa. Many African nations' governmental administrations still bear the scars of colonial control. Direct rule refers to a concentration of power (in the colonizer's or “mother” country) at one location. French and Belgian models of government were thus imposed on the native African population, without considering the way the local populations' way of life or what they had previously selected to control and manage their daily activities (Lukamba & Molokwane, 2017).

Despite the numerous and varied factors that animated the emergence and spread of corruption, we can observe that the disorder and political instability that have remained in Sub-Saharan African since independence contributed a significant role in the spread of corruption due to the nature of their political systems, the practices of non-transfer of power, and the absence of fair and transparent electoral mechanisms. The army's grounds for getting involved in politics were to end the ousted regimes' corruption, which was made possible by all of this (Bahouli, 2023).

Causes of coup d' etats in sub-Saharan Africa

As stated earlier, the 1950s marked new wave of independence in Sub-Saharan Africa with Ghana merging as the first to regain its political independence on March 6, 1957. After Kwame Nkrumah and his Ghana set the stage, Guinea (October 2, 1958), Cameroon (January 1, 1960), Senegal (April 4, 1960), Togo (April 27, 1960), Mali (September 22, 1960), Democratic Republic of Congo (June 30, 1960), Somalia (July 1, 1960), Republic of Benin (August 1, 1960), Republic of Niger (August 3, 1960), Burkina Faso (August 5, 1960), Côte d'Ivoire (August 7, 1960), Chad (August 11, 1960), Central African Republic (August 13, 1960), Republic of the Congo (August 15, 1960), Republic of Gabon (August 16, 1960), Federal Republic of Nigeria (October 1, 1960), Mauritania (November 28, 1960), Sierra Leone (April 27, 1961), United Republic of Tanzania (December 9, 1961), Burundi (July 1, 1961), Rwanda (July 1, 1962), Uganda (October 9, 1962), Kenya (December 12, 1963), Malawi (July 6, 1964), Zambia (October 24, 1964), The Gambia (February 18, 1965), Botswana (September 30, 1966), Lesotho (October 4, 1966), Mauritius (March 12, 1968), Eswatini (September 6, 1968), Equatorial Guinea (October 12, 1968), Guinea-Bissau (September 24, 1973), Mozambique (June 25, 1975), Cape Verde (July 5, 1975), Comoros (July 6, 1975), São Tomé and Príncipe (July 12, 1975), Angola (November 11, 1975), Seychelles (June 29, 1976), Zimbabwe (April 18, 1980), Namibia (March 21, 1990), Eritrea (May 24, 1993), and South Sudan (July 9, 2011) followed sequentially.

While France was swift enough to allow its erstwhile colonies to regain their independence especially in the early 1960s these states become theatres of coups of different kinds and intensities. In the pursuit of better governance and wealth for all, continental liberation fronts recently overthrew colonial powers. Most of Africa's colonial regimes were successfully overthrown by these fronts. But eventually these indigenous breeds seized control through military coups and brought about a brutally enforced dictatorship. For instance, multiple military coups occurred in Sudan in 1958, Congo in 1960, Togo in 1963, Ghana in 1966, and Nigeria in 1966 (Yach J, 2022). The civil uprisings swiftly extended to Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Bissau after evolving into contagious coup inclinations. These nations make up what was formerly known as the coup belt. Only one of the thirteen coups that have been officially documented since 2017 have taken place outside of Africa.

Many research show that one of the main causes of coup d' etats in sub-Saharan Africa and Africa in general is the rational choice approach (Bell, 2016). The rational choice approach is animated by the fact that prospective coup plotters compare the benefits to be obtained from successful coups with the continued life in the ruling government. According to scholars who contend that domestic reasons led to the democratic transition in Sub-Saharan Africa, pro-democracy movements and political protest were stoked by severe economic suffering and underdevelopment, as well as by the collapse of the postcolonial state's legitimacy and capacity. On the other hand, proponents of the external force theory contend that the Structural Adjustment plans of IMF conditions and the end of communism in Eastern

Europe made democracy a desirable alternative for these countries (Osafo-Danso et al., 2020). Whether it is internal or external factors all of them point to the linkage between the quality of the people's life and the reactionary approach of the military.

At the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Structural Adjustment Programmes were adopted and put into effect in the 1980s, a fundamental component of which was a shift away from centrally planned economies and toward the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in Africa (Tankebe et al., 2014). Military spending affects a multitude of economic factors, including economic growth, corruption, and public investment in other civilian economic areas, as well as regional and global stability (Bove & Nisticò, 2014). Higher coups occur in low-income countries. However, the impacts are minimal and become even weaker when systems only have developing countries (Lehoucq, 2021). Researchers and decision-makers should be aware of the post-coup dynamics developing in Guinea, Mali, Chad, Sudan, and Burkina Faso as well as the unsuccessful coup attempts in Niger and Guinea-Bissau, the juntas' desire to govern; currently, military juntas are in power in all these countries show no inclination to hand back authority to democratically elected officials (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022b).

Many African nations are praetorian regimes where the military often meddles in politics, challenging civilian rule over the armed forces. For example, Mali, a non-coastal nation in West Africa with 14.5 million people, is not an exception. Mali has been a praetorian state since regaining independence from France in 1960 because of the military's regular political meddling. Mali has thus far witnessed four successful military coups in 1968, 1991, 2012, and 2020 (Matei, 2021). This seemingly unending trend of unconstitutional usurpation of power by the military is one that does not only have the propensity to expose these countries the autocracy as a modus operandi of the military classes when they take over government but also raise a significant issue of their intention to salvage the citizens from lack and want which continues to be unrealized.

Several West African economies are on the verge of collapse due to the emergence of intra-state conflicts or "new wars", which has resulted in casualties and concerns for the humanitarian community. Countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau were plagued by civil wars and battles for decades, which were marked by violence and ceaseless killings. While the number of violent conflicts in the subregion is on the decline, recent insurgencies in the Sahel region that have affected the West African nations of Mali, Niger, and Mauritania as well as low intensity conflicts surging within notably stable nations like Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal send alarming signals about the potential resurgence of violent conflicts both domestically and regionally. These conflicts frequently revolve around several causes, including as poverty, violation of human rights, bad governance and corruption, racial and ethnic marginalization, and the proliferation of small arms (Annan, 2014).

The Antinomy of Democratization and Coup d' etats in sub-Saharan Africa

Over the past two decades, sub-Saharan Africa has seen a surge of democratization that has profoundly altered the political climate in this area after the emergence of coups in the 1960s. Almost all Sub-Saharan Africa's nations have held repeated multiparty elections, in which each party has at least had the opportunity to participate command over government institutions (Yoo & Seol, 2018). While democratization is an abstract ideology that is difficult to define its recognition in international politics has always been and continues to dominate the political space. In simple terms, democratization is the expansion and diffusion of democracy in the political strata of a state. But what is democracy? Democracy originates from the Greek words, *demos* meaning people and *kratos*, meaning power. So, democracy means "power of the people" hence, Abraham Lincoln's cliché, "government of the people, for the people and by the people".

The term "democracy" first appeared in the ancient Greece political and philosophical ideology in the city-state Athens. During the time of Cleisthenes' reconstruction, which took place in 508–7 BC, democracy was first introduced into the Athens city-state, marking its major and thorough adoption. Parallel to this, Pericles became a significant political figure between the years 461 and 429, when his influence briefly declined after Athens was defeated by the oligarchic city-state of Sparta (Olorunlana, 2023).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the continued practice of highly individualized authoritarian leadership has been a prominent aspect of its politics for majority of the region's history following independence. Pre-colonial politics is interpreted in two conflicting ways in Africa: one where traditional government was based on authoritarianism and hierarchy, and the other where traditional African cultures were basically democratic, including substantial consultation and decisions are made through consensus (Healey & Robinson, 1994).

However, there is a growing consensus that democracy can improve access to basic services. Several empirical research have shown that there are broad correlations between national indicators of public goods results and indices of democracy (Harding, 2020). It is demonstrated that variations in riot intensity brought on by drought cause sub-Saharan African countries to move toward democracy, and that these changes are frequently the consequence of compromises made because of the riots. This supports the "window of opportunity" theory and offers proof that low-intensity conflict can have a significant short-term impact on democratic reform. Droughts heighten the prospect of conflict, and incumbents frequently respond by granting democratic concessions (Aidt & Leon, 2016).

The militarization of democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa

Democracy as an abstract ideal is yet 'concrete' cognizant of the fact that its products can also be realized, felt and touched. While the ideology of democratization is the order of the day in sub-Saharan Africa as it is in other parts of the world (Markoff & Burrige, 2019), the counteract of military coups is currently taking a trajectory of normalising the abnormal and embracing the absurd. However, an ever-long-standing question is: Do civilian governments in sub-Saharan Africa respect democracy even in the centre of democratization?

This question is germane to the current state of the sub-Saharan African as institutions of higher learning continue to present modules and theories on democratization in Africa (Makhanya & Botha, 2015). Democratic changes spread across Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. Alongside decentralization measures, which either established or strengthened subnational levels of government, this was done. More than thirty years later, it appears that there is a disconnect between the institutional and, or constitutional blueprints initiating the reforms and the reality on the ground throughout the region to the south of the Sahara (Erk, 2014). It is crucial for theorists and practitioners to comprehend and explain this gap, and this is manifested in the toppling of democracy by the military. But what is democracy? Does the classical definition of democracy by the conceptual West (Europe and America) yield dividends to Africa?

An all-encompassing abstract concept of democracy is gaining popularity around the world in today's globalizing society. There appears to be a nuanced, universal concept of democracy as freedom from dictatorial authority and as self-determination, a comprehension that resembles the idea of liberal democracy (Ferrin & Kriesi, 2016). However, civilian governments in some sub-Saharan states are far from the ideals of democracy as some of these states witnesses constitutional amendments that usher them to third term – or even beyond – in presidency. The relevant African Union legal and policy instruments don't give a clear description of what an unconstitutional change of government is. The idea would appear to cover any change in government that is incompatible with fundamental laws regulating a state's ascension to power (Manirakiza, 2016). Malabo Protocol on the Amendments to the Protocol Establishing the African Court of Justice and Human Rights is the most detailed text highlighting the types of unconstitutional change of administrations in Africa.

According to the above protocol in 28E of the annexed Statute, 'unconstitutional change of government' means any of the following:

- a) A putsch or coup d'état against a democratically elected government;
- b) An intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government;
- c) Any replacement of a democratically elected government by the use of armed dissidents or rebels or through political assassination;



- d) Any refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party or candidate after free, fair and regular elections;
- e) Any amendment or revision of the Constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government or is inconsistent with the Constitution;
- f) Any substantial modification to the electoral laws in the last six (6) months before the elections without the consent of most of the political actors.

Paragraph (e) of this protocol reflects what this research term as ‘coup d’etat of constitutions’ by civilian governments to extend their terms in office. In the writing of Richard Albert, he refers to it as unconstitutional constitutional change (Albert, 2017).

Recent tendencies in militarism can be seen throughout Africa. Trends toward militarism and militarization pose a threat to the expansion and stabilization of democracy. Ironically, Robert Dahl was direct when he asserted that politics is all about distributing and allocating resources. For non-military states and nations where the armed forces predominate, there are distinct allocation formulas for scarce resources (Bonga & Mahuku, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This research finds that coups are regaining traction in sub-Saharan Africa one of the ultimate causes of coups in subregion is the proclivity of civilian government to stay long in government even when their constitutions provide for presidential term limit. Joint with poor development indices of these countries, the military are compelled to overthrow civilian with a view to enhancing the living standard of the citizens. However, this promise has not always yield good dividends with time as these coupists-turn-civilian rulers often rule their people with iron fist with human rights violations such a freedom of expression by media.

Also, military governments in sub-Saharan Africa are often weak and therefore, always conscious, and worried of being overthrown. This is manifested in the continent’s condemnation and unrecognition of military governments through the Malabo Protocol on the Amendments to the Protocol Establishing the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. Despite this continental abhorrence the men in uniform continue to execute what they believe to be ‘salvation and emancipation’ of their people.

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