

# RESURGENCE OF MILITARY COUPS IN AFRICA: CAN THE AFRICAN UNION AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DEFEND AND CONSOLIDATE DEMOCRACY?

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## Introduction

The military's takeover of political power, irrespective of the methods adopted, represents a rejection of civilian authority (Gutteridge 1985). Since the conclusion of World War II, there have been instances where militaries across the globe have taken part in the removal of elected political leaders, dissolution of democratic regimes, or establishment of autonomous operations within nominally democratic political systems. These actions have been carried out without the consent, oversight, and control of elected civilians. These actions are achieved through coups and other unconstitutional methods of altering the status quo (Kuehn 2017). In the pre-1990 era, military coups served as the predominant method for instigating government transitions in a significant number of African nations. Since the advent of post-colonial Africa, the continent has witnessed a cumulative total of 88 instances of successful coups. The initial *coup d'état* transpired in Egypt in July 1952, whereas instances of such political upheavals transpired in Guinea-Bissau and Mali in April and December of the year 2012, respectively. Based on the research authored by Issaka K. Souaré, Africa has had a total of 73 instances of military coups, as documented over some time. Out of the entire dataset, 63 occurrences were recorded before the year 1990, while the remaining 10 cases were reported after the ratification of the Lomé Declaration in July

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2000 by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), an organization that is since defunct (Souaré 2014).

The Lomé Declaration enacted a prohibition on military coups and implemented sanctions against governments that attained power through such actions. The significance of the recent surge in coups in Africa cannot be overstated, despite the efforts of a limited number of analysts to do so. According to a report by The Wall Street Journal, the occurrence of military coups has surged to unprecedented levels since the end of the colonial era, following the coup that took place in Sudan in October 2021. Although hyperbolic in tone, the departure of the year 2021 from recent history has been noteworthy enough to merit a comparison with the era of independence (Faucon, Said, and Parkinson 2021). As per The Economist, the count of coups that transpired in the year 2021 has exceeded the cumulative count of coups that transpired in the preceding five years (The Economist 2021). Recently, there was a worldwide celebration of the decline of coups, not only in Africa but also globally. During the autumn season of 2015, New African magazine presented a query regarding the decreasing pattern of coups.

In their 2017 work, Powell, Reynolds, and Chacha (2021) cited a report by Schiel et al., which stated that as of September 2017, Africa had not undergone any attempted coup in the past two years and had successfully avoided one for almost three years. Kamissou Camara, a former Foreign Minister of Mali, stated that the era of coups had ended one month after the event, despite her brief tenure during a coup. Upon preliminary analysis, it is evident that this marks the lengthiest duration without a *coup d'état* in Africa since the decolonization era. Numerous endeavors have been undertaken to elucidate this transition, encompassing the formation of more lucid political frameworks and the involvement of external entities such as the African Union (AU) and regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Despite the political upheaval witnessed in November 2017 with the ousting of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, coups d'état have been generally regarded as events of limited consequence in the years that followed.

The Council on Foreign Relations has put forth a statement that corroborates Jonathan Powell and his colleagues' claim that conventional coups, which involve military personnel attempting to take over, have been supplanted by incumbent officeholders resorting to manipulative tactics to maintain their hold on power. Since August 2020, significant political changes have occurred in various African countries, such as successful coups in Chad, Guinea, and Mali, and attempted coups in Niger and Sudan, with

varying levels of success. The rise in the frequency of this phenomenon has generated significant discussion regarding its fundamental causes, possible correlations, and feasible remedies. The focus of the article revolves around the possible influence of regional organizations, such as the African Union and other regional economic communities, in effectively tackling this phenomenon. Since the year 1950, African nations that have attained independence have encountered over 200 instances of coup attempts, with a success rate exceeding 100 (Powell, Reynolds, and Chacha 2017).

This research evaluates the contemporary increase in military coups in Africa and analyses the effectiveness of the African Union (AU) and other regional institutions in safeguarding and promoting democratic government following existing frameworks and policies. The African Union's framework for Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG) and its subsequent execution have faced significant problems in response to the recent revival. The African Union has garnered commendation for its stance in opposition to military coups. Nevertheless, it has been noted that the organization has exhibited inadequate engagement and delayed responsiveness in addressing instances of the unconstitutional exercise of power. Numerous historical figures have exhibited a proclivity for disregarding established institutions that have played a pivotal role in facilitating their ascent to positions of authority.

Frequently, this phenomenon has led to a subsequent decline in public backing, serving as either a direct catalyst or a cosmetic rationale for the overthrow of increasingly authoritarian incumbents. Another pertinent issue concerns the African Union's demonstration of a similar attitudinal inclination as its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), regarding coups and attempted coups. As a result, the governmental measures implemented in response to a coup are insufficient in addressing the fundamental causes of the coup, thereby potentially setting a precedent for future coup attempts (Krausa 2020). Furthermore, a noteworthy issue pertains to the insufficient determination demonstrated by the international community in proficiently tackling those individuals who partake in coups and the countries that are vulnerable to such occurrences, to deter analogous conduct from transpiring in subsequent times.

## Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Democracy, Regime Change, and Military Coups

### *Democracy*

The popularity of democracy as a system of government in the contemporary world is subject to argumentation. Over the past three decades, there has been a notable rise in the global demand for this particular political system. While it is widely acknowledged that democracy does not possess the capability to address all of humanity's challenges, it is equally important to recognize that numerous predicaments cannot be effectively resolved in the absence of democratic principles. The prevalence of this particular system of administration in contemporary society has led to its widespread acceptance and underscored the need for its implementation and long-term viability. Various scholars have formulated diverse conceptualizations of democracy (Bolarinwa and Adeleke 2020).

In his thought-provoking piece, Adelaja Odukoya posited that the concept of democracy may be interpreted diversely, including several notions such as a methodology, a procedural framework, a societal structure, an ideological construct, a platform for competing for power, and notably, a manifestation of class conflict. According to the author, democracy has undergone a significant transformation from its original classical concept, which was based on the principles of governance by the people, the pursuit of the common good, the rationality of individuals, and the simultaneous pursuit of liberty and equality. Classical democracy has faced criticism due to its philosophical inconsistency, abstract character, and lack of empirical evidence supporting its premise, particularly regarding the rationality of human nature. The aforementioned restrictions have had detrimental effects on democratic theory, as they embody distinct attitudes towards the democratic endeavor and present significant challenges for democratic practices (Odukoya 2007).

According to Michael Coppedge (2002), democracy is widely regarded as one of the most intricate concepts within the field of political science. This phenomenon's comprehensive and multifaceted nature has yet to be quantified and may remain unmeasurable. There exist numerous other systems of governance that encompass various patterns, subtypes, and variations of decision-making procedures that have also been categorized as democratic, hence posing challenges in maintaining clarity and understanding. The

diverse application of this principle results in a proliferation of distinctions and certifications. Traditionally, democracies can be categorized into many types, including liberal or republican, direct or representative, consensual or majoritarian, and market or socially orientated. In recent times, additional forms of democracy have gained importance, including participatory, deliberative, and grassroots democracies. Furthermore, alternative models such as demarchy, skewed democracy, and nonpartisan democracy have also emerged. Ultimately, when examining the global evolution of democracies, it is worth contemplating the potential for a distinct Islamic transformation of democracy or the emergence of socialist and anarchist approaches to democratization. These possibilities have the potential to broaden the conceptual boundaries of democracy in the future. In any given setting where democracy is present, two interrelated factors must precede the emergence and subsequent progress of the democratic concept. The first aspect pertains to the historical resolution of the conflict between democracy and representation. The second aspect involves the broadening of this term beyond its application solely to the categorization of state and government, to encompass the characterization of a specific societal structure as well.

While we have seen how democratic systems developed distinctively early in the nineteenth century, in each country, region, and continent, the Anglo-American brand stood out for its liberal aspects. France and other countries in Continental Europe remained more strongly connected to the republican tradition. Thus, if presidential democracy is dominant today in North and South America (and in Eastern Europe more recently), in Western Europe parliamentary governments have been prevalent (despite some ill-fated hesitations and interruptions in Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). There are still effective normative concepts of democracy, emphasizing, for example, justice or its bond to human rights. It seems inevitable today that the empirical reality and variety of democratic institutions and societies is accompanied by renewed critical normative reflections on the concept given that not only the best form of democracy is an object of dispute but also its chances and risks in the context of globalization (Coppedge 2002).

## *Regime Change*

The study of regime change, particularly the process of “democratization,” is often regarded as a highly significant and intellectually stimulating area of investigation within the realm of current comparative politics (Kern 2023). Over the last five decades, particularly during the 1980s, several

authoritarian governments throughout the globe have seen a decline in their power and influence, but not always to the point of complete collapse (Wiebrecht 2023). The region that has seen the most significant transformations is Eastern Europe. In regions such as southern Europe and some parts of Latin America, the process of democratization has seen significant advancements. Similarly, in Asia, countries like the Philippines and South Korea have undergone comparable democratic transitions.

Authoritarian regimes in Africa persist as the prevailing form of governance and are expected to maintain their dominance for the foreseeable future. However, increasing discontent with the dominance of a single political party has given rise to a surge in calls for the establishment of more diverse and inclusive political structures (Fishman 1993). According to Fishman, a regime is defined as a more enduring structure of the political organization in contrast to a particular administration. To enhance precision, it is important to note that a regime may persist, akin to the state, while the dynamic process of political power inside the state fluctuates between governing and opposition parties.

To provide further clarification, it is worth noting that while there may be a series of diverse governing bodies, the state and regime typically remain unchanged since these different governments wield authority within the confines of the established regime, without disrupting the fundamental structure of the state (Fishman 1993). This phenomenon is evidently relevant to political regimes that possess a strong historical background of adhering to constitutional principles and have established mechanisms for the peaceful transfer of power, often via popular elections conducted in accordance with the regulations and protocols of the governing regime.

In these instances, a transition of political power does not always imply a change in the fundamental structure of the constitution. The concept of regime is intricately connected to the principles of constitutionalism and the rule of law (Grant 2017). In contrast, a regime is primarily concerned with how power is used, rather than the mere possession of power itself. A regime may be defined as the component of the political system that establishes the manner, circumstances, and constraints under which state authority is exerted. To clarify, the notion of regime pertains to the specific manner in which governance is exercised by Chazan *et al.*, in “Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa” (Chazan 1992).

As a consequence, the regime further establishes the procedures by which governments are established and fulfill their duties, while also defining the grounds for their legitimacy and the degree to which they are authorized

to wield power. In essence, regimes serve as the embodiment of the norms and principles that regulate the political structure of a state, delineated by the established rules and procedures that guide governmental operations.

## *Military Coups*

The occurrence of military coups has been a persistent phenomenon in both contemporary global politics and historical events. The scholarly investigation of the involvement of military forces in politics has been a topic of interest for numerous decades. There are various concepts about the integration of military forces in the governance of a nation in different capacities. Morris Janowitz has identified four distinct models of political-military elites in his work. These models include the aristocratic, democratic, totalitarian, and garrison state models. The establishment of an effective democratic system that observes, controls, and manages the armed forces can be a viable means of preventing military dictatorship, in addition to accounting for variations in models (Janowitz 1957). Achieving the necessary conditions is the ultimate and optimal goal that a democratic government can strive for to fully exercise authority over military forces and prevent their seizure of power or interference in state affairs. In reality, several states face difficulties in attaining the aforementioned optimal level, particularly during times of crisis or prolonged state issues. The topic of military coups or attempted military coups continues to be relevant within the field of political and security studies (Chazan et al. 1992).

As per Josef Krausa's analysis, military coups have played a crucial role in initiating political regime alterations throughout history. During the 20th century, a multitude of military coups and attempted coups occurred, not solely in developing countries, but also in Europe. Scholars and experts have extensively analyzed military coups, exploring their objectives, classifications, contextual factors, procedural aspects, and probability of success. There are various theoretical frameworks available that examine the involvement of military forces in political matters, to classify and evaluate these efforts based on their goals and fundamental factors. The aforementioned variables increase the probability of a military coup and establish the basis for developing an early warning system (EWS). The author has elaborated on the notion of *coup d'état* as an unconventional approach to the transfer of state leadership, which involves the use of illegal means by the military or other privileged factions, drawing inspiration from the works of Powell and Thyne. This procedure may entail the utilization of coercion or the mere

intimidation of it; however, it does not inevitably culminate in any mortality. In the context of a discourse on a military coup, one could posit that the involvement of armed forces constitutes an indispensable element. A *coup d'état* may entail the involvement of a heterogeneous range of military units, rather than a singular armed force (Krausa 2020).

Singh's definition of a coup attempt, as referenced by Josef Krausa (2020), characterizes it as a purposeful endeavor executed by a fraction of a state's military, police, or security forces to overthrow the current government. Coup attempts often entail the convergence of heterogeneous military factions. In contrast, the modification of a governing body takes place without significant participation, thus distinguishing coups from revolutions. As per Galula's seminal literature, the terminology "plot" is utilized interchangeably with "coup" in the milieu of political turmoil. A plot is a clandestine operation carried out by a group of insurgents to overthrow the top leadership of a particular country. This particular form of undertaking lacks inclusivity towards the wider population and is distinguished by meticulous and protracted strategizing and arrangement, culminating in an abrupt and concise implementation. The phenomenon of regime changes that involve military participation is commonly observed. The military possesses the necessary capabilities, hierarchical organization, and obedience to authority that typically facilitate the successful execution of a *coup d'état*. In numerous instances, they might be the only entity with the capacity to execute said action.

Nonetheless, the mere capacity of a military to carry out a coup does not inevitably indicate its inclination to participate in such an endeavor. There must be valid rationales for the integration of military forces in political matters in such a manner. Many scholars are motivated by a militaristic drive to carry out a coup. The dominant viewpoint regarding this issue posits that military establishments tend to intrude into the realm of politics when their institutional concerns are not being satisfactorily catered to or are being jeopardized by the prevailing governing regime. The argument suggests the presence of a negative correlation between the budget allocated for defense and the incidence of coups. Specifically, a higher probability of coups is associated with lower defense budgets, whereas states that allocate a greater proportion of their budget towards military spending are less susceptible to coups. Putschist armies, which are military factions that aim to overthrow a government, often resort to violent confrontations and hold differing strategic and tactical perspectives from civilian leadership.

The aforementioned phenomenon may be associated with the military's self-perception as a unique social entity or its inclination towards social

differentiation. Taking a broader perspective, it is relevant to contemplate not only economic necessities but also wider values. In scenarios where the dominant political regime's principles do not align with those of the lower-ranking officials, the latter may feel compelled to champion the interests of their particular societal group.

Furthermore, the preconditions and rationales for coups d'état entail the confluence of various circumstances. Notwithstanding the military standpoint, there exist numerous issues involving economic, political regime, social, strategic, and military dimensions. The economic approach focuses on examining the likelihood of coups in nations facing poverty and the potential impact of trade openness on the chance of a coup attempt, intending to mitigate economic stagnation or decline. The regime perspective examines the potential decrease in the probability of a *coup d'état* occurrence in nations where the government enjoys significant public backing. Additionally, it explores the influence of the political system's characteristics (e.g., democracy, non-democracy, or military rule) and the timing of elections as crucial factors in this regard (Ndubuisi 2021).

## **Geopolitical Competition between USA & NATO versus Russia & China in Africa**

During the 1990s, a notable surge in democratization occurred in several African states after the conclusion of the Cold War (Vanhanen 1997). During this historical era, several authoritarian governments saw a decline in power, while simultaneously seeing the emergence and growth of democratic movements. The transitions towards democracy were bolstered by the help of foreign players, with a particular focus on Western nations and international organizations. The help provided often manifested as diplomatic coercion, monetary aid, and the surveillance of electoral processes. Anticipation grew that Africa would undergo a "third wave of democracy" a phenomenon previously experienced in several other areas.

Nevertheless, the mechanisms of regime transition in Africa have undergone a significant transformation in the 21st century. The complicated geopolitical environment has emerged as a result of key global entities, such as the United States and its NATO allies, as well as China and Russia, actively pursuing their geopolitical objectives (Friedman 2012). The continent of Africa has become a contested arena for several nations because of its abundant natural resources, advantageous geographical position, and

promising economic prospects. Mkandawire wrote that: external actors have used many strategies to exert influence over political transitions and sustain their sway in African nations. These strategies include various methods such as conspiracies and overthrow attempts, whereby clandestine activities aim to establish administrations that are in line with foreign agendas, possibly leading to the destabilization of states and impeding the advancement of democratic processes (Mkandawire 2002).

The provision of assistance to or management of revolutionary movements has also resulted in changes of political regimes, motivated by alignment with geopolitical objectives (Thandika 2002). Moreover, the use of key resources, such as oil and minerals, has been employed as a means to exert pressure to smooth transitions in governance and sustain political power. Infrastructure investments, especially those made by China, are reciprocated with political allegiance, therefore guaranteeing the acquisition of valuable resources and market opportunities. These strategies give rise to apprehensions over their influence on democratic processes, possibly bolstering authoritarian regimes, weakening grassroots democratic movements, and prolonging political instability.

Thus, in reality, coups were frequent in Africa before the end of the Cold War due to rivalries and competition among the global powers, especially between the West and other powers like Russia and China. At the end of the Cold War, particularly, at the advent of unipolarity which led to the emergence of the USA as the sole power and the 'last man standing,' which made most African nations do its bidding and less resistance, there was relative stability in governance and less regime change in Africa.

In other words, unipolarity led to a reduction of coups in Africa as there was less or no major powers' rivalry on the continent. Unfortunately, however, the resurgence of coups in Africa in the 21st century has been attributed to many factors like poverty, bad governance, poor leadership, and corruption, but more importantly, a return to the period when coups, revolutions, and regime changes were used as instruments of geopolitical competition and rivalry between USA & NATO versus Russia & China on the African Continent.

## **Democratization and regime change in Nigeria**

In the context of Nigeria, two main types of regime transition have occurred during its historical development, ultimately resulting in the esta-

ishment of a democratic system (Bratton 1998; Falola 2005). Nigeria has experienced numerous occurrences of political transition, marked by transitions from civilian rule to military authority. On January 15, 1966, a notable occurrence unfolded, characterized by the orchestration of a *coup d'état* by a faction of military personnel. This incident led to the removal of the First Republic, which was under the leadership of Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and ceremonial president Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. The inception of the administration transpired after a forceful *coup d'état* masterminded by Major Chukuma Kaduna Nzeogwu on January 15th, 1966.

The coup led to the downfall of prominent political personalities inside the country, namely those hailing from the Northern region. This included Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa, who held the position of Prime Minister, and Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Governor of the Northern Region. It is crucial to recognize that the military's participation in Nigerian politics was not without underlying motivations. Following the aforementioned events, the military regime led by General Yakubu Gowon (15th July 1966 – 29th July 1975) came into being. The appointment of General Gowon as the Head of State was a consequence of a nonviolent coup, which diverged from the customary military tradition of selecting the highest-ranking officer for the position. Brigadier General Ogundipe had the most superior military rank inside the armed services, surpassing all other military officers.

From July 29th onwards, and leading up to the announcement of the assassination of the Head of State, he undertook the role of governing the nation. On August 1, 1966, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon was designated as the Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, after thorough discussions inside the Supreme Military Council. The successive military administrations in Nigeria encompassed the tenure of Generals Murtala Ramat Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo, spanning from July 29, 1975, to October 1, 1979. During this period, General Olusegun Obasanjo relinquished power to Shehu Shagari, who became the first democratically elected president.

Regrettably, the aforementioned period was curtailed due to the military intervention led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari, occurring between December 31, 1983, and August 27, 1985. The subsequent military administration was headed by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, commencing on August 27, 1985, and concluding on August 27, 1993, at which point he relinquished power to an Interim Transitional Government under the leadership of Chief Earnest Shonekan until November 17, 1993. Following the aforementioned events, the military administration led by General Sani

Abacha assumed power from November 17, 1993, to June 8, 1998. Finally, the military administration led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar ensued, spanning from June 8, 1998, to May 29, 1999. The successful execution of General Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition plan resulted in the restoration of democratic governance in the nation on 29 May, 1999, marking the beginning of the existing Fourth Republic. This achievement was accomplished within a timeframe of eleven months. This event signified the conclusion of a sixteen-year era distinguished by successive military administrations. The military coups frequently employed corruption, ethnic strife, and political instability as rationales for their operations.

Nigeria has witnessed numerous examples of shifting from a military dictatorship to a civilian democracy. In 1979, a significant event took place when General Olusegun Obasanjo transferred power to the inaugural Executive President. A significant and recent transition took place in 1999, when the military regime, led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, transferred authority to a civilian administration. This occurrence marked the commencement of the Fourth Republic, characterized by the implementation of periodic electoral procedures and the establishment of democratic institutions. Nigeria has had numerous democratic transitions facilitated through electoral mechanisms, symbolizing the shift from military rule to civilian governance.

It is imperative to recognize that Nigeria's political history has been marked by a series of shifts in government and periods of transition, frequently prompted by many factors including political instability, ethnic tensions, and demands for democratic rule. The fluctuation between civilian and military forms of rule has exerted a substantial impact on the political and socio-economic trajectory of the nation.

## **AU Frameworks and the challenge of unconstitutional changes of government**

The African Union (AU) was established in 2001 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Since its inception, the AU has adopted a proactive approach to tackling governance and human security concerns among its member states. The establishment of the Organisation of African Unity, a former pan-African agency, occurred in the year 1963. Nevertheless, it was found to be insufficient in its endeavors to effectively suppress the spread of military dictatorships that arose following the process of decolonization. Over more than thirty years, the OAU demonstrated

a notable disregard for the domestic affairs of its member states. The OAU demonstrated unwavering commitment to the core principles that were first formed throughout the 1960s.

The fundamental focus of the organization's policy was to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the newly formed African nations. Moreover, an additional objective was to eradicate all instances of colonialism in Africa, as delineated in Article II of the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. The Organisation undertook the duty of protecting sovereign states, even if it meant neglecting the well-being of common citizens. This specific position led to the unfavorable portrayal of the OAU as the "Heads of State Club."

The process of transitioning from the Organisation of African Unity to the African Union was marked by the recognition that member states must no longer maintain a stance of indifference towards the numerous breaches of human rights and inadequate governance observed in adjacent regions. The aforementioned trend can be ascribed to the shared developmental goals and the transboundary character of disputes. The African Union has implemented various legal frameworks in order to facilitate and protect democratic transitions, while also promoting their long-term viability and stability. The attribution of the establishment of legislation for the methodical transfer of authority can be ascribed to the Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government, which was promulgated by the OAU in July 1999. The decision was formulated in preparation for the organization's forthcoming transition to the African Union (AU). The resolution urges governments that have acquired power through illegitimate means to restore constitutional legitimacy. The Declaration about the Framework for an Organisation of African Unity Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government was officially ratified at the 36th OAU Assembly, which took place in Lomé, Togo in July 2000. The aforementioned Declaration serves to reinforce the prohibition on unconstitutional modifications of government, which includes military coups, armed rebellions, and the failure of the incumbent government to transfer power to a successful political faction following impartial, fair, and regular elections. This is consistent with the implementation of the Continental Early Warning Systems across the African continent (ACDEG 2007).

The aforementioned claims were additionally supported by the Constitutive Act of 2001 of the African Union. According to Article 3(g) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, member states are obligated to advance democratic principles and institutions, encourage citizen participation, and uphold efficient governance. The assertions outlined before were further

supported by the Constitutive Act of 2001 of the African Union. As per the provisions outlined in Article 3(g) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, member states are under a binding obligation to promote democratic ideals and institutions, foster citizen engagement, and uphold effective governance.

Article 4(p) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union explicitly prohibits any illicit modifications in governance, thereby emphasizing the firm stance of the continent against military coups that jeopardize democratic governance. According to the provisions outlined in Article 7(h) of the PSC convention, countries that acquire power through unconstitutional methods may be liable to face potential sanctions. The AU launched the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in 2003 to promote democratic practices and improve governance in its member countries through a voluntary self-assessment methodology. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) was officially instituted in January 2007 during the 8th African Union Summit. It was designed as a follow-up initiative to the previous declarations and commitments articulated in the AU Constitutive Act. The Comprehensive and Actionable Assistance on Political Transition of the African Union was developed to deliver comprehensive and pragmatic support concerning issues of political transition. However, the current body of knowledge is deficient in providing a complete analysis of the phenomenon of mass uprisings. As per the provisions outlined in Article 23 of the ACDEG, any attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government through:

1. Any attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government through a putsch or *coup d'état*.
2. The potential occurrence of an intervention by mercenaries to replace a government that has been democratically elected.
3. The overthrow of a democratically elected government by armed dissidents or rebels.
4. Criterion number four pertains to the incumbent government's refusal to cede power to the victorious party or candidate following a free, fair, and routine election.
5. Criterion number five concerns any alteration or modification made to the constitution or legal instruments that violates the principles of democratic transfer of power (ACDEG 2007).

The African Commission on Democracy and Governance (ACDEG) has identified a governance concern over the modification or adjustment of constitutional or legal frameworks in specific nations, specifically Rwanda under the leadership of Paul Kagame and Cote d'Ivoire under Alassane Ouattara. The aforementioned action is commonly seen as a transgression

against the fundamental tenets of democratic government concerning the transfer of political power. The development highlighted above serves as a clear demonstration of the African Union's steadfast dedication to facilitating seamless and reliable transitions of political authority. As per the provisions delineated in Article 28 of the ACDEG, the AU is vested with the power to enforce sanctions and institute legal proceedings against individuals found to have perpetrated unconstitutional alterations to governmental frameworks (ACDEG 2007). Moreover, the AU can effectively execute suitable measures aimed at expediting the process of extraditing individuals (Ndubuisi 2021).

African leaders approved the African Governance Architecture (AGA) in January 2011. Its main goal is to make it easier for member states, regional economic communities (RECs), and the African Union to coordinate initiatives related to democracy and good governance on a continental level. The aforementioned claim relates to the African Union's AGA framework, which seeks to advance democracy and good governance across the continent. The AGA is an add-on project for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The latter was established at the July 2000 AU Assembly in Lomé, Togo. This initiative's main goal is to strengthen and promote cooperation between African countries in the fields of security and peace. The aforementioned Declaration aims to fortify the ban on unconstitutional changes to the government, including military takeovers, armed uprisings, and the inability of the ruling party to hand over power to an elected political party after elections that are considered free, fair, and regular. Coordinated interdependent initiatives are implemented at the national, regional, and continental levels to attain the aforementioned goal.

At the national level, African institutions' democratic procedures and governance frameworks are observed through the AGA. The AU houses the Secretariat of the African Governance Architecture (AGA), which is responsible for creating annual evaluations on the state of democracy and governance across the continent. The principal aim of this endeavor is to augment the process of identifying and propagating the best practices among the African Union member states, while simultaneously cultivating adherence to democratic values. The AGA founded the African Governance Platform (AGP) to provide a forum for important African players to engage in dialogue on issues pertaining to democracy and governance.

The founding declarations of the AU, the ACDEG, and the AGA have encouraged a greater regional commitment to addressing overt violations of democratic ideals by armed and military groups (Ndubuisi 2021). Following its founding in 2001, the African Union has continuously voiced

its opposition to military takeovers in several African countries, including the Central African Republic (2003), Guinea-Bissau (2003), São Tomé and Príncipe (2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005), (2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), Niger (2010), Ivory Coast (2010), Mali (2012), Egypt (2013), Burkina Faso (2014), (2015), Zimbabwe (2017), Sudan (2019). And, since 2020, a series of coups have also occurred. On August 18, 2020, the military orchestrated the ouster of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in Mali, subsequently leading to the establishment of a transitional government in October. In April 2021, the military of Chad assumed control of the government after the demise of President Idriss Deby during his visit to troops engaged in combat against rebel forces in the northern region. On May 24, 2021, a military intervention took place in Mali, resulting in the arrest of the president and the Prime Minister. Subsequently, Colonel Assimi Goïta assumed the role of transitional president and was installed in June. The military regime has pledged to restore civilian governance subsequent to the elections slated for February 2024.

On September 5, 2021, a military coup resulted in the removal of President Alpha Condé in Guinea. Colonel Mamady Doumbouya assumed the presidency on October 1st. The military has committed to restoring governance to democratically elected civilians by the conclusion of 2024. On October 25, 2021, a military intervention occurred in Sudan, as General Abdel Fattah al-Burhane and his forces displaced the transitional civilian leaders. These leaders were entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the nation towards democratic governance following a prolonged 30-year dictatorship under Omar al-Bashir, who was himself removed from power in 2019. Since April 15, 2023, a conflict arising from a power struggle between General Burhane and his former subordinate Mohamed Hamdane Daglo has resulted in a casualty count of no less than 5,000 individuals throughout the nation.

On the 24th of January, 2022, the military of Burkina Faso removed President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré from office. Subsequently, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba assumed the presidency in February. In Burkina Faso, a subsequent event occurred eight months later on September 30, 2022, when Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was relieved of his duties by the military under the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré. Captain Traoré assumed the role of transitional president until a presidential election, slated for July 2024.

On July 26, 2023, the Nigerien military issued a statement declaring the successful ousting of President Mohamed Bazoum. General Abdourahmane Tiani assumed leadership as the new authoritative figure in the nation.

Concurrently, amidst global deliberations, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), regarding strategies to address and resolve the *coup d'état* in Niger, another coup transpired in Gabon on August 30, 2023. In this instance, a faction of Gabonese military officers proclaims a seizure of power and invalidates the recently declared election results, citing concerns over their perceived lack of credibility. The aforementioned declaration was made close to the pronouncement by the state electoral authority affirming President Ali Bongo Ondimba's re-election for a third term in office amidst the contentious nature of the elections.

In addition, the previously stated organization (AU) has openly denounced the efforts in 2014 and 2015 to topple the governments of Lesotho and Burundi, respectively. The interesting finding is the correlation between the frequency of successful and failed efforts to change government in a way that is not permitted by the constitution and the normative stance on political transitions that the African Union has taken.

The African Union's condemnation of illegitimate administrations, although seemingly routine, reveals the organization's reluctance to embrace situations that compromise democratic values and imperil the stability of the continent. When a coup occurs, the African Union has generally adhered to its policy of excluding the affected countries from its activities until a legitimate government has been reinstated. The statement above is consistent with the guidelines found in Article 30 of the Constitutive Act, which states unequivocally that governments that have come to power via unlawful methods are not permitted to participate in the Union's initiatives (Constitutive Act 2000). If the restoration of a constitutional framework is not followed, certain punishments might be applied to the ruling body. According to Article 23 of the African Union's Constitutive Act, these penalties may include denying visas, limiting commerce, prohibiting intergovernmental contacts, and taking other steps.

The African Union's Constitutive Act has provisions that provide the organization the right to step in and defend democratic values should unlawful developments occur. The African Union's Constitutive Act, Article 4(h), describes the organization's power to interfere in a Member State under certain circumstances. Serious situations like war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity are among these circumstances, along with a serious danger to lawful government. Nonetheless, the African Union Assembly must pass a resolution authorizing such involvement. Article 4(h) of the African Union permits the organization to engage in proactive and interventionist actions in political circumstances, including where there are unlawful chan-

ges in government. It is believed that these actions pose a serious danger to the current judicial system. The African Union Assembly has the authority to approve an intervention into a member state of the organization, provided that a two-thirds majority is achieved.

In compliance with the provisions delineated in Articles 4(h) and 4(j) of its charter, the African Union has undertaken peacekeeping operations within its member nations, having obtained appropriate authorization from the relevant stakeholders. The aforementioned regulations provide member nations the right to look for outside help to bring about peace and stability. As part of its initiatives to support democratic processes, sub-regional organizations working within the framework of the APSA have taken action to resolve situations of unlawful government transitions. With the backing of the AU, the ECOWAS firmly condemned the violation of democratic principles by former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, who led the country for twenty-three years. After a seemingly consistent commitment to the values of freedom, justice, and regularity throughout the 2016 elections, Yahya Jammeh had shown a reluctance to relinquish his position of power to the duly elected President Baro (Constitutive Act 2000).

Despite the need for protection against unauthorized changes to the government, some leaders continue to use constitutional instruments to obstruct legitimate transitional processes. Analyzing African countries where there have been large-scale revolutions reveals that the governments in these countries were able to hold onto power for longer than ten years. This was accomplished by the use of coercive measures, changes to constitutional limitations, and the adoption of rigged election processes. If weren't for the public's unwavering involvement, the aforementioned deposed presidents could have been able to hold onto their posts forever due to their tenacity in the face of several flawed election processes. Many African leaders claim to support democracy, yet they often use authoritarian forms of government. The continent's overall democratic ratings have declined as a result of a sizable portion of the African people continuing to live under authoritarian governments, according to the 2019 Democracy Index. Many African governments show clear patterns of changing their constitutions and tampering with election processes. Many African nations have had success with their constitutional amendments, including Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Chad, Djibouti, and Equatorial Guinea. It has been shown that the previously described amendments are associated with the retention of the existing leadership, a phenomenon that has been related to insurgent activities, the inciting of civil disturbance, and other changes that violate constitutional norms.

President Denis Sassou Nguesso has ruled the Republic of Congo for thirty-three years. That being said, the constitution was changed for him to remain president beyond March of 2016. With the electoral triumph, the incumbent president of Chad, Idriss Déby Itno, was elected to a fifth term in office. The result indicated above is a direct result of a 2005 constitutional change that essentially did away with term restrictions. In the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, where he has held office since 1979, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema was re-elected in April 2016 with 99.2% of the votes cast, and again in 2022, with 97% of the votes. The current 81-year-old president is in office as a result of the term constraints being lifted in 2011 and the opening up of the prospect of reelection. It is anticipated that the current tenure will last for seven years. In African nations, the main problem is not whether governing regimes can last. This investigation's main concern is the inability of illegal governments to maintain public order and provide basic services, which leaves room for political unrest and power conflicts that might potentially result in instability.

Several factors, such as the lingering effects of colonialism and imperialism, poor administration, and developmental shortcomings, limit the state's ability to provide public goods. The legacy of colonialism has had significant effects, chief among them the erection of colonial borders and the ensuing lack of a unified national identity. It is also crucial to emphasize that post-colonial African governments still depend on market systems that are mostly dominated by Western powers and that foreign aid is their main source of income rather than resources developed domestically. Many factors, including the propensity of many African leaders to exhibit ineptitude and emphasize self-promotion, may be ascribed to the political instability that has been experienced on the continent. The leaders of many African countries have acted in their self-interest, which has prevented them from developing economies that can support themselves. To further their own goals and preserve their networks of patronage, the persons in question have mostly relied on foreign aid and easily accessible money sources, such as oil (Constitutive Act 2000). Through the technique of abusing national resources, some have produced false declarations and grandiose initiatives to gain international recognition and obtain funding from outside sources.

Several factors combined to drive the uprising in Sudan, including a failing economy, despotic rule, and long-standing structural injustice. Maintaining citizens' democratic rights is a significant undertaking given the many challenges to democratic administration. When there aren't enough channels for people to air their complaints and governments don't deliver on their promises, people in Africa are more and more resorting to collective

action as a last resort. However, there are several difficulties with this method. Authoritarian African governments that oppress opposition organizations may unintentionally fuel the growth and spread of insurgency movements that are prepared to use all means necessary to topple these regimes. There is an ongoing discussion on how people might break social contracts and topple a government that oppresses its people and doesn't protect their property. Unfortunately, the ACDEG of the African Union does not specifically mention the process of transitioning via peaceful public uprisings to overthrow existing regimes.

## Niger Coup

The military coup, which occurred on 26 July 2023 in Niger, resulted in the removal of President Mohamed Bazoum and the subsequent installation of General Abdourahmane Tchiani as the new leader. This event is part of a series of military takeovers that have taken place across the African continent since 2020. Regarding the recent coup in Niger, it is noteworthy that President Mohamed Bazoum was apprehended by Niger's presidential guard. The leader of a new military junta and transitional administration was declared by General Abdourahmane Tchiani, the commander of the Presidential Guard. The closure of the country's borders, suspension of the constitution and governmental institutions, and declaration of a curfew were implemented by the presidential guard troops. The ex-president, Bazoum, who has declined to step down, remains under detention. The military personnel asserted that they assumed control "in response to the ongoing decline in the security landscape, inadequate economic and social governance" within Niger (ECOWAS 2023). The former president, who was removed from power, faced allegations of aligning with Western interests, which occasionally resulted in a decline in domestic support.

Some Nigeriens had the belief that the coup plotters may have been driven by ulterior reasons. This speculation stemmed from additional claims that the previous president was gradually altering his security appointments and allegedly intended to replace the leader of his presidential guard. Niamey has seen considerable social and political turmoil after the coup. The military dictatorship has received support from Niger's armed forces, as confirmed by the country's army. In 2021, Mohamed Bazoum had been victorious in Niger's inaugural peaceful and democratic transition of power after its independence from France in 1960.

The coup has been criticized by various international organizations such as the ECOWAS, the AU, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN), as well as by influential countries such as the United States, France, Russia, and China. The concerns of Nigeria extend beyond regionalism and are closely tied to its national security. Nigeria possesses an extensive border that it shares with the neighboring country of Niger. Significantly, on either side of the divide, the influential ethnic groups of Hausa and Fulani are present. The groups originate from southern Niger and northern Nigeria. The presence of cultural homogeneity on both sides of the boundaries has significant security implications for the states involved.

Moreover, it is imperative to note that violent extremists and rebel groups have been active in the vicinity of the shared border between the two states. The eastern section of the border has witnessed significant activity from the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram. Bandits are also observed inside the vicinity. For an extended period, Nigeria has engaged in collaboration with Niger under the framework of the Lake Chad Basin Commission to combat terrorism through civilian oversight. The present analysis posits that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in his capacity as the incumbent chairman of the ECOWAS, is taking appropriate actions. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the organization has effectively acknowledged the occurrence of coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and notably, Chad. This implies that established legal decisions have been made. The primary factor contributing to ECOWAS' hesitance in employing military intervention within the Niger Republic is as follows.

The Economic Community of West African States, a regional institution, has officially proclaimed a policy of “zero tolerance” against *coup d'états*. The regional bloc issued a statement asserting its intention to employ all necessary actions to reinstate constitutional order if its stipulations were not fulfilled within a week. These conditions encompassed, among other things, the unconditional liberation of the previous head of state, the reinstatement of the former president, and the provision of sufficient security for the deposed president and his family. The organization issued a cautionary statement to the military junta in Niger, indicating that in the event of non-compliance with their requests, a series of significant actions would be implemented. Potential actions could involve the implementation of coercive tactics, and high-ranking military officials promptly convened to strategize for an intervention. However, the utilization of force was temporarily suspended in favor of engaging in extensive dialogue and ongoing negotiations between representatives from ECOWAS, experts such as former Head of State General Abdusalami Abubakar, and the government officials of Niger

(ECOWAS 2023). The bloc has declared the prompt implementation of an aerial exclusion zone above Niger, prohibiting all commercial aircraft. Furthermore, the closing of all land crossings with the country and the introduction of financial sanctions against the junta were announced.

The African Union (AU) promptly responded to the coup by suspending Niger from its various activities. This decision was made in light of the military coup that occurred in the country. Additionally, the AU advised its members to refrain from engaging in any actions that could potentially legitimize the ruling junta. As previously stated, the Economic Community of West African States has been engaged in negotiations with the junta. However, ECOWAS has expressed its preparedness to deploy military forces to Niger to reinstate constitutional governance should diplomatic endeavors prove unsuccessful. This stance is further reinforced by the AU, which, within its framework, explicitly opposes any unconstitutional alteration of governance in African nations.

The *communiqué* issued by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union acknowledged the decision made by the Economic Community of West African States to activate a standby force. Furthermore, the AU Council requested the AU Commission to evaluate the potential economic, social, and security consequences associated with the deployment of this force. Additionally, the organization stated that it had formally requested the African Union Commission to assemble a comprehensive roster containing the names of individuals affiliated with the junta and those who endorse their actions. This compilation would serve as a basis for implementing focused sanctions and the enforcement of particular punitive measures (AU 2023).

The Economic Community of West African States has already implemented comprehensive sanctions against Niger, a measure that has received the endorsement of the African Union. The organization has restated its demands for the prompt release of President Mohamed Bazoum, who was democratically elected and has been held in custody since the occurrence of the coup. Additionally, the AU urges the coup leaders to retreat to their military bases. The military regime has exhibited resilience in the face of demands to relinquish power and has put up a proposal outlining a three-year timeframe for the organization of elections. However, this plan has been met with disapproval by the ECOWAS.

Niger holds strategic importance due to its role as a military base for both U.S. and French forces engaged in counterterrorism operations against Islamist extremist organizations in the surrounding area. Additionally, Niger's status as a major global uranium supplier further enhances

its relevance. White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan restated the imperative of releasing Bazoum and expressed the United States' commitment to further consultations with ECOWAS. "We are actively engaged in collaborative efforts with all of our allies, including France, to diligently pursue the preservation of democratic principles in Niger" (The White House 2023)<sup>2</sup>.

The AU has expressed its firm opposition to any form of external intervention in the region, whether it be from non-African actors or countries. This includes the involvement of private military groups, such as the Russian mercenary outfit Wagner, which is known to operate in the nearby country of Mali. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that France sources almost one-third of its uranium from Niger, a country that contributes 5% to the global aggregate of uranium production. Niger accommodates military forces from France and the United States, along with two United States drone bases, with a primary objective of addressing Islamist insurgencies within the area. The demonstrators in favour of the revolution were observed displaying Russian flags, while the Wagner Group of Russia asserts that the coup "demonstrates Wagner's efficacy in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region" (The Nation 2023).

Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, characterised the coup as "unconstitutional". According to official statements from the White House, there is a lack of convincing proof supporting Russian involvement. Additionally, it is worth noting that one of the key individuals involved in the coup attempt, specifically the leader of Niger's Special Forces, has significant connections to the United States. However, it is widely argued by numerous experts that there is a resurgence reminiscent of the Cold War period, characterised by geopolitical struggle and rivalry involving the United States, NATO, Russia, and China in Africa, which has resulted in instances of regime transitions and coups. One intriguing observation is the American training received by Goita in Mali, Traore in Burkina Faso, Doumbuya in Guinea, and presently Tchiani in Niger (The Guardian 2023).

The ongoing political ramifications of the coup in Niger are yet to completely manifest, however, several potential repercussions are anticipated, encompassing both domestic and foreign spheres. These consequences necessitate cautious and deliberate handling. The coup has resulted in

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2 Jake Sullivan. September 2023. Remarks and Q&A by US National Security Advisor on the Coup in Niger, release of the former president Bazoum and the United States' commitment to further consultations with ECOWAS and Its engagement in collaborative efforts with all US allies, including France; in order to ensure stability in Niger.

heightened levels of instability and uncertainty within the domestic sphere. The nation is currently confronted with a multitude of issues, encompassing rebel groups and organizations, persistent and widespread poverty, as well as limited economic opportunities and wealth. The occurrence of a coup has the potential to exacerbate the country's instability and pose additional obstacles in effectively addressing the numerous concerns at hand.

The coup has had a detrimental impact on Niger's diplomatic connections with neighboring countries and international partners, notably Nigeria and the European Union. Consequently, these nations and the EU have promptly terminated diplomatic relations and suspended the provision of aid to Niger. Niger is an active participant in the G5 in the Sahel, a regional security coalition dedicated to addressing the issue of terrorism within the area. The occurrence of the coup has resulted in a significant deterioration of the diplomatic ties between Niger and the remaining constituents of the G5 Sahel, impeding the effective coordination of counterterrorism endeavors. The World Bank, the ECOWAS, the African Union, and the United Nations have terminated their relationships with Niger. In response, the junta of Niger Republic has severed its connections with Nigeria, as well as its former colonial power France, Togo, and the United States.

The coup has had a comparable impact on Niger's diplomatic ties with the European Union. The EU plays a significant role as a contributor to Niger, and the occurrence of a coup has the potential to result in a reduction in financial assistance provided by the EU. The potential consequences of this situation on Niger's economy and its capacity to tackle existing difficulties may be adverse. According to data provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Niger, the second largest beneficiary of foreign aid in West Africa following Nigeria, got a total of \$1.8 billion in aid just in the year 2021 (OECD 2021).

The coup has precipitated alterations in governmental policy. The potential divergence in priorities between the incumbent government and its predecessor may exert an influence on the governance of Niger. The occurrence of the coup has resulted in a decline in foreign investment. The potential apprehension regarding the stability of Niger may lead to a decreased inclination among foreign investors to engage in investment activities within the country. The occurrence of the coup has resulted in a notable escalation of societal unrest. The occurrence of a coup has the potential to incite demonstrations or alternative manifestations of social disorder, exacerbating the existing state of instability inside the nation. The occurrence of the coup has prompted inquiries over the durability of democratic governance

in Niger and its establishment within the broader regional context. Ensuring the sustenance of democratic institutions and procedures in Niger and the broader region is of paramount significance in mitigating the likelihood of future *coup d'états*.

## Conclusion

The African Union is unique among continental organizations due to its possession of a framework that incorporates multiple measures aimed at addressing unconstitutional changes of government (UCG), setting it apart from other similar entities. The framework presented herein functions as a guiding tool for African nations in their endeavors to address coups and other illegitimate means of government alteration. The recurrence of coups in the year 2021 highlights inadequacies within the framework of the AU. The text highlights the African Union's inconsistent approach towards coups and other forms of illegitimate power transitions. Additionally, it sheds light on the AU's restricted ability to exert control over governments that arise from coups, thereby discouraging future attempts at seizing power through such means. It could be advantageous for the African Union to extend the implementation of its policy on Unconstitutional Change of Government beyond *coup d'état* scenarios, to strengthen its institutional framework. Had the African Union implemented its UCG policy in response to Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's bid to prolong his tenure in Mali, it is plausible that the 2020 coup could have been prevented, and a more impactful signal would have been sent to other heads of state who aspire to abolish constitutional term limits.

President George Weah of Liberia has provided his perspective on the recent decision made by ECOWAS to suspend Guinea following the coup against Alpha Conde. The speaker has underscored the importance of not solely denouncing military coups, but also delving into the root causes that precipitate these illicit seizures of power. Is it conceivable that we are neglecting our political responsibilities by not adhering to the stipulated term limits as specified in our respective constitutions? The adoption of a more vigilant approach and the implementation of pragmatic measures are crucial for the African Union to address the increasing threats to constitutional governance in Africa.

The efficacy of the punitive measures delineated in the African Union's Uniform Charter on Governance (AU UCG) in compelling coup plotters to relinquish authority may be constrained. The African Union

underscores the significance of coordination and collaboration with other relevant entities in tackling occurrences of coups. The extent to which such collaborative endeavors take place is uncertain. The act of being suspended from the academic institution commonly referred to as AU is regarded as a punitive measure. The impact of the punitive measure on the suspended state is unclear, especially if it continues to maintain its diplomatic relations with other countries.

The effectiveness of sanctions, visa bans, and asset freezes on individuals involved in a *coup d'état* is dependent on their degree of affiliation with other African countries. Enhancing collaboration, which includes both organized and unorganized forms, between the AU and organizations that have closer connections with the state impacted by a coup, could potentially serve as a more effective approach for applying pressure on governments that have arisen from coups to surrender their authority. What are the projected results of the Elders Forum/Panel of the wise, composed of former presidents who have previously served as military commanders or employed constitutional manipulation or amendment to retain power? The inclusion of non-state actors, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations in the electoral and democratic process is crucial for the preservation and enhancement of democracy in Africa.

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## ABSTRACT

Since the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) transformed into the African Union (AU), the continental body has abandoned the non-interventionist tenet in favor of non-indifference. It also adopted the Unconstitutional Changes of Government

(UCG) framework as well as other measures to protect and strengthen democracy. The UCG and other current frameworks are challenged by the recent uptick in military coups and coup attempts, which also shows a democratic backsliding and poses a significant danger to the consolidation of democracy in Africa. Since achieving independence, the African continent has been consistently afflicted by instances of coups and attempted coups. Contrary to popular opinion, the return of coups over the last ten years suggests that enhanced democratic practices do not always result in fewer instances of coups or coup attempts. Even while the AU and other regional organizations in Africa are politically determined not to reward military governments or those that have emerged from extra-constitutional arrangements by allowing them to join the community of nations, the plague persists. This essay examines the application of the AU's methodology for using UCG together with other metrics. It also makes an effort to provide other hypotheses for the recurrence of this phenomenon. The study suggests that it is time for the AU to properly apply its UCG strategy outside of coup events to successfully preserve and consolidate democracy. The AU has to have the guts to investigate what leads to these illegitimate coups and pay more attention to the rising danger to democracy in Africa.

## KEYWORDS

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