

# Unpacking the Interplay of Military Interests and Regional Instability in Africa

Robert Ngesu

Department of Diplomacy and International Studies(DDIS), The University of Nairobi

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## ABSTRACT

Military interventions in the political arena and internal affairs of African states without a clearly defined legal framework, roles, and extent of their operations pose a significant threat to democratic governance and constitutionalism in the continent. This study therefore sought to determine the military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions in Africa. The study adopted Feaver's Agency Theory as its theoretical framework. The theory emphasises the distinct preferences and the roles of the military and civilian leaders in shaping military interventions. This study utilised a mixed-method research design, entailing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study was conducted in eight African countries that have had coups: Sudan, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mali, Sierra Leone, Gabon and Niger. A sample size of 48 respondents was drawn from the study's target population (military officers and commanders, members of parliament, representatives from the Attorney General's office, the general public and scholars in the fields of political science, international relations, and security studies). Purposive sampling was used to identify the countries and the respondents to be included in the study. Primary data for this study was obtained using interviews. The study also relied on secondary data which was obtained from pertinent literature in the field of study, including journals, books, essays, policy papers, government reports, conference proceedings, and other publications. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and identify emerging themes pertaining to military interests in their political involvement, while descriptive statistics was computed for quantitative data. Excel sheet, NVivo, QDAS, and SPSS will be used to aid data analysis in this research. The study utilized graphs and tables to exhibit and evaluate quantitative data. From the study's findings, military intervention in the political affairs of African nations is primarily necessitated by military corporate interests and a confluence of interlinked factors such as historical precedents, economic downturn, legitimacy crises, poor governance or weak political institutions, and terrorism. Consequently, the study recommends coup-proofing mechanisms that bolster regional security organisations and promote cooperative efforts in addressing security threats, reinforce the principle of civilian control over the military through legal and institutional mechanisms, and strengthen political institutions and governance.

**Keywords:** Africa, Coup, Political Transitions, Military Interests.

## INTRODUCTION

Africa's military is the biggest threat to democratic governance and constitutionalism in the continent primarily due to their interventions in the political arena and involvement in internal affairs without a clearly defined legal framework, roles, and extent of its operations.<sup>1</sup> Since the post-independence era of the late 1950s to date, there have been over 200 military coups in Africa, 45% of which have been successfully executed.<sup>2</sup> Africa is replete with instances wherein the armed forces have seized authority, either wholly or partially suspended the constitutional framework, or prematurely terminated transitional endeavours that appeared to be making progress. The Sahel, Central Africa, and the West Africa regions have in recent times earned a new name, the Coup Belt, due to the region's high prevalence of coups d'état. Since 2020, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone have all witnessed military coups, the latest being the ouster of Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

<sup>1</sup> Bailie, Craig. "The African military in a democratic age." *Conflict Trends* 2018, no. 2 (2018): 27-35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Most coups d'état entail the threat or use of force to overthrow or replace the existing government.<sup>3</sup> However, Suleiman opines that there are emergent forms of coups- 'coups that are not coups'- in Africa.<sup>4</sup> These include "soft coups" as witnessed in Zimbabwean's 2017 Mugabe regime change; "dynastic or institutional coups" as was the case in Chad in April 2020 where the army appointed the late president's son Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno as the new president contrary to the stipulations of the country's constitution; and "constitutional coups" where several sitting presidents in Africa have extended constitutional term limits.

Military coups and other forms of military involvement in politics (MIPs) have been a recurrent trend in Africa. This phenomenon has made it difficult to develop and maintain democratic procedures, especially during political transitions. A political transition occurs when two distinct political regimes, such as authoritarian, democratic, or hybrid ones, are separated by a change in one form of government or political regime. These transitions can be violent or peaceful, and take many different forms, such as elections, coups d'états, revolutions, decolonization, or regime changes. They frequently entail the handing over of power from one group or person to another and can cause profound alterations in a society's economic, social, and political spheres. Political changes frequently take place when the viability of current regimes or political systems is untenable.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Military involvement in political transition has adverse negative effects on the states: undermining political participation and democratic principles such as adherence to the rule of law, and fundamental human rights including the freedom of expression, destabilizing regional stability in neighbouring states.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, violent and undemocratic power transitions escalate tensions and conflicts with other countries or regions. Consequently, the military's involvement in political transitions raises serious concerns as to whether such an intervention is justified in the first place.

Despite the prevalence of military interventions in Africa, scholarly focus on their role during political transitions remains limited. While general studies exist on civil-military relations and coups d'état, few explicitly investigate the underlying motivations and evolving interests of the military during moments when political regimes shift. This narrow treatment obscures the complexity of military interests' influence on this interventionist behavior. Without a focused investigation into the drivers of military involvement during political transitions, Africa's policy responses will continue to be reactive and fragmented, rather than preventive and strategic.

### Research Objective

The motives behind a coup can vary, including the political, ideological, or personal ambitions of the coup leaders. With an emphasis on the causes, this research seeks to identify the underlying military interests and related elements that underlie such interventions. It is imperative to understand these dynamics to reduce the disruptive role of the military in African governance transitions.

### Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that military interventions in political transitions across Africa are primarily driven by a combination of i) institutional interests, ii) personal ambitions of military elites, and iii) perceived threats to the military's political and economic influence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The reviewed literature presents an examination of the factors driving military involvement in political transitions across Africa. The scholarship on civil-military relations revolves around four themes: societal–

<sup>3</sup> Luttwak, Edward. *Coup d'État: A Practical Handbook*. Harvard University Press, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Dan Suleiman, Towards a Better Understanding of the Underlying Conditions of Coups in Africa. E-International Relations. Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/09/24/towards-a-better-understanding-of-the-underlying-conditions-of-coups-in-africa/>

<sup>5</sup> Morlino, L., (2011). *What Accounts for Military Intervention in Politics*. International Encyclopaedia of Political Science, 8.

military (dis)integration, civilian control, military coups d'Etat, and defection of militaries.<sup>6</sup> Finer opines that MIPs are fundamentally driven by two forces: the motives to intervene and the opportunities to do so.<sup>7</sup> Transnational scholarship on the causes of coups indicates that popular unrest and domestic and interstate wars stimulate coups.<sup>8</sup> In nascent democracies, Bou Nassif argues that ideational variables are a crucial factor that shapes the intrusion of militaries into political affairs.<sup>9</sup> The threat of coups continues when the military believes that its fundamental institutional interests are threatened following a democratic transition. The scholar notes four interlinked causes of MIPs: corporate interests, the relationship between the military and the founding democratic government in terms of force, perceptions of the new civilian governing class, and military ethos. These ideas and normative preferences resonate with interventionist tendencies.

According to Gavin and Luckham, the military's capacity to maintain order and project force grants it the ability to assert authority and intervene in political affairs when opportunities arise. Roessler underscores the military's pursuit of alliances with technocrats and politicians, emphasizing the need for collaboration beyond armed forces for effective governance. Tusalem identified three key commonalities in African states as triggers for military intrusion in politics: corruption, bad governance, and state instability arising from poor leadership.

Tendi argued that the idiosyncrasies and personal ambitions of military personnel play a crucial role in motivating the military's intervention in political transitions. The scholar reaffirms Samuel Finer's observation that 'mixed' causes for coups are inevitable, and the exact mix of motives varies from case to case. In the case of the coup in Zimbabwe, Tendi notes that there were four key coup motivations: Mugabe's waning power, some generals' personal political leadership ambitions, the threat of criminal prosecution and unstable employment among the upper ranks of the military, and discontent among military generals due to Mugabe's devaluing of ZANU PF's 1970s liberation struggle actors and ideology.<sup>10</sup>

Albrecht and Eibl opine that officers' grievances over personal incentives are a breeding ground for most coups.<sup>11</sup> The scholars note that these grievances are compounded by economic crises and shocks, genuine democratization or political liberalization in authoritarian states, and low military spending. Albrecht and Eibl argue that military spending affects military officers differently insofar as coups are concerned. Elite officers' coups arise from a low level of military spending in comparison with other government agencies. On the contrary, combat officer coups are necessitated by the low level of military spending per soldier and a lack of social spending.

Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa emphasise a wider scope of the military's involvement in politics beyond coups.<sup>12</sup> The scholars argue that the threat of terror attacks or terrorist violence provides an opportunity for the military to infiltrate a nation's political landscape. This is mainly witnessed through two mechanisms: First, government authorities draw militaries into national politics by requiring their expertise to strengthen national security and fight terrorism. secondly, militaries exploit their informational advantages over civilian authorities to advance their interests in policy-making processes and politics. However, it is noted that the involvement in such cases fails to take full control of state institutions.

Elischer has also shown that militaries in countries within the Sahel intervene in politics to safeguard the economic and political interests of senior officers within the military.<sup>13</sup> This protection of elite privileges underscores the institutionalization of self-serving motives among military leadership. Such tendencies reinforce

<sup>6</sup> Brooks, Risa A. "Integrating the civil-military relations subfield." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 379-398.

<sup>7</sup> Finer, Samuel. "The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics (Boulder." (1988).

<sup>8</sup> Bell, Curtis, and Jun Koga Sudduth. "The causes and outcomes of coup during civil war." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 7 (2017): 1432-1455.

<sup>9</sup> Bou Nassif, Hicham. "Coups and nascent democracies: the military and Egypt's failed consolidation." *Democratization* 24, no. 1 (2017): 157-174.

<sup>10</sup> Tendi, Blessing-Miles. "The motivations and dynamics of Zimbabwe's 2017 military coup." *African Affairs* 119, no. 474 (2020): 39-67.

<sup>11</sup> Albrecht, Holger, and Ferdinand Eibl. "How to keep officers in the barracks: Causes, agents, and types of military coups." *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2018): 315-328.

<sup>12</sup> Bove, Vincenzo, Mauricio Rivera, and Chiara Ruffa. "Beyond coups: terrorism and military involvement in politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 263-288.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Elischer, "Militaries in Sahelian politics." *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel* (2021): 423-438.

a pattern of interventionism aimed at preserving internal hierarchies and benefits. In a similar vein, Salihu identified military unprofessionalism as a central cause of coups and praetorianism in post-colonial West African states.<sup>14</sup> According to Salihu, as military institutions become increasingly cognizant of their political leverage, they tend to exploit moments of political instability, often resulting in recurrent coups d'état. This phenomenon has led to entrenched patterns of civil-military imbalance in governance structures across the region.

Eizenga attributes military interventions in Burkina Faso to both popular pressures arising from social unrest and internal ideological cleavages within the armed forces.<sup>15</sup> Eizenga also points out that most of Burkina Faso's military coups in the 1980s, including the 2014-2015 coup, were due to ideological differences. Engels corroborates this analysis by examining the military coups of 24th and 25th January 2022 in Burkina Faso.<sup>16</sup> He concludes that dissatisfaction with the government's failure to adequately address growing security threats posed by armed groups and terrorists was the primary catalyst for the coups. This situates the military as a reactive institution responding to security vacuums left by civilian authorities.

In the case of Mali, Matei offers a comprehensive account of the military coups in 1968, 1991, 2012, and 2020, attributing them to a complex interplay of factors.<sup>17</sup> These include colonial legacies, the persistent instability in Northern Mali, entrenched military-political cultures, weak state institutions, ineffective foreign assistance, and a chronically fraught civil-military relationship. The study illustrates the cumulative impact of both structural and agency-based factors in shaping Mali's coup trajectory.

Turning to Niger, Korotayev et al. analyzed the military coup led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani.<sup>18</sup> They argue that it was precipitated by dissatisfaction with the government, deepening economic crises, pervasive corruption, and escalating socio-political unrest. The authors observed that similar factors had spurred coups in neighboring West African nations like Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Mali. Thus, indicating the presence of shared historical, geographical, and political conditions that heighten the vulnerability of these states to military takeovers.

Collectively, these studies reveal that military interventions in political transitions across Africa are rarely the product of isolated causes. Rather, they are symptomatic of systemic weaknesses. This article adds to the existing literature by narrowing down the scope of the military's involvement in politics to political transitions, a phase in which the state is most vulnerable to instability enablers and threats.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Feaver's Agency Theory in determining the military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions in Africa. This theory was advanced by Peter Feaver. Feaver's Agency Theory emphasises the distinct preferences and the roles of the military and civilian leaders in shaping military interventions.<sup>19</sup> The importance of military interests and the interaction of numerous circumstances is shown by applying Feaver's agency theory to military interventions in political transitions in Africa. These interventions frequently result from a confluence of factors, including perceived dangers to military objectives, weak civilian leadership, outside influences, and historical precedents.

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<sup>14</sup> Naila Salihu, "West Africa: Civil-Military Relations From a Colonial Perspective." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Eizenga, Daniel. "Military Coups in Burkina Faso." *Democratization and Military Coups in Africa* (2021): 51.

<sup>16</sup> Bettina Engels, "Transition now? Another coup d'état in Burkina Faso." *Review of African Political Economy* 49, no. 172 (2022): 315-326.

<sup>17</sup> Florina Cristiana Matei. "Mali: The hot and cold relationship between military intervention and democratic consolidation." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Andrey Korotayev, Leonid Issaev, Anna Ilyina, Julia Zinkina, and Elena Voronina. "Revolutionary history of Niger: From independence to 2023 coup." In *Terrorism and political contention: New perspectives on North Africa and the Sahel region*, pp. 169-194. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Feaver, Peter D. *Armed servants: Agency, oversight, and civil-military relations*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

From the perspective of Feaver's Agency Theory, the military is the agent and the civilian authority is the principal. The theory is concerned with how these two different groups' preferences interact during the decision-making process. For instance, the theory presupposes that, like rational actors, the military also have their own institutional purposes and interests. These interests may include maintaining their financial resources, rights, independence, and control over military actions. In light of the aforementioned, it is assumed that the military will participate in political transitions when doing so is in line with its institutional interests.

The emphasis of Feaver's Agency Theory is on the influence of civilian leaders on military behaviour. During political changes, civilian leadership in African nations may be brittle or unstable. As a result, there may be a power vacuum or ambiguity, which could prompt the military to step in to restore stability or further its own influence. While the military is the state's main protector against domestic and foreign threats, it is also a key source of insecurity to civilian rule. Consequently, there exists a dilemma in maintaining the effectiveness of the military in addressing threats to civilian rule and ensuring that the armies remain submissive to civilian authorities. Feaver refers to this situation as the civilian-military relations "problematique"<sup>20</sup> The theory assumes that policy outcomes are influenced by the balance of power, persuasion, and compromise between civilian leaders and the military. When their interests align, policies are more likely to be implemented smoothly, but when there are conflicts of interest, it can lead to friction and challenges in policy execution including coups, especially in political transitions.

However, this theory is not without criticism. For instance, the theory static model is criticised for failing to account for changes in public opinion, dynamics in military ethos, and changes in leadership, all of which greatly shape policy decision-making processes. The theory's rationality assumption does not always hold in practice. Critics argue also that the theory oversimplifies the complex interactions within governments and military organizations. It tends to portray civilian leaders and the military as monolithic entities with uniform preferences, overlooking the diversity of perspectives within each group. Lastly, critics also point to the limited empirical support for its claims

Despite the above-mentioned criticism, scholars such as Deane-Peter Baker have found Feaver's Agency Theory to be relevant and applicable in the African context as an analytical tool.<sup>21</sup> This refutes earlier criticisms of the theory's limited applicability to mature democracies or contexts devoid of coups. Baker argues that in contexts of weak governance incapable of enforcing the military's submissiveness to civilian rule, as is the case in many African countries, regional organisations offer an opportunity to tame the behaviour of the military and promote military obedience to civilian authorities.<sup>22</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a mixed-method research design, entailing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This study's research design is essential since it enables a more thorough evaluation of the research issues without restricting the researcher to only employing quantitative or qualitative methods. The study was conducted in eight African countries that have had coups: Sudan, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mali, Sierra Leone, Gabon and Niger. The study's target population comprised military officers and commanders, members of parliament, representatives from the Attorney General's office, the general public and scholars in the fields of political science, international relations, and security studies.

A sample size of 48 respondents was drawn from the study's target population: six respondents (a combat officer, an elite officer, a member of parliament, a representative from the Attorney General's office, a scholar, and a citizen) from each of the eight selected countries. Purposive sampling was used to identify the countries and the respondents to be included in the study. The choice of this sampling technique was based on the rationale that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select respondents who possess specialized knowledge and

<sup>20</sup> Feaver, Peter D. "The civil-military problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the question of civilian control." *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 149-178.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, Deane-Peter. "Agency theory: A new model of civil-military relations for Africa?" *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 7, no. 1 (2007): 113-135.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

expertise, unique insights or direct experience related to coups and perspectives that are critical to the study's subject area.

This study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary data was obtained from pertinent literature in the field of study, including journals, books, essays, policy papers, government reports, conference proceedings, and other publications. Primary data for this study was obtained through interviews with the 48 key informants selected from the eight African countries. Interview guides were structured and disseminated to the study's respondents through email.

Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and identify emerging themes pertaining to military interests in their involvement in politics while descriptive statistics was computed for quantitative data. Excel sheet, NVivo, QDAS, and SPSS will be used to aid data analysis in this research. The study utilized graphs, pie charts, and tables to exhibit and evaluate quantitative data. Given the sensitive nature of this study's subject area, particularly coups, this study ensured informed consent prior to participation in the research, utmost confidentiality and anonymity of its respondents. These ethical considerations were based on the moral premise of ensuring the utmost safety of the respondents while safeguarding their rights and well-being. A potential limitation of this study relates to the sensitivity of this study's subject area, which may limit the vigorous participation of some respondents.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section entails a presentation and in-depth discussion of the findings from both qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the 48 interviewees and secondary data.

The results from the content analysis indicate that most of the respondents (96%) agreed that most coups in Africa are driven primarily by military interests and a confluence of other factors that stem from weak governance. From the study's results, the prominent themes concerning military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions were identified, as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Military Interests and Related Factors that Make the Military Intervene in Political Transitions

<b>Military Interests and Related Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage (%)</b>
Military corporate interests	15	31	31
Weak political institutions/ poor governance	7	15	46
Regime legitimacy	7	15	61
Economic decline	5	10	71
Historical precedents	4	8	79
Terrorism	10	21	100
Total	48	100	

**Source: Author (2023)**

From the table above, 31% of the respondents identified military corporate interests as the prominent factor leading to military interventions in political transitions in Africa. This was followed by terrorism (21%), legitimacy crises (15%), weak political institutions/ poor governance (15%), economic downturn (10%) and historical precedents/ culture of coups (8%). The following graphic illustrates the military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions in Africa.

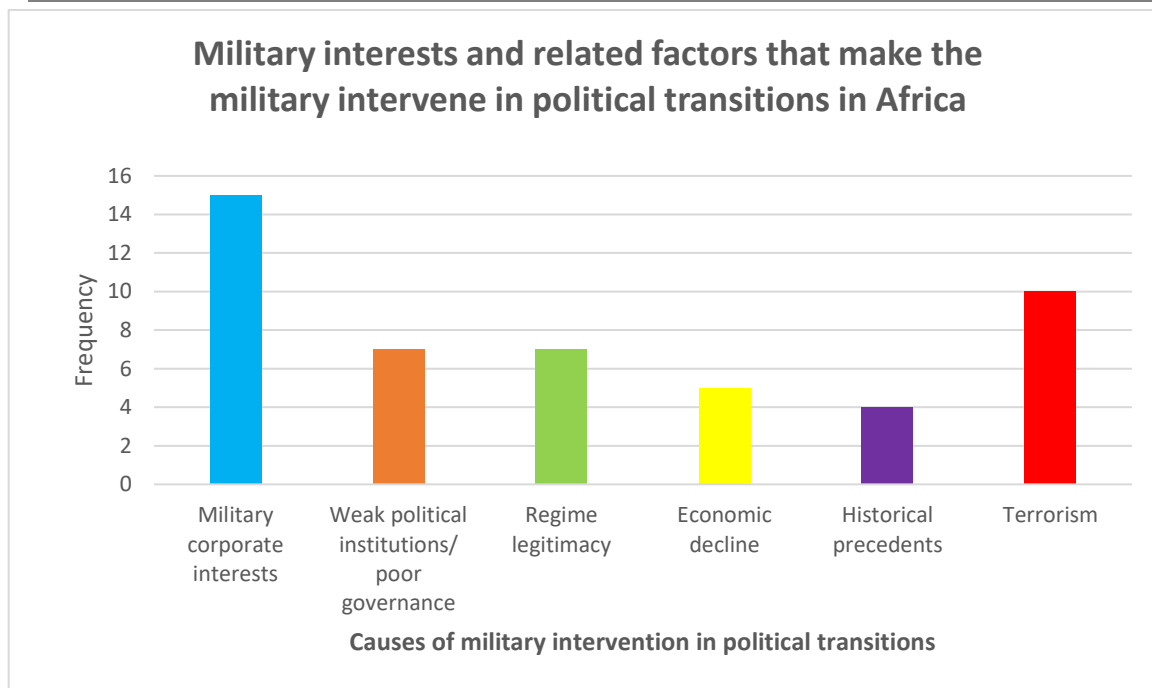


Figure 1 The military Interests and Related Factors That Make the Military Intervene in Political Transitions in Africa

### Military corporate interests

The military is a complicated organization having its own economic interests and commercial ventures in many nations, in addition to serving as a force for defence. These interests can vary from gaining lucrative contracts to the personal wealth of senior officers to controlling critical sectors. Some of the military-owned or controlled businesses encompass a wide range of sectors, including arms manufacturing, natural resource extraction, construction, and telecommunications, and government contracts and procurement deals.

One interviewee stated that:

“Military spending influences military officers’ inclinations towards coups differently. For the elite military officers, a low level of military spending in comparison with other government agencies is enough reason to justify an intervention to safeguard their status quo in support of their patronage links within the military. For us combat officers, our concerns are majorly about low levels of military spending per soldier and a lack of social spending.”<sup>23</sup>

The above-mentioned interests can have a significant effect on how the military behaves during periods of political upheaval. Albrecht and Eibl opine that officers’ grievances over personal incentives are a breeding ground for most coups.<sup>24</sup> Political transitions can create uncertainty in the business environment, which can be detrimental to military-owned enterprises. During political transitions, there is a risk that civilian leaders may seek to reform or privatize these industries, potentially undermining the economic power and privileges of the military establishment. This personal dimension can further incentivize military intervention as a means of self-preservation. The military may perceive political interventions as a way to restore stability and protect its economic interests, viewing itself as the guardian of economic order.

### Weak political institutions/ poor governance

Weak political institutions and poor governance can create conditions conducive to military intervention in political transitions. Amoateng notes that countries with poor political control over the military are vulnerable

<sup>23</sup> Interview with a combat officer from Burkina Faso

<sup>24</sup> Albrecht, Holger, and Ferdinand Eibl. "How to keep officers in the barracks: Causes, agents, and types of military coups." *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2018): 315-328.



to military-fueled civil conflicts that undermine the authority of existing political regimes.<sup>25</sup> Weak and ineffective political institutions struggle to maintain law and order, provide essential public services, or ensure the rule of law. In such contexts, there is a perceived power vacuum or instability that the military may view as its duty to fill. The military often portrays itself as a stabilizing force that can restore order and protect national interests. This perception can lead to military leaders justifying their intervention as a means of providing much-needed governance and security.

Poor governance, characterized by corruption, mismanagement, and lack of accountability, can erode public trust in civilian authorities. When citizens lose faith in the ability of elected leaders to address their concerns and deliver basic services, they may become more receptive to the idea of military intervention as an alternative. The military can exploit this discontent by positioning itself as a more efficient alternative to civilian rule. This has been the case in many African nations, especially in the Sahel region.

One interviewee stated that:

“Niger and its neighbour in the Sahel region have weak governance, lack of state presence, infrastructures and provision of essential services, especially in isolated rural locations. The pervasive state of poor governance and marginalisation of the citizens are synonymous with extreme poverty, acute food insecurity, water scarcity and a low human development index. These dynamics have resulted in the dissatisfaction of the citizens and lack of trust in civilian rule, and have promoted the spread of terrorism and heightened insecurity in the region. This calls for overreliance on military expertise, especially during political transitions. Consequently, political elites and the military have exploited these situations to frame and legitimize coups.”<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, weak political institutions can lead to power struggles and political fragmentation, especially during political transitions such as elections or regime changes. In such situations, competing factions within the government may seek military support to bolster their positions or challenge their rivals. The military, in turn, may intervene to align with one faction or seize the opportunity to consolidate power for itself. In a nutshell, situations of poor governance and brittle political institutions enhance the military's perception as the necessary corrective force.

### Regime legitimacy

Regime legitimacy is a critical factor in shaping the military's decision to intervene in political transitions. Okafor opines that a regime may lose its legitimacy due to electoral fraud, corruption, or human rights abuses, undermining its stability.<sup>27</sup> One interviewee stated that:

“A loss of legitimacy can destabilize the political environment, threaten the military's interests and reputation, and trigger public and international pressure.”<sup>28</sup>

The military may take advantage of the aforementioned instances of social upheaval and international pressure to put in place corrective measures. The military, which is frequently regarded as a guarantor of stability, may believe that the regime is unable to keep the peace, which would prompt intervention to restore stability. Sanctions or isolation may result if the legitimacy of a government is questioned by the international community. In response to outside pressure, the military may take actions aimed at restoring legitimacy and normalising international relations. Furthermore, a legitimacy crisis may jeopardize the objectives of the military as an institution. The military draws its benefits from a stable government that has the ability to distribute resources,

<sup>25</sup> Amoateng, Elvis Nana. "Military coups in Africa: A continuation of politics by other means?" *Conflict Trends* 2022, no. 1 (2022): 3-10.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with a professor in International Relations

<sup>27</sup> Okafor, Obiora Chinedu. *Re-defining legitimate statehood: International law and state fragmentation in Africa*. Vol. 36. BRILL, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Burundi's Attorney General Office representative



privileges, and power. Consequently, the military may step in to defend its institutional interests, such as funding and autonomy if the regime's legitimacy begins to decline.

### **Economic downturn**

In African countries where the military has significant economic and political power, military engagement in politics is also common. Economic downturn results in political instability, protests, and civic unrest. Widespread poverty, inflation, and unemployment cause resentment among the populace, which could result in large-scale protests and unrest. The military might engage in an effort to restore order and defend its economic assets if it perceives such disruption as a danger to national stability and its own interests.

As one interviewee aptly put it,

“Economic downturns can lead to reduced revenues, jeopardizing the financial benefits the military derives from these sectors. In response, the military may intervene to safeguard its economic privileges and access to resources.”<sup>29</sup>

In the civilian realm, political leaders who frequently rely on economic performance for their credibility are put at a disadvantage by economic crises. In such situations, military leaders have an opportunity to exert influence over the government.

### **Culture of coups/ historical precedent**

Military establishments with historical precedents, institutional norms and a culture of coups make it more inclined to intervene in the political affairs of the state. These precedents, which are based on a nation's prior experiences with both successful and disastrous military interventions, can affect how the military views its role and how it weighs the potential risks and rewards of participating in a political transition. A military may be more likely to act in a similar way if it has done so in the past during economic downturns, crises of legitimacy, bad governance, or when its corporate interests are threatened. The military examines the possible dangers, advantages, and justifications for involvement through the lens of these precedents. For instance, the military may be more inclined to regard intervention as a realistic option during subsequent political upheaval if previous coups or interventions resulted in favourable outcomes for the military.

One interviewee stated that:

“Sudan had its first unsuccessful military coup in 1957 followed by a successful coup in 1969. Over the past decades, the country has experienced six successful coups, the latest being in April 2023. Burkina Faso has also experienced close to eight successful coups. Militaries which have executed successful coups over time develop a culture of coups. I would not be surprised if the status quo remains unchanged into the future.”<sup>30</sup>

The military's involvement in state political matters, which may be seen as dangers to the state's very existence, are justified by institutional norms that portray the military as the final arbiter of political authority.

### **Terrorism**

Military intervention during political transitions can be sparked by terrorism, a phenomenon that has been seen not only in Africa but also in other parts of the world. Security concerns, the need to preserve stability, and the belief that the civilian government is unable to adequately combat the terrorist threat are frequently the driving forces behind this involvement. An entire nation's security is seriously threatened by terrorism. The military may have a sense of urgency when terrorist groups get stronger or commit high-profile strikes amid political transitions. Given its resources and counterterrorism expertise, the military may believe itself to be the institution best equipped to deal with this threat. Long-term terrorist activity can jeopardize the civil government's

<sup>29</sup> Interview with elite military officer in Mali

<sup>30</sup> Interview with a political science scholar in Uganda.

legitimacy and authority. The military may claim that intervention is necessary to restore order and defend the state in situations where the government is seen as being incapable of stopping terrorism or weak in doing so.

One interviewee stated that:

“In the past decade, the majority of the coups in West Africa, the Sahel, and Central Africa region have been identical. The coups were motivated by disgruntled armies criticizing how their own governments had failed to amicably control protests and Islamic insurgents.”<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions. The study concludes that military intervention in the political affairs of African nations, particularly during political transitions is primarily necessitated by military corporate interests and a confluence of interlinked factors such as historical precedents/ culture of coups, economic downturn, legitimacy crises, terrorism and poor governance or weak political institutions. As a result, military operations in African politics are rarely motivated exclusively by noble motives, but rather by a complex web of interrelated factors. Unless these issues are addressed, military interventions in political transitions including through coups will continue to pose a significant threat to constitutionalism and democracy in Africa.

## RECOMMENDATION

Having identified the military interests and related factors that make the military intervene in political transitions. It is imperative to design suitable coup-proofing mechanisms. This study therefore recommends the following:

1. **Reinforce the principle of civilian control over the military through legal and institutional mechanisms.** Establish a clear framework that protects civilian primacy while outlining the conditions that allow for military operations. This includes passing laws and rules that expressly state that civilian power takes precedence over military authority when making decisions on military interventions. Government officials should have the legal power to approve or reject military operations, barring unilateral military action. Nations may promote a culture of respect for democratic norms and civilian rule by strengthening these institutional and legal protections. These initiatives will lessen the possibility of military intervention in political transitions and increase the stability of government.
2. **Bolster regional security organisations and promote cooperative efforts in addressing security threats.** This will diminish the perception of the military as the sole guarantor of stability. The regional organisations such as the AU and ECOWAS among others will also act as the military's checkmate. Enhancing these regional organizations' ability, resources, and operational capabilities is part of strengthening them. Nations within a region can work together to address security concerns, including domestic wars, insurgencies, and transnational threats like terrorism and organized crime, by developing collective security arrangements. The military's role in ensuring stability can be complimented by a multilateral strategy if regional organizations grow more competent in tackling these challenges, eliminating the idea that the military is the only decider of security and offering a more comprehensive solution.
3. **Strengthening political institutions and governance.** This can be done from three fronts. First, ensure fair and transparent electoral processes to prevent electoral fraud and disputes that can undermine regime legitimacy. Secondly, invest in capacity-building programs to enhance the effectiveness and capacity of political institutions. This includes training for civil servants, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies to improve governance and the rule of law. Lastly, implement robust anti-corruption measures and promote transparency in government operations to restore public trust in civilian authorities.

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