

Policyweekly

Jihadist Violence and Military Resurgence

The Crisis of Fragile Democratisation in Africa



Policy Recommendations

- 1 African public institutions need to be strengthened to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency.
- 2 Coups or forceful power grab needs to be recognised.
- 3 African governments that uphold democratic norms and practices should merit significant diplomatic support, development and security assistance.

In just over six months in 2021, coups made a rude comeback in Sudan, Mali, Chad, and Guinea. The coups in Sudan and Mali came from previous military power grabs in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Thus, in about three years, six coups had been experienced in the four sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. A few years ago, the coup bug had caught up with Egypt and Zimbabwe. Most of these countries were navigating democratic transitions. However, these [violent takeovers](#) of power are fuelling pessimism that Africa is going [back to the bad old days](#) when the continent had a notoriety for a high frequency of coups. These forceful takeovers of power further deepen [social instability](#), corruption, human rights violations, and mass poverty on the continent. Besides these abnormalities, coups are highly [contagious](#) because they can some-

times trigger more coups in the country where they occur and sometimes in neighbouring states. As a result of these terrible consequences, this edition of Nextier Policy Weekly examines how fragile democratisation and waves of jihadist violence are impelling coups on the continent.

The Bad Old Days

Current coups in Africa are a [mirror of the past](#). In 1970, ten years after Africa's 'independence year', the continent recorded 20 coups. Another 24 coups followed between 1971 and 1980, representing the highest number in the six decades after 1960. Following appreciable [waves of democracy](#), coups decreased to 16 in the 1980s, 14 in the 1990s, 7 cases in the early 2000s and only five between 2011 and 2020. However, these developments were not accidental. From the 1980s, democracy had become the typology for classifying political systems. Two decades before then (the 1960s and the late 1980s), the 'Three Worlds' typology was the central analytic construct used to categorise states in terms of development, leading to the classification of the Western industrialised democracies as First World; communist states as Second World, and the economically less developed states in Asia, Latin America and Africa as Third World (Kesselman, Krieger, and Joseph, 2013). From the 1980s, political systems were classified as consolidated democracies, transitional democracies, or authoritarian regimes. The major features of democratic regimes were spelt out as periodic free and fair elections, the existence of political parties, public accountability, human rights, the rule of law, independent judiciary, among others (Huntington, 1991). Thus, authoritarian regimes, including military rule, became an aberration globally.

Fragile Democratisation

The hope that African [democracies](#) would consolidate is fast turning into despair because of the resurgence of coups on the continent in the last two years. However, the coups have been mainly triggered by fragile democratisation.

According to the [Freedom House](#), which classifies states as "free" (or democratic), "partly free" (or semi-democratic), and "not free" (or non-democratic) at five-year intervals, most African states constitute the largest numbers of not free, partly free or "hybrid" regimes, wherein some elements of democracy – such as periodic multiparty elections – coexist with authoritarian practices including human rights violations, electoral manipulation and disregard for term limits. This democratic backsliding further erodes legitimacy, accountability and inclusivity, inimical to popular political participation, contestation, and power-sharing. In recent years, [Mali](#) had been politically unstable because of widespread poverty, unemployment, climatic change, corruption and general feebleness of its state institutions. In [Chad](#), President Idriss Deby, killed in a war fight, had been in power for over 30 years. Similarly, political institutions are not any stronger in [Guinea](#), where a group of army officers overthrew the three-time elected President Alpha Condé.

Despite the many '[corrective coups](#)' in Burkina Faso since 1966, the country remains one of the poorest in the world. Moreover, the threat of terrorism increased in 2015 when al-Qaida announced that it had set up a cell in the country. In recent years, there have been several killings in Ouagadougou where civilians and members of the military and gendarmes have been targeted. Thus, fragile democratisation has led to political violence and militant Islamist insurgencies in some African countries, including [Mali](#), [Sudan](#) and even in highly populous Nigeria (Aghedo, 2017). Moreover, three-quarters of the African countries facing armed conflict (12 out of 16) have autocratic or semi-authoritarian governments. The military capitalises on these state weaknesses to grab power.

Addressing the Trend

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to African states' challenges, some structural reforms are needed.

1. Comprehensive approaches for

strengthening the region's states: Most African states lack the effective capacity for statehood, including professional security forces and efficient bureaucracy. As a result, the reach of the states is limited, making rebels and insurgents capitalise on such gaps to strike. Thus, the African public institutions need to be strengthened to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency.

2. Refusal to recognise coups: To be sustained, coups or forceful power grab must be recognised. Thus, both sub-regional organisations, regional bodies and international actors should ensure that putschists are politically isolated and denied access to a state's sovereign financial accounts. Currently, coups are still treated as unfortunate but usual means of transferring power in Africa. Instead of this condescending approach, actual costs need to be imposed on coup-makers to make them keep off the power grab. The AU should ensure a 'zero-tolerance' approach to military coups through effective reliance on the Constitutive Act, the Peace and Security Protocol, the Lome Declaration, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance. In this regard, the AU's condemnation of the recent military coups in [Mali](#), [Guinea](#) and [Sudan](#) is commendable even though more needs to be done.
3. Need to incentivise democracy: As coups are condemned, African governments that uphold democratic norms and practices should merit significant diplomatic support, development and security assistance, and promotion of private investment. Such regional and international incentives would make coups unpopular and encourage African elected officials to remain committed to democratic

norms and values.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the four coups in 2021 in sub-Saharan Africa are a terrible setback for the continent. It reminds one of the bad old days when the region was characterised by frequent coups that stagnated economic development and political stability and led to the wanton killings and displaced persons. Due to the contagious nature of coups, some concrete measures need to be adopted to stem the tide of this forceful grab of power in the sprawling continent. Such measures include comprehensive strengthening of the states, non-recognition of coup makers by regional and international actors, and the use of incentives to encourage leaders who uphold democratic norms and practices.

References

- Aghedo, I. (2017). Old Wine in a New Bottle: Ideological and Operational Linkages between the Maitatsine and Boko Haram Revolts in Nigeria. In James J. Hentz and Hussein Solomon (eds.) *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*, Routledge, London & New York, 65-84
- Huntington S. Peter (1991), "Democracy's Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy*, 2(2):1-24
- Kesselman Mark, Krieger Joel, and Joseph A. William (2013), *Introduction to Comparative Politics: Political Challenges and Changing Agendas* (6th edition), USA: WADSWORTH CENGAGE Learning (chapters 1 and 12)

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Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.nextierspd.com) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

Weekly Update

**2023
ELECTIONS**

US Policy and Nigeria's National Decisions



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Friday 11th March 2022
9:00 EST (15:00 WAT) - 14:30 EST (20:30 WAT)

at the School of Advanced International Studies,
Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC and Online

In person registration link
<https://bit.ly/Nigeria2023Election>

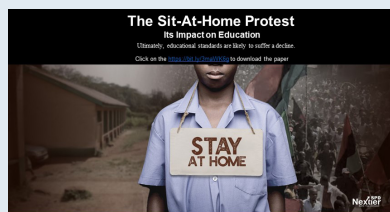


Zoom registration link
<https://bit.ly/Nigeria2023ElectionZoom>





Nextier Sample Publications



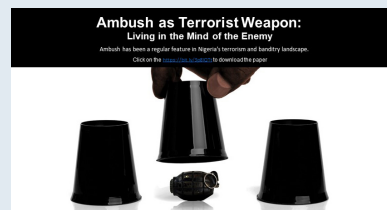
The Sit-at-home Protest: Its Impact on Education
Ultimately, educational standards are likely to suffer a decline.



Ballots or Bullets?
The Anambra State Governorship Election
The violent atmosphere does not only destroy lives and investments. It is also a direct threat to the forthcoming gubernatorial election in Anambra state.



Reviving Cattle Grazing Routes: What are the conflict Potentials?
There are several issues President Buhari did not reckon with regarding the planned restoration of the grazing routes.



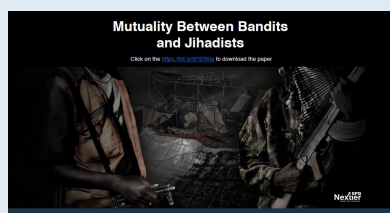
Ambush as Terrorist Weapon: Living in the Mind of the Enemy
Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.



Threats, Fears and Securitised Ballots
The Concluded Governorship Election in Anambra State
Three important spin-offs from the tensions generated before the election include fear, pervasive securitisation, and voter turnout effects.



Where Vultures Continue to Feast: Oil Spills and the Niger Delta Region
The recurrent oil spill has been a significant hallmark in the Nigerian oil and gas sector in the last five decades.



Mutuality between Bandits and Jihadists
The insurgency waged by Boko Haram and its breakaway factions has ravaged much of the Lake Chad Basin for over a decade.



Counting the Costs of Violent Conflicts: Examining Nigeria's South-East Region (Part 1)
The Federal government's resolve to quell self-determination struggles and separatist agitations has led to the deployment of brutal force.



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