

THE RESURGENCE OF UNDEMOCRATIC REGIMES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE 2023 MILITARY COUP IN NIGER REPUBLIC

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Abstract

This study examined the unstable democratic institutions and the return of military rule in Niger Republic, with specific focus on the July 2023 military coup. It explored the underlying governance failures, structural weaknesses, and civil-military tensions that culminated in the overthrow of President Mohammed Bazoum's civilian administration. The military takeover was framed as a response to worsening insecurity, governance deficits, elite exclusion, and rising anti-foreign sentiments, especially against France. The work relied exclusively on secondary data drawn from online sources, academic journals, and institutional reports, and it was analyzed descriptively. The study was anchored on the bushfire theory, which emphasizes the spontaneous and contagious nature of instability in fragile states. Findings revealed that the coup was not an isolated incident but rather part of a recurring pattern in Niger's post-independence history, marked by a weak democratic culture and persistent military involvement in politics. The study showed how systemic corruption, elite fragmentation, and socioeconomic grievances eroded public confidence in civilian rule, paving the way for military intervention. It further stated how regional and international responses particularly from ECOWAS, the African Union, France, the United States, Russia, and China were shaped by strategic interests and ideological alignments. The suspension of democratic institutions, deterioration of civil liberties, and deepening of security threats post-coup were also noted. The study concluded by recommending institutional reforms, civil-military reorientation, socio-economic investments, and inclusive dialogue to prevent future military coups and foster democratic consolidation in Niger Republic.

Keywords: *Civil-Military Relations, Democratic Consolidation, Governance, Military Coup, Political Instability.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In international politics, military takeover and democratic regression have been a recurring problem, especially in areas with brittle democratic institutions and governance frameworks. Throughout history, military actions have interfered with civilian governance, frequently under the pretext of re-establishing economic order, reducing corruption, or addressing security risks. These interventions have occasionally resulted in extended military rule, but, other times they have created unstable cycles that impede the advancement of democracy. Military takeover has been impacted by socio-political and economic factors in various regions, demonstrating the intricate connection between institutional strength, security, and governance (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). The international view of military coups show that they are not singular occurrences but rather a component of larger trends in which military interventions are fueled by political upheavals, economic hardship, and weakened democratic institutions. Military takeover has occurred in Latin American, Asian, and African countries, often reversing democratic gains and solidifying authoritarian governance (Hunter, Rutland & King, 2020). The history of military takeover in Africa is firmly anchored in institutional flaws, post-colonial political instability, and difficulties with governance. Despite gaining independence in the middle of the 20th century, many African countries had difficulty establishing stable democratic systems because of external interventions, economic hardships, and ethnic divisions. The Cold War further complicated governance systems because both the Eastern and Western blocs supported military governments that suited their strategic goals (Murphy, 2017). Military interventions in Africa have been linked to poor governance, corruption, and the inability of civilian governments to address security concerns. According to Hiroi and Omori (2013), some coups have been justified as being required to restore economic order, among other factors but, they have frequently led to cycles of instability that have weakened civilian control and undermined democratic development. Numerous military interventions in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Sudan demonstrate how coups are more common in regions with poor democratic institutions and problems with governance.

With recent disruptions to civilian rule in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and now Niger, West Africa has been especially susceptible to military takeover. Failures in governance, poor economic management, and growing security risks, especially from terrorism and insurgent groups, have all been blamed on the region's democratic regression (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). The recurrent coups point out the ongoing difficulties with governance and security,

despite the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) diplomatic efforts and sanctions to limit military interventions. Similar pressures that led to military intervention have been experienced by Niger Republic as part of this regional trend, including political instability, corruption, and security threats from jihadist insurgency. The difficulty of establishing democracy in areas where government institutions are still weak and security concerns predominate in political discourse is demonstrated by the larger context of military coups in West Africa (Azubuike, Matthew & Vincent, 2024). A number of factors, including poor governance, economic hardships, and worsening security conditions, contributed to the 2023 military coup in Niger Republic. Following his election in 2021, President Mohamed Bazoum had to deal with a number of issues, including economic decline, corruption, and the increasing power of jihadist organizations in the Sahel (Ziso & Hamandishe, 2024). As economic problems deepened and accusations of political mismanagement further undermined his legitimacy, his administration found it difficult to retain public trust. The Nigerien military voiced discontent with the civilian government, contending that military action was warranted due to the government's inability to address security threat (Nweke & Enwere, 2024). The coup leaders presented themselves as protectors of national stability, by arguing that their intervention was necessary to prevent further degradation and backwardness in Niger Republic. However, the military takeover was a reflection of more serious structural problems, such as the history of poor leadership and foreign forces that influenced Niger Republic's politics.

The military intervention in Niger Republic has had far-reaching effects on international relations, governance, and regional stability. The coup upended democratic processes at home, raising questions about Niger's prospects for civilian governance. Concerns regarding long-term democratic prospects have been raised by political repression, limitations on civil liberties, and heightened military control over governance institutions (Haruna, 2024). In West Africa, where other nations are facing comparable governance and security issues, the coup has exacerbated regional instability. In an effort to restore constitutional order, ECOWAS responded with diplomatic pressure and sanctions, though it is unclear how successful these actions will be. Global powers with strategic interests in the Sahel, such as France, the United States, and Russia, have responded to the coup. Russia has attempted to increase its influence in the region through security alliances, while France, which has historical ties to Niger, denounced the coup and encountered anti-French sentiments (Mouton, 2024). The military intervention in Niger is an excellent illustration of the greater struggle for democratic consolidation in West Africa, where problems with governance, economic hardship, and

security threats increase the likelihood of military takeover. Therefore, this study examined the 2023 military takeover in Republic of Niger.

Method of Data Collection

The study was purely qualitative in nature, as it relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from journal articles, textbooks, newspapers, official reports, and credible online sources. These materials provided in-depth insights into the issues surrounding unstable democracy and the return of military rule in Niger Republic. No primary data, such as interviews or surveys, were collected or used. The secondary data served as the foundation for understanding historical patterns, political dynamics, and recent developments in Niger. The data were then analyzed descriptively, allowing for a systematic interpretation of events, themes, and trends without statistical or quantitative techniques.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used the contagion theory of military intervention, also known as the bush-fire theory, as its analytical framework. According to the "bush-fire" or contagion theory of military intervention, military takeover and intervention in one state may serve as a model for similar action in nearby or politically comparable states, much like a "bush-fire" spreading throughout a region. This theory first emerged in the mid-1900s and gained popularity when military coups and takeovers became common in Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Asia during the Cold War and era of decolonization. After Samuel Huntington methodically introduced the theory in his seminal work *The Soldier and the State* (1957), scholars such as Samuel Finer went on to develop it in *The Man on Horseback* (1962) (Egreteau & Jagan, 2013). These works attempted to explain the phenomenon of military intervention in politics, especially in newly independent states with underdeveloped or weak democratic institutions. However, the bush-fire theory has been heavily criticized, primarily because of its deterministic assumptions and failure to account for the unique historical and sociopolitical contexts of various states.

The observation that military coup frequently happened in groups, especially in areas with weak governance structures and a history of political instability, is where the bush-fire theory got its start. According to Huntington (1995), when civilian governments were unable to uphold law and order or accomplish economic progress, the military often stepped in as a modernizing force. Yusuf (2023), asserts that if a coup in a particular country is successful, it could encourage military leaders in neighbouring states to try similar takeovers, causing a cascading

effect. The Cold War geopolitical environment, in which the superpowers frequently approved or encouraged military interventions to further their ideological agendas, had a significant impact on that perspective. The wave of African coups in the 1960s and 1970s, which included the overthrow of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana in 1966 and subsequent events in Togo, and other West African states, provided empirical support for the theory (Boafo-Arthur, 2008). Huntington (1995), and other proponents of the bush-fire theory highlighted how structural factors help make military interventions easier. Huntington (1995), believed that the military was uniquely able to take control, particularly in states with weak civilian institutions, because of its organizational cohesion, access to weapons, and control over coercive means. However, the theory ignores agency, ideology, and local context in favour of excessive focus on structural factors. Ruane (2018), for example, contended that the bush-fire theory is insufficient to explain why military intervention occur in some states while they do not in others with comparable structural conditions. He argued that the theory ignores the part played by individual leaders, ideological drivers, and the unique historical paths taken by states. On the other hand, Johnson (2015,) criticized the theory for adopting a deterministic perspective of military behaviour and contended that it undervalues the diversity of military institutions and their varying relationships with civilian governments.

In application, the bush-fire or contagion theory provides a lens to analyze military coups and democratic backsliding in West Africa, particularly in Niger Republic. The region has experienced a resurgence of military interventions, with coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022) creating a domino effect. The 2023 coup in Niger Republic, reflects this trend, as military leaders justified their actions by citing governance failure, insecurity, and corruption, echoing narratives used in neighboring states. The contagion effect is amplified by shared regional challenges, such as weak institutions, jihadist insurgencies, and public disillusionment with civilian governments. However, the theory's deterministic framework overlooks Niger's unique socio-political dynamics, including its history of military rule and external influences. While the bush-fire theory explains the regional clustering of coups, it fails to fully account for the interplay of domestic grievances, elite rivalries, and geopolitical interests that drive military interventions.

3. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

Military intervention in Africa is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the continent's colonial history, post-independence political struggles, and the persistent challenges of governance and

economic development. The origins of military intervention in Africa can be traced back to the early years of independence, when newly sovereign states were grappling with the legacies of colonial rule, weak institutions, and the pressures of nation-building (Ramuhala. 2010). The first significant military coup in post-colonial Africa occurred in Egypt in 1952, when the Free Officers Movement, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, overthrew King Farouk (Nwaezeigwe, 2021). This event marked the beginning of a trend that spread across the continent, as military forces positioned themselves as arbiters of political power, often under the guise of addressing corruption, inefficiency, or national unity. The reasons for these interventions, however, were frequently far more complicated and spoke to deeper structural problems, such as the influence of foreign powers, the tenacity of colonial legacies, and the vulnerability of democratic institutions.

The role of democratic corruption in precipitating military interventions cannot be overstated. In many African states, the transition from colonial rule to independence was marked by the establishment of democratic institutions that were ill-equipped to handle the complexities of governance. The lack of experienced leadership, coupled with the absence of strong institutional frameworks, created fertile ground for corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement. In Nigeria, for instance, the First Republic (1960-1966) was characterized by widespread electoral fraud, ethnic favoritism, and economic mismanagement, which eroded public trust in civilian governance. This culminated in the country's first military coup in January 1966, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. The coup was justified as a corrective measure to purge the country of corrupt politicians and restore national unity. But at the end, it sparked a string of countercoups and a catastrophic civil war in highlighting the contradictory nature of military interventions: although they are frequently presented as remedies for corruption, they usually worsen political instability and slowdown the advancement of democracy (Igbokwe, 2020). The Nigerian case illustrates how the failure of democratic institutions to address corruption and governance challenges can create a vacuum that military leaders are all too willing to fill, often with disastrous consequences.

The colonial legacy looms large in understanding the prevalence of military intervention in Africa. Colonial powers, particularly Britain and France, established centralized administrative systems that prioritized control and extraction over the development of participatory governance. The military, as an institution, was often used as a tool of colonial repression, and its structure and ethos were shaped by this role. During post-independence era, many African

states were involved in militarized systems as instituted by the colonialists, which were ill-suited to the demands of democratic governance. In Ghana, for example, the British colonial administration had established a strong, centralized military that was later co-opted by Kwame Nkrumah's government to suppress political dissent. However, the military's involvement in politics with specific reference to 1966, nine years after Ghana gained independence, overthrew Nkrumah's government, citing economic mismanagement and authoritarianism as justification. This pattern of military intervention, rooted in the colonial legacy of centralized control and repression, has been repeated across the continent, from Niger to Uganda (Katusiim & Igba, 2024). The colonial legacy of militarization and centralized authority created a political culture in which the military was seen as a legitimate actor in the political arena, rather than a subordinate institution under civilian control.

The case of Niger Republic provides a stark illustration of how colonial legacies and democratic corruption intersect to create conditions conducive to military intervention. Niger, a former French colony, gained independence in 1960 but struggled to establish stable democratic governance. The country's first president, Hamani Diori, was overthrown in a military coup in 1974, following allegations of corruption and economic mismanagement (Mosh & Karisti, 2024). The coup leaders, led by Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché, justified their actions as necessary to address the failures of civilian rule. However, like many military regimes, Kountché's government was characterized by authoritarianism and lack of accountability, which further entrenched the cycle of instability. The legacy of French colonial rule, which prioritized the extraction of resources over the development of democratic institutions, left Niger ill-prepared to navigate the challenges of post-independence governance. This pattern has persisted, with Niger experiencing multiple coups and attempted coups in decades since independence, underscoring the enduring impact of colonial legacies on the continent's political trajectory (Yusuf, 2023). Superpower Rivalry and Regional Security Concerns: Analyzing the Impact of Niger Coup on West Africa. The Nigerien case displays how the failure to address the structural inequalities and institutional weaknesses inherited from the colonial era can create a cycle of instability and military intervention.

The role of external actors in shaping military interventions in Africa also warrants critical examination. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union supported military regimes in Africa as part of their broader geopolitical strategies. For example, the United States provided military and economic aid to regimes in Zaire (now the Democratic

Republic of Congo) and Liberia, despite their authoritarian practices, as part of its efforts to counter Soviet Union's influence on the continent. Similar to this, the Soviet Union' backed military governments in Angola and Ethiopia by portraying their actions as a component of the worldwide fight against imperialism. Military leaders were frequently emboldened by this outside assistance, which allowed them to bolster their authority and quell criticism. Instead of ending foreign involvement in African politics, the end of the Cold War signaled the beginning of a new era of intervention, marked by rhetoric of humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion. These interventions have often been criticized for their selective application and underlying geopolitical motivations, which undermine their legitimacy and effectiveness (Saaida, 2024).

The economic dimensions of military interventions in Africa are equally significant. Many military coups have been justified on the grounds of addressing economic mismanagement and inequality, but the reality is that military regimes often exacerbate economic challenges. In Nigeria, for example, the military regimes of the 1970s and 1980s were marked by rampant corruption, mismanagement of oil revenues, and economic stagnation (Oluwaseun & Samuel, 2018). The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) imposed by international financial institutions during this period further deepened economic hardship, leading to widespread social unrest. Similarly, in Ghana, the military regimes that followed Nkrumah's overthrow implemented austerity measures that disproportionately affected the poor, while failing to address the root causes of economic inequality. The economic failures of military regimes showcase the limitations of using force as a means of addressing complex socio-economic challenges, ushering the need for inclusive, participatory approaches to governance (Khlil, 2020). The economic consequences of military interventions often extend far beyond the immediate political upheaval, creating long-term challenges that are difficult to overcome.

The human rights implications of military interventions in Africa are profound and far-reaching. Military regimes are often characterized by the suppression of political dissent, the suspension of constitutional rights, and the use of violence to maintain control. In Uganda, for example, the regime of Idi Amin (1971-1979) was marked by widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and the persecution of ethnic and political minorities. Comparably, the military government of Samuel Doe (1980–1990) in Liberia was infamous for its repression and brutality. It is clear that military actions can erode democratic governance and human rights, fostering an atmosphere of fear and impunity that endures long after the

military has given up control (Peksen, 2012). Human rights violations linked to military regimes are not merely unintentional; they are frequently a calculated tactics to stifle dissent and consolidate power.

Effect of Military Intervention on Africa's Development

The effect of military intervention on African development is a deeply contested and multifaceted issue, with implications that extend far beyond the immediate political upheaval. Military coups, often framed as necessary corrections to governance failures, have historically been associated with significant economic, social, and political costs. These interventions disrupt institutional frameworks, undermine democratic processes, and often lead to international isolation, all of which have profound implications for development (De Mesquita & Downs, 2006). The recent coups in Niger (2023) and Burkina Faso (2022) provide stark examples of how military interventions can exacerbate existing challenges, particularly in fragile states already grappling with poverty, insecurity, and weak governance. The imposition of local and international sanctions, coupled with regional and international isolation, further compounds the developmental setbacks caused by such interventions, creating a vicious cycle of instability and underdevelopment (Jones, 2015).

One of the most immediate consequences of military intervention is the disruption of economic activities, which has long-term implications for development. Military regimes often lack the expertise and legitimacy to manage complex economies, leading to policy inconsistencies, mismanagement, and corruption. In Niger, the 2023 coup led by General Abdourahamane Tiani disrupted economic activities, particularly in the extractive sector, which accounts for a significant portion of the country's GDP. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responded by imposing stringent economic sanctions, including the suspension of financial transactions and the closure of borders (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024). These measures, while intended to pressure the junta to restore constitutional order, had severe repercussions for the civilian population. The sanctions exacerbated food insecurity, disrupted supply chains, and led to a sharp decline in foreign investment, further straining an already fragile economy (Ilori, 2024). Similarly, in Burkina Faso, the 2022 coup led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré resulted in the suspension of international aid and development projects, which were critical to the country's efforts to address poverty and insecurity. The World Bank and other international donors froze funding, citing concerns over governance and the rule of law, thereby

undermining development initiatives aimed at improving healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Transparency International & Defence Security, 2024).

The imposition of sanctions, both local and international, is a common response to military intervention, but their effectiveness and impact on development are highly contentious. While sanctions are intended to pressure military regimes to restore democratic governance, they often have unintended consequences that disproportionately affect the civilian population (Eriksson, 2011). In Niger, the ECOWAS sanctions led to a sharp increase in the prices of essential goods, including food and fuel, exacerbating the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. The suspension of electricity export from Nigeria, which supplies 70% of Niger's power, further compounded the crisis, leading to widespread blackout and disrupting economic activities. Nigeria cuts power supply to Niger republic by 42% (Oladipo, 2025). However, despite being purportedly directed at the junta, this type of punishment frequently worsens inequality and poverty, undermining the very developmental objectives they are meant to support. Therefore, it is doubtful if sanctions are successful in accomplishing the political goals for which they were designed for. In Burkina Faso, for example, the junta consolidated its power and suppressed dissent despite international pressure. This calls into question whether sanctions are a useful tool for advancing democratic development and governance in post-coup environments.

Regional and international isolation is another significant consequence of military interventions, with far-reaching implications for development. Military regimes often face diplomatic ostracism, leading to the suspension of membership in regional and international organizations (Danopoulos, 2019). In the case of Niger, the country was suspended from ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) following the 2023 coup, effectively cutting it off from critical regional and international platforms. This isolation not only undermines the country's ability to engage in diplomatic negotiations and access development funding but also limits its participation in regional initiatives aimed at addressing shared challenges, such as terrorism and climate change (Michaud, Moss, Licina, Waldman, Kamradt-Scott, Bartee & Lillywhite, 2019). In a related instance, the suspension of Burkina Faso from the AU and ECOWAS in the aftermath of the 2022 coup, has made it more difficult for it to work with its neighbours on security and development matters, which has made the Sahelian insurgency even more difficult to curtail.

The impact of military intervention on social development is equally profound, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, and human rights. Military regimes often prioritize security and control over social development, leading to the neglect of critical sectors. In Niger, the 2023 coup disrupted the implementation of development projects aimed at improving access to education and healthcare, particularly in rural areas. The suspension of international aid and the diversion of resources to the military further exacerbated the challenges faced by these sectors, undermining efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ajala, 2025). Comparably, the coup in Burkina Faso resulted in the suspension of donor-funded initiatives meant to enhance maternal and child health, which worsened the country's medical outreach. Because military regimes frequently use violence and repression to stay in power, the militarization of the state also affects human rights. Human rights violations, such as arbitrary detentions, torture, and extrajudicial executions, have been documented in both Niger and Burkina Faso. These violations erode social cohesiveness and public institutions' credibility (Ziso & Hamandishe, 2024). The long-term developmental implications of military intervention are particularly concerning, as they often create a cycle of instability and underdevelopment. Military regimes, by their very nature, are ill-equipped to address the root causes of governance failures, such as corruption, inequality, and weak institutions. Instead, they often perpetuate these issues, creating a vicious cycle that undermines development. In Niger, for instance, the 2023 coup has deepened political instability, leading to a decline in investor confidence and a slowdown in economic growth. The country's already fragile economy, which is heavily reliant on external aid and remittances, has been further weakened by the sanctions and isolation, raising concerns about its ability to achieve sustainable development (Ilori, 2024).

The role of external actors in shaping the developmental outcomes of military interventions is also critical. While international organizations and donor countries often condemn military coups and impose sanctions, their responses are often shaped by geopolitical considerations rather than a genuine commitment to promoting development. In the case of Niger, for instance, the response of Western countries, including France and the United States, has been influenced by their strategic interests in the Sahel region, particularly in relation to counter-terrorism and migration. This has led to a selective application of sanctions and a reluctance to engage with the junta, which has further complicated efforts to resolve the crisis (Abdulrahman, Taiwo, & Nazifi, 2025). Comparably, worries about Burkina Faso's ties to Russia, which has aimed to increase its influence in the area, have influenced how foreign donors have responded to the

country. In fragile states in particular, this geopolitical dimension highlights the degree to which external actors can worsen the developmental difficulties brought on by military interventions (Oladoyin, Osimen, Pokubo, Obozekhai, & Oladipo, 2025).

4. IMMEDIATE AND UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE 2023 MILITARY COUP IN NIGER REPUBLIC

The 2023 military coup in the Niger Republic represents a significant rupture in the country's democratic trajectory and reflects both immediate political disruptions and deeply rooted structural problems. Among the immediate triggers of the coup was the growing discontent within the armed forces concerning internal security, especially in relation to jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel region. The inability of President Mohamed Bazoum's administration to effectively address the persistent insecurity and restore state authority in large parts of the country generated frustrations among rank-and-file soldiers. According to Halidou Nouhou, (2020), Niger has been at the epicenter of violence by armed groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Greater Sahara, and the continued loss of military personnel without tangible strategic gains undermined confidence in civilian leadership. With this reasons, the military justified its seizure of power by citing "the deteriorating security situation" and "poor governance," pointing to the failure of the administration to contain extremist threats and reform military structures (Chikerema, Chakunda, & Ncube, 2025).

The lack of inclusivity in governance and the centralization of power further fueled underlying discontent. Bazoum's presidency, while recognized internationally as a democratic successor to former president Mahamadou Issoufou, was marked by rising perceptions of elitism and exclusion within political and security institutions (Afriyie, 2024). This sentiment was particularly pronounced among segments of the officer corps that felt marginalized. The Economic Community of West African States noted that elements of the army accused the government of failing to equitably distribute military appointments and resources, thereby sowing internal divisions (Jabo, 2024). Furthermore, the growing civilian-military divide, exacerbated by reports of patronage politics and inadequate reforms in the defense sector, and widened mistrust. These patterns reflect longer-standing institutional deficiencies and civil-military tensions rooted in the Nigerien political system, which has oscillated between civilian and military rule since independence. Corruption and weak public institutions also constituted a core underlying cause of the coup. Years of systemic corruption, poor accountability, and

misuse of public funds had eroded public confidence in democratic governance. Transparency International and other transparency body have ranked Niger among countries struggling with high levels of corruption, and these perceptions of entrenched malfeasance weakened the legitimacy of state authority (Jacob & Diepreye, 2024). Despite international aid inflows, especially from the European Union and United States in support of security and development, the dividends of democracy were not tangibly felt by many Nigeriens. Socioeconomic grievances, including high unemployment and lack of access to quality education and healthcare, created fertile ground for support or tolerance of military intervention (Tuki, 2024). According to Okeke & Dimonye, (2024), the military exploited popular frustration by portraying themselves as saviours who would restore accountability and stability, a narrative that resonated with large sections of the population.

The role of external actors and geopolitical shifts also contributed indirectly to the coup. Niger has been a focal point for Western counterterrorism operations in the Sahel, with the country hosting American and French military bases (Fortin, 2024). However, growing local resentment against perceived foreign domination, particularly France's influence, shaped a nationalist rhetoric within the military and sections of the public. Anti-French protests, already visible in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso after their own coups, intensified in Niger in the months leading up to the military takeover (Afriyie, 2024). The coup leaders capitalized on these sentiments, as public protests shortly after the coup in Niamey showed crowds waving Russian flags and denouncing France. This dynamic mirrors a broader shift in the region where military regimes have leveraged anti-colonial narratives and frustration with Western partners to consolidate power and reposition alliances, with implications for regional and international security (Kpetsu, 2025).

Foundationally, the recurrence of military coups in Niger and across the Sahel reveals the fragile nature of democratization processes in post-colonial states. The absence of robust democratic institutions, lack of civilian oversight of the military, and historical patterns of authoritarianism have contributed to the normalization of coups as a mechanism for political change (Ayoub, 2024). Niger's political history is marked by cycles of military intervention: from the 1974 coup that ousted President Diori Hamani, to the 1996, 1999, and 2010 coups that disrupted democratic experiments (Korotayev, Issaev, Ilyina, Zinkina & Voronina, 2024). Each episode has left enduring legacies of weak institutional culture, making civilian governments vulnerable to military threats. The 2023 coup, rather than an isolated event,

should thus be viewed as a symptom of chronic political instability rooted in decades of under-institutionalization, governance failures, and limited social contract between the state and its citizens. These foundational issues remain critical in any analysis of the country's political trajectory and prospects for sustainable democracy.

Regional and International Responses to the 2023 Nigerien Military Coup

The 2023 military takeover in Niger Republic elicited swift and multifaceted responses from both regional and international actors, reflecting a continued global commitment to democratic governance and regional stability. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reacted with immediacy by suspending Niger from all its institutions, imposing sanctions, and threatening military intervention to restore constitutional order (Ukpere & Frank, 2024). ECOWAS described the coup as a threat to peace and security in the West African region and invoked its 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which prohibits unconstitutional changes of government (Frank & Ukpere, 2024). The body imposes significant economic and travel sanctions on coup leaders and freezes state assets in regional banks (ECOWAS, 2010 cited in Frank & Ukpere, 2024). The seriousness of ECOWAS's stance marked a deviation from the more muted responses seen in earlier coups in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, indicating a recalibration of the regional bloc's tolerance for military interventions.

The African Union (AU) also condemned the military junta's actions and echoed ECOWAS in calling for the immediate reinstatement of President Mohamed Bazoum. The AU's Peace and Security Council suspended Niger from participating in all AU activities until the restoration of civilian rule, with respect to its long-standing principles articulated in the Lomé Declaration and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The AU's communiqué further emphasized the risk that repeated coups pose to regional integration, economic development, and peace building on the continent of Africa (African Union Report, 2023). However, the AU adopted a more cautious tone than ECOWAS regarding military intervention, signaling internal divisions and the difficulty of reaching consensus among African leaders, some of whom preside over fragile or hybrid regimes. At the international level, the United Nations (UN) issued a statement through the Secretary-General, António Guterres, expressing strong disapproval of the ousting of the democratically elected president and urging respect for the rule of law and human rights. The UN also reaffirmed its support for ECOWAS's mediation efforts and encouraged dialogue as the preferred resolution mechanism (Ologunagba, 2023).

While the UN did not impose sanctions directly, it emphasized the humanitarian consequences of the political instability, especially in a country already grappling with food insecurity and armed insurgencies. The UN's humanitarian agencies expressed concern over the potential disruption of aid deliveries and called for unrestricted access to vulnerable populations in Niger and surrounding areas (Oduoye, Ubechu, Zafar, Noor, Oyeleke & Agbeyewo, 2024).

France, Niger's former colonial power and a key security partner, condemned the coup unequivocally and demanded the release of President Bazoum. France maintained its support for ECOWAS's efforts and initially refused to recognize the legitimacy of the junta. It also suspended all development aid and military cooperation with Niger. French President Emmanuel Macron declared that any attack against French nationals or interests would provoke an immediate and firm response (Ilori, 2024). However, France's historically contentious relationship with many segments of the Nigerien population, particularly due to its post-colonial influence and military presence, made its involvement a point of friction. Pro-coup demonstrations in Niamey and other cities included strong anti-French rhetoric, the junta eventually demanded the withdrawal of French troops, a move that Paris was forced to comply with under growing pressure (Engels, 2023). The United States also condemned the military takeover and paused certain types of security assistance, while retaining humanitarian aid to support civilian populations. The U.S. Department of State stressed the importance of democratic governance for regional and international stability and maintained communication with ECOWAS and other international stakeholders. Unlike France, the U.S. opted for a more diplomatic approach, emphasizing engagement over isolation. High-level delegations were sent to the region to explore mediation and assess the prospects for peaceful resolution (Maryjane & Ebenezer, 2024). This reflects a pragmatic strategy by Washington to preserve counterterrorism cooperation and geopolitical interests in the Sahel, where jihadist threats continue to expand.

Russia's response to the coup diverged significantly from that of Western nations. Although, it issued a formal statement calling for the restoration of constitutional order, its media and political discourse were more ambivalent. Some Russian officials and state-controlled outlets portrayed the coup as a reaction to Western neocolonialism, and the Wagner paramilitary group, already active in Mali and the Central African Republic, reportedly offered support to the junta (Peccini, 2025). This fueled speculation that the coup might align Niger more closely with alternative security providers outside Western influence (Yusuf, 2023). The emergence of

such narratives provides the ongoing contestation of influence in Africa, where Western and non-Western actors are vying for political and strategic footholds. China adopted a neutral position in public, calling for dialogue and peaceful resolution of the crisis. Beijing emphasized respect for national sovereignty and non-interference, in line with its long-standing diplomatic doctrine. However, China's significant economic interests in Niger, especially in uranium and oil, suggest that it is monitoring the situation carefully (Ilori, 2024). Chinese firms operating in the country continued their activities with limited disruption, reflecting the regime's attempts to reassure foreign investors of the maintenance of economic stability amidst political upheaval (Frimpong, 2025). This measured response indicates China's preference for continuity and pragmatic engagement, even under military rule, to safeguard its investments and long-term strategic goals.

The general international responses to the Nigerien coup reflects a spectrum of approaches, from hardline condemnation and threats of force by ECOWAS and France, to more cautious diplomatic strategies by the United Nations, the United States, and China. These responses were shaped by each actor's historical relationships, geopolitical interests, and assessments of the risks associated with escalating the crisis. The incident has provided a lens to the limits of regional enforcement mechanisms and the difficulties in balancing democratic norms with the realities of political instability and governance failures in West Africa. It also raises questions about the effectiveness of punitive measures in restoring constitutional order, especially in contexts where coups are driven by internal grievances such as insecurity, poor governance, and elite fragmentation. The regional and international reactions to the Niger coup reveal a critical juncture for democratic consolidation in the Sahel. As repeated unconstitutional changes of government in the region indicate a growing disillusionment with civilian regimes, the credibility and effectiveness of external interventions are under scrutiny. ECOWAS, in particular, faces the challenge of reaffirming its normative commitments without triggering wider regional conflict or humanitarian crises. At the same time, external powers must navigate a complex terrain where democratic legitimacy, security interests, and anti-imperialist sentiments intersect. The unfolding situation in Niger, therefore, is not just a test of political will, but also a measure of how global and regional actors can adapt to the evolving dynamics of African governance and sovereignty.

Consequences of the Coup on Governance, Stability, and Civil Liberties in Niger Republic

The military takeover in the Niger Republic in 2023 was a watershed in the nation's political history, with far-reaching effects on civil liberties protection, regional stability, and governance. The coup that overthrew President Mohammed Bazoum was masterminded by the presidential guard led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, undermining democracy and undoing years of political advancement. As military actors took the place of elected officials and suspended constitutional order, Niger's governance drastically worsened in the aftermath. By dissolving important democratic institutions and enacting laws that concentrated power within the military junta, the transitional government, which was headed by military leaders, ignored civilian representation and participation (Sowale, 2024). This breakdown in constitutional authority weakened public institutions, fostered an environment of political uncertainty, and reduced governmental transparency, diminishing the effectiveness and legitimacy of public administration in the eyes of citizens. The deterioration of governance following the coup also contributed to heightened instability within Niger and its surrounding region. As a member of the G5 Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Niger had been a critical partner in regional security cooperation. The coup led to its suspension from ECOWAS and triggered economic and diplomatic sanctions aimed at pressuring the junta to restore democratic rule (Mushoriwa, 2024). These sanctions, aimed at defending democracy, unfortunately strained Niger's economy and disrupted cross-border collaboration on security matters, weakening collective responses to the growing threat posed by jihadist insurgent groups active in the Sahel (Al Bouchouari, 2024). The abrupt removal of a democratically elected government created a leadership vacuum that emboldened terrorist actors, particularly in the tri-border area shared with Mali and Burkina Faso, leading to an uptick in attacks on civilians and security forces alike.

Civil liberties, already fragile before the coup, came under severe threat in its aftermath. The junta imposed restrictions on freedom of the press, the right to peaceful assembly, and civil society activities. Reports emerged that journalists were being detained or harassed, while independent media outlets faced closures or censorship (Amnesty International, 2024). The military junta justified these actions by citing national security concern, yet they simultaneously stifled dissent and curtailed freedoms essential to democratic society. Civic organizations and pro-democracy advocates reported intimidation, surveillance, and arbitrary

arrests. The suspension of the constitution allowed the junta to operate with impunity, without judicial oversight, thereby eroding the rule of law (Issa, Fagbemi, Ogunbanjo, Popoola & Fagbemi, 2024). These developments collectively represent a serious regression in human rights protection and the civic space, pushing Niger closer to authoritarian governance. Furthermore, the coup's consequences extended to international relations, with many donor countries and development partners suspending aid and support programme. The French government for instance, announced freezes in financial assistance following the military takeover (Ufuoma & Eseoghene, 2023). Such actions, while intended to deter unconstitutional changes in government, disproportionately affected ordinary Nigeriens by reducing funding for critical sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure. The democratic governance vacuum hindered policy continuity, disrupted development planning and public service delivery. Consequently, the already low level of human development in the country, marked by widespread poverty and limited access to basic services, were further exacerbated. This reinforced a cycle of disenfranchisement and disillusionment among the populace, deepening societal cleavages and undermining efforts at long-term national cohesion.

In addition to internal repercussions, the coup signaled a broader crisis of democratic governance in West Africa, which has witnessed a resurgence of military interventions in recent years. The justification of the coup by Nigerien military leaders echoed similar narratives used in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, where soldiers cited corruption, insecurity, and ineffective governance as reasons for seizing power (Ahmad, 2025). This trend poses a significant threat to the African Union's normative framework on constitutional governance, particularly the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The erosion of civilian rule in Niger Republic, challenges the legitimacy and enforcement mechanisms of continental and regional bodies, raising questions about their ability to prevent and respond to democratic backsliding. More so, the coup undermined international norms and emboldened military actors elsewhere who perceive such actions as viable alternatives to democratic contestation, thus jeopardizing democratic consolidation in fragile states across the continent.

Prospects for Democratic Restoration and the Role of ECOWAS and the AU in Niger Republic

The prospects for democratic restoration in Niger Republic following the July 2023 military coup hinged significantly on both internal dynamics and the strategic interventions of regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African

Union (AU). Niger has experienced cycles of political instability since its independence, with military interventions often disrupting fragile democratic gains. The most recent coup, which ousted President Mohammed Bazoum, reveals enduring structural weaknesses in Niger's democratic institutions, exacerbated by governance challenges, elite rivalries, and growing insecurity, particularly from jihadist insurgencies (Afriyie, 2024). These foundational issues calls for urgency of regional involvement in restoring democratic order while also raising questions about the efficacy and consistency of such interventions. ECOWAS has traditionally positioned itself as a normative guardian of democratic governance in West Africa. In the wake of the 2023 coup, ECOWAS bloc swiftly condemned the military takeover and imposed sanctions on Niger, including the closure of borders and a freeze on state assets (Al Bouchouari, 2024). The bloc also threatened military intervention, invoking its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which prohibits unconstitutional changes of government. This assertiveness is consistent with ECOWAS's actions in the Gambia (2017) and Mali (2020), where it sought to reverse military takeovers or facilitate transitions. However, the threat of force in Niger sparked a more polarized response among member states, particularly given Niger's strategic importance in regional security arrangements against terrorism. It is clear that ECOWAS's credibility is contingent not only on its capacity for decisive action but also on its consistency in applying sanctions across member states violating its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024).

The AU, as the continental organization committed to upholding democratic norms under the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), also condemned the coup and suspended Niger's membership (Birikorang, 2024). While such steps align with its normative framework, the AU's response was more restrained than ECOWAS's. This difference may reflect broader geopolitical considerations and the AU's preference for consensus-driven diplomacy. Moreover, the AU's response mechanisms, while symbolically important, often lack enforcement capacity and rely heavily on sub-regional bodies like ECOWAS for operational interventions (Abdulrahman, Taiwo & Nazifi, 2025). This reliance has raised concerns over institutional duplication and the need for more synchronized efforts between the AU and RECs (Regional Economic Communities) to address democratic reversals in Africa comprehensively. The effectiveness of ECOWAS and the AU in restoring democracy in Niger also depends on the domestic political environment. The junta's consolidation of power, has been bolstered by segments of the population who view the coup as a corrective measure against elite bad governance, foreign interference, and insecurity (Sowale, 2024). This

public support complicates external pressure strategies, as sanctions may inadvertently affect civilians more than the ruling elites, potentially hardening nationalist sentiments. Therefore, diplomatic efforts need to be accompanied by genuine dialogue and incentives for democratic return, such as guarantees for amnesty or transitional arrangements that protect key stakeholders while safeguarding democratic outcomes. Without addressing the socio-political grievances that led to the coup in Niger Republic, external interventions risk being perceived as foreign impositions (Afriyie, 2024).

Furthermore, the geopolitical dimension of the Niger crisis reveals a complex interplay of regional and global interests. Niger is a linchpin in the Sahel's security architecture, hosting French and American military bases aimed at combating insurgent threats (Gaiya, 2024). The junta's move to terminate these military partnerships and align with Russia and the Wagner Group mirrors a broader pattern seen in Mali and Burkina Faso. This shift in alliances proves a crisis of legitimacy for Western-backed democratic regimes and challenges the strategic leverage of ECOWAS and the AU, who are perceived to be aligned with Western interests (Kpetsu, 2025). The regional bodies must therefore navigate this terrain carefully, crafting a strategy that balances the imperatives of democratic restoration with the political realities and aspirations of Nigerien citizens. In the long term, the prospects for restoring democracy in Niger require structural reforms and regional cooperation that go beyond reactive measures. ECOWAS and the AU must invest in democratic capacity-building, electoral integrity, and civil-military relations to prevent future coups. The recurrent pattern of unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa calls for a more robust continental early warning system, as well as the enforcement of term limits and governance standards across member states. Both ECOWAS and the AU must also engage civil society, religious institutions, and traditional leaders in dialogue, ensuring that democratic norms are embedded not just in elite discourse but also within grassroots political culture (Gideon, Oke, & Aduloju, 2025). The Niger case presents both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge to the regional architecture of peace and security, but also a chance to reimagine and reinforce democratic resilience in the face of mounting threats.

Measures meant to Prevent Future Military Coups and Promote Democratic Consolidation in Niger Republic

The recurrence of military coups in the Niger Republic has prompted national, regional, and international actors to seek proactive measures aimed at preventing future military takeovers

and strengthening democratic consolidation. Central to these measures is the promotion of constitutionalism and institutional reforms. Weak constitutional provisions and disregard for term limits have often precipitated military interventions. To forestall future coups, it is critical that constitutional frameworks are designed to prevent ambiguity and manipulation by incumbents. This includes enshrining firm term limits, strengthening the independence of electoral commissions, and instituting credible judicial mechanisms that can mediate political disputes without external interference (Pradipta, 2025). In the wake of the 2023 coup, many analysts emphasized the need to insulate the judiciary and electoral systems from political capture as a way to rebuild trust in the democratic process and discourage unconstitutional power grabs. Civil-military relations also play a significant role in the prevention of coups. In Niger Republic, repeated military involvement in politics points to the need for thorough security sector reforms (SSR). The military's loyalty must be redirected from individual leaders to the state and its democratic institutions. Training and education programmes focused on the role of the military in a democracy, coupled with robust oversight mechanisms by civilian authorities, are essential. Such reforms should also include transparency in military appointments and budgetary allocations, reducing opportunities for discontent or political manipulation within the armed forces (Kotia, 2025). Moreover, encouraging regional cooperation on professional military standards, possibly through ECOWAS frameworks, would help reinforce civilian supremacy over military institutions in Niger and neighboring states.

Another preventive measure lies in enhancing socio-economic governance. Chronic underdevelopment, widespread poverty, and high unemployment rates have historically fueled public disillusionment with civilian administrations, creating an enabling environment for military intervention. In addressing the root causes of discontent requires targeted investment in infrastructure, education, health, and employment opportunities, particularly for the youth population (Sumberg, Fox, Flynn, Mader, & Oosterom, 2021). When democratic governments fail to deliver economic dividends, they lose legitimacy, making it easier for military actors to justify unconstitutional seizures of power. Transparent and equitable governance would therefore help to restore citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and reduce the allure of military alternatives. International and regional organizations also bear responsibility in promoting democratic consolidation and preventing military coups. The role of ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the United Nations must go beyond reactive condemnation and sanctions. There should be preventive diplomacy and early warning mechanisms that monitor

signs of democratic regression (Awotayo, Omitola, Adeyeye, & Arikewuyo, 2024). For instance, ECOWAS' deployment of Good Offices missions and preventive diplomatic engagement, if timely and sustained, could forestall coups before they materialize. Furthermore, these bodies should enhance support for democratic institution-building by funding electoral reforms, facilitating inclusive national dialogues, and promoting civic education. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), if enforced with political will, remains a potent instrument against unconstitutional changes of government.

5. CONCLUSION

The 2023 military coup in Niger Republic reflects the deep fractures within the nation's democratic framework and signals the persistence of unresolved institutional, socio-political, and governance challenges. Far from being an isolated incident, the coup stresses the cumulative effects of weak democratic institutions, civil-military imbalance, insecurity, and widespread public disenchantment with elitist leadership. It also exposes the limits of regional and international mechanisms in deterring unconstitutional seizures of power, especially when underlying grievances remain unaddressed. While the regional response led by ECOWAS was immediate and firm, the junta's ability to consolidate control and rally segments of popular support reveals a legitimacy crisis not only within Niger but across similar post-colonial democracies. Any long-term democratic restoration must address these root causes through reforms that deepen constitutionalism, restore citizen trust, and entrench civilian control over the military. Strengthening democratic governance in Niger will require both internal political will and sustained, coordinated regional engagement that prioritizes institution-building, political inclusiveness, and economic justice. Without such efforts, Niger and the wider Sahel region risk remaining locked in cycles of instability and authoritarian regression.

Recommendations

The study offered the following recommendations to support the restoration of a lasting democratic system in Niger Republic. These recommendations are:

- i. Regional bodies such as the African Union and ECOWAS should initiate an inclusive national dialogue with the military junta to pave way for a peaceful return to democratic governance;

- ii. Upon the restoration of civilian rule, the United Nations, African Union, and ECOWAS should collaborate to organize free and credible elections that genuinely reflect the will of the Nigerien people;
- iii. Upon the restoration of civilian rule, the new government should initiate full-scale security sector reform which will strengthen civilian oversight and foster professional, and apolitical military institutions;
- iv. Upon the restoration of civilian rule, the government should prioritize socio-economic investments in security, education, employment, and infrastructure, which are the root causes of political instability and military takeovers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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