

## **Re-Emergence of Coup D'états and Political Change in Africa: Explaining the Theoretical and Empirical Connections**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines political undercurrents of the re-emergence of military interventions in politics in Africa. The main aim of the paper is to ascertain the theoretical and empirical connection of military interventions in politics in Africa. Situated in the context of political modernization philosophy, this paper posits that the military appropriated its centrality of command structure, differentiation and specialization as well as popular identification in diverse ways as part of their strategies to control political power in Africa. Empirically, we employed desk-based research design based on the qualitative approach to research. Thus, we draw mainly on textual data collected through remote research methods, namely, desk research and distant observations we made on the ground. The analysis of the data is informed by emerging critical political analysis of the recent military coups in Africa, particularly in Chad, Sudan, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Meanwhile, it is sad though to note that civil society in many of the African countries has become so cowed that the voices of reason have become relatively silent in the midst of undemocratic dispositions by some African leaders and ruling class. Some African leaders are flouting constitutional term limits which has received wide public reaction across Africa and the world. The upshot of our analysis is therefore that, Africa's emerging democracy, and elections are under threat. Hence, members of the armed forces who pride themselves as custodians or restorers of constitutional order and governance in Africa act on the rhetoric that democratic principles will be better upheld or served by their direct involvement in the administration of the State as in the case of Mali in 2019, Guinea in 2021 and Burkina Faso in 2022 in the West African sub-region. The paper concludes and recommends that critical stakeholders

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need to act proactively and in concert to structurally address the putative democratic deficits obviously eroding the dividends of democracy and the socio-economic aspirations of ordinary Africans.

**Keywords:** democracy, military, coup d'état, politics, military intervention, Africa

## Introduction

*Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun... Moa Zedong (Problems of War and Strategy, 1938).*

The paper examines interventions in politics by the military and why these unconstitutional changes of government tend to feature prominently in recent political developments in Africa. The political dimensions and implications of the military interventions in the political administration of African nations are the dominant concerns of this paper. The political role of the military in modern liberal democracy has been the subject of a number of detailed studies and scholarly discussions both general and regional. In a modern liberal democratic system, the state is represented by government, and has monopoly over the use of legitimate force. This authoritative power and function of the state is exercised partly through the armed forces, which is traditionally under the control of the Executive Arm of Government with legislative oversight in some cases. In a democracy the military is an institution with clear-cut role and mission to employ the use of legitimate force based on its operational doctrine, institutional structures, force levels and equipment types. Members of the armed forces are conventionally obliged to be politically neutral and enjoy privileges and prerogatives, professional autonomy, coercive and organisational power, institutional cohesion and unity of command. This characterization predisposes the military to be inclined towards the conservative side of politics where its monopolistic interests are preserved with considerable influence over holders of civilian power.

However, the nature of military structures generate cleavages that have resemblance of class conflict, making it impossible to assume that the military is a monolithic institution or that its role is always conservative

(Luckham, 1994). Also, Luckham (2009) considers the military establishment as a whole as having vested interest in what military ideologists call 'national security,' and what its opponents call state and class domination. The military is also perceived as possessing a superior level of national consciousness than other elites, hence drawn into politics with fractions of the military elite intervening on behalf of peripheral or excluded classes and groups in times of crisis (Janowitz, 1964; Luckham, 1994). As an institution responsive to centralized command, members of the armed forces undergo various levels of training to instill particular ethos and ethics, effectively handle different equipment types, be aligned to institutional structures and meet operational and strategic force levels (Hutchful, 2010). The nature of the military architecture and strata creates significant loyalties among members of the armed forces which transcends political affiliations, and thus may serve a positive function in compelling national unity and in maintaining political boundaries (Huntington, 1957; Heywood, 2007). As representatives of the State in its war making capacity, the members of the armed forces do find themselves tempered to assert the prescribed claim either to regulate the operation of the system in the interest of constitutional stability or in extreme cases to supplant the political system. Also, the political sociology of the military is a complicated issue evinced by the fact that members of the armed forces have a life apart from civil society, although the trend in modern democratic society both in developing and in developed nations is towards greater penetration of the military into the political arena (Huntington, 1957).

Conversely, the military institution of any society is shaped by a functional imperative, stemming from the threats to the society's security, and a societal imperative arising from the social forces, ideologies, and institutions dominant within a democratic system (Huntington, 1957; Heywood, 2007). Thus, a military institution which reflects only social values may not be capable of effectively performing its military function neither is a military institution shaped purely by functional imperatives could possibly be contained within a democratic society. The apparent interaction of these two views explains the civil-military relations problem in democratic societies such as those in Africa. Further, in terms of basic

defence function, the term 'military' might be all inclusive, referring to all uniformed personnel bearing arms. Considering the political function of the military, the conversation is limited to the military involvement in political administration like the cases of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) of Chad (2020), Ruling Sovereign Council (RSC) of Sudan (2019), Transitional Military Council (TMC) of Mali (2020), National Committee of Reconciliation and Development (NCRD) of Guinea (2021) and Patriotic Movement for Preservation and Restoration (MPSR) of Burkina Faso (2022). The re-emergence of these military regimes in Africa in recent times after the continent returned to constitutional democracy beginning in the early 1990s could succinctly be described as the '*Third Wave of Militarization*' in African politics and public administration.

Besides, military intervention in politics has received much scholarly discussions and debate underpinning the rationale for their undemocratic adventures in political administration. Consequently, scholars have argued that the conditions leading to the military interventions in public administration in Africa are generally a combination of intra-military grievances, widespread economic malaise and political dissatisfaction with the governments in power (Afrifa 1967; Kraus, 1970; Hansen, 1982). Situations arising out of these have given the armed forces a motive, and the implied legitimacy to take over the reins of government in the public interest (Afrifa, 1967; Kraus, 1970). For instance, Afrifa, summed it up succinctly when he stated that "*a coup d'état is the last resort in the range of means whereby the government may be overthrown*" (Afrifa, 1967: 93). Also, in his analysis of the 1966 coup in Ghana, Kraus 1970, p242 stated that "the military-police action was occasioned by the government's disregard for the professional autonomy and interests of the armed forces and police." Kraus further argued that "*a fundamental problem of the future civil-military relations is how a civilian government can handle and maintain, in subordinate status, military and police which have been ruling directly and retired willingly*" *ibid*, 1970 p.242. Political developments in Africa were to prove Kraus' assertion largely right as the armed forces on several other occasions beginning in 1960s until the Third Wave of Democratisation

(Huntington, 1991) in 1990s got directly involved in politics thereby establishing themselves as significant power brokers in public management and administration.

Arguably, notwithstanding the universal understanding of the conventional role of the military, members of the armed forces have taken over reins of governments in Africa on several occasions beginning in the early 1960s of the post-independent Africa. The phenomenon has re-emerged in Africa. Thus, the re-emergence of military interventions in Africa political administration has drawn scholars' attention to interrogate the role of armed forces in a democratic society. However, the study of military interventions in political administration cannot be undertaken without a close analysis of the effect of these interventions on the political changes that occur. The recent political developments in Africa, and the re-emergence of coup d'états in the West African sub-region in particular underpins the relevance and analytical framework of this paper. The recent political developments in Africa and the re-emergence of coup d'états in the West African sub-region in particular underpin the relevance of the analytical framework of this paper. This paper therefore problematises the re-emergence of coup d'états in Africa, and interrogates the theoretical and empirical connections of military inventions in politics and public administration. We also speculate about the prospects of Africa's democracy when the military withdraws from active political involvement. The rest of the paper is organized as follows; the next section is the methodology, followed by framework of analysis, understanding coup d'états, empirical connections of re-emergence of coups, concluding remarks and the references.

## **Methodology of the Paper**

This paper employed (desk-based) content analysis research approach and design. Data for analysis sourced through a review of literature on military regimes and coup d'états, and distant observation. Thus, the analysis began with the review of policy documents on military coup d'états in Africa from academic journals and papers, published books,

policy reports, and relevant documents explaining military interventions in Africa's democracy. The aim of the review of the literature and policy documents was to identify gaps in scholarly debate and discussions on military interventions on political changes in Africa. Therefore, the information gathered from the earlier works and the relevant documents was used to establish the theoretical and empirical connections of the re-emergence of military interventions in African politics.

## **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

The theoretical connection between political development and military interventions in politics has been a subject of scholarly discussions and debate. The debate is in three folds:

1. An increased centralization of power in the state, coupled with the weakening of traditional sources of authority;
2. The differentiation and specialization of political institutions; and
3. Increased popular participation in politics, and greater identification with the political system as a whole in a country (Welch, 1967 p.7).

First, scholars have argued that the armed forces as an organization is characterised by centralisation, discipline, hierarchy, communication and 'esprit de corps' (Finer, 1974, p7). In this connection, for a military to function effectively, it requires a clearly defined chain of command, with adequate communications to ensure that orders are carried out, and with means of disciplinary control. That is, effective military organisation demands a high degree of centralisation (Heywood, 2007). For this reason, many scholars have equated modern democratic systems with centralised and highly organised government. For instance, Huntington (1966, p 378) argued that:

Political modernisation... involves the rationalisation of authority: the replacement of a large number of traditional, religious, familial, and ethnic political authorities by a single, secular, national political authority... It means national

integration and the centralisation or accumulation of power in recognised national law-making institutions.

Thus, centralisation of power will accord well with patterns of organisation similar to the military institution. This is because in organisational terms, the armed forces appear to be a paragon of a modernised political system (Huntington, 1966). However, weakening of traditional sources of authority does not necessarily result in the centralisation of government functions. To put the matter simply, the 'modern' organisational characteristics of the armed forces such as centralisation, discipline, hierarchy, communications and esprit de corps may readily break down under the stresses of military interventions in politics (Finer, 1974). Clear evidence exists in African coups d'états where 'Junior Officers' turned against 'Senior Officers' to capture political power from their superiors. Three such coups in Africa were the Nigerian uprising of 29 July 1966, the abortive uprising in Ghana on 17 April 1967 and 4 June 1979 uprising in Ghana (Hansen, 1982). These examples shows that centralisation of authority and command as in the case of the military must not be mistaken as an effective central, unitary authority that can be used to rule a country.

Second, in a traditional setting many functions carried out within a society may be fused, but in a modern setting, the functions are characterised by differentiation or division of labour and development of particular structures (institutions) for their accomplishment. Scholars therefore argue that the armed forces epitomized such differentiation of function and specialisation of structure in modern society (Pye, 1961). Thus, the high degree of specialisation in the military contrasts not only with the fused traditional social setting, but also with other modern groups. For instance, few political parties in Africa, can match the centralisation, discipline, hierarchy, esprit de corps and speed of communications exhibited by armies. In this regard, Pye (1962, pp 80-83) argued that:

The good soldier is also to some degree a modernised man. Thus, it is that the armies in the newly emergent countries come to play roles in the process by which traditional ways give way to more Westernized ideas and practices.... the acculturative process in the army tends to be focused on acquiring technical

skills that are of particular value for economic development.... politically the most significant feature of the process of acculturation within the army is that it usually provides some form of training in citizenship.

However, the specialties and nationalistic outlooks, though cannot readily be carried over from the armed forces to the political administration. Thus, modern skills cannot necessarily be effectively diffused from the military to the civilian realm in a political system.

Third, the extent of political participation can readily be altered by military regimes. However, the degree of popular identification with the political system is not susceptible to easy manipulation. In the creation of political systems, perhaps the most important task is that of fostering popular identification where stakeholders of the system are integral to its existence. This identification may be enhanced by greater opportunities for symbolic participation. Members of the armed forces in control accordingly may turn to referenda (particularly on new constitutions) as an innocuous means of transforming participation into identification. However, enhanced opportunities for participation may not lead to national type of identification. Instead, it may lead to:

“An obsessive concern with the relation of one’s tribe, region, sect, or whatever to a center of the power that, while growing rapidly more active, is not easily either insulated from the web of primordial attachment, as was the remote colonial regime, or assimilated to them as the workaday authority system of the “little community”. Thus, it is the very process of the formation of a sovereign civil state that, among other things, stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism, and so on, because it introduces into society a valuable new prize over which to fight and a frightening new force with which to contend.” (*Verba, 1965 p529*).

In short, popular identification with the political system as a whole cannot be legislated into existence. As, “some realms of life cannot be directly affected in an enduring way through the machinery of government” (Welch, 1967 p177). This means the overthrow of government may bring great initial credit to the perpetrators of military intervention.

However, the installation of a genuinely popular army member as head of State may similarly result in public approbation. That is, the vagaries of popular opinion in a political system and the threat of ethnically based parochialism often make widespread popular identification with the new regime an unlikely direct product of military intervention, like the case of former Liberia military regime under Master Sergeant Doe (1980-1990). For this reason, the fostering of political and administration legitimacy requires far more than just a displacement of elected government by soldiers in a coup d'état.

### **Towards Understanding Coup D'états**

Military interventions in politics drew much scholarly attention on the role of the armed forces in democratic societies. The Latin American countries experienced first wave of military coups in 1955 and the re-emergence after 1960s. In the Middle East, many of the Arab states went through military rule. Also, the Asian states have also gone through successive military coups and abortive coups beginning in the 1950s.

Though Africa as a continent has now joined the league of democracies in the world, military coups have become a phenomenon the continent has to reckon with. Moreover, we still have but a rudimentary grasp of what is involved in the recent political developments in Africa, and scholars have begun once again to interrogate the phenomenon. Though research and analysis have provided some explanations, the recent surge of coup d'états in West Africa call for concern. Given the political instability in these countries, a military takeover can be viewed as a step in the arduous search for order and progress, but at the same time it is a setback in the process of democratic consolidation in the continent. The intervention of the military in politics could result from the combination of many factors. In the particular case of coups in Africa and other '*Third World*' world countries, economic, cultural, and political reasons are intertwined; the

declining prestige of political parties and growing consciousness among the military of their power plays significant roles.

The diminished likelihood of external intervention and the effects of the contagion must also be added to a sense of grievance within the military itself as part of the background. When and how coups occur differ greatly, and there seems to be no uniform circumstances under which military seizure of political control often come. But, when the popularity of government declined among the politically relevant strata of the population, the military seems to illustrate an awareness of its unique duty to protect the national interest. Also, when the military begins to distinguish between the policies pursued by the civilian government and the policies desired by its members, the disposition to intervene in political administration proceeds and may be activated as planned. The disposition of the military to intervene in politics is thus prompted by evidence of political weakness.

Another hypothesis is that soldiers have a tendency of being attracted to stage coups to pursue their selfish interests, in view of their low national consciousness which is a legacy of colonial rule (Mazrui & Rothchild, 1969). Another position is that, to make civilian control of the army easier, development of the professionalism of the army is prioritised (Huntington, 1957). This is in contrast to the position by Mazrui (1964) that military is sometimes deliberately politicized to guarantee civilian control. Interestingly, Jonowitz (1964, pp 65-66) also posits that professionalism of the military projects it to the point of “*wanting to be above politics*”, hence being less responsive to civilian control. In tandem with the modernisation theory, the military is perceived as one of the forces for modernising society especially in Africa (Pye, 1960). This is because, the military is assumed to be an institution that can produce rare skills or competencies required by the middle classes it recruits, and developing national consciousness.

However, these hypotheses in relation to the complexity and the dynamics of the facts or realities are pointers that no single variable can fully explain the motivations of the military to participate in politics. Consequently,

Luckham (1971) attempted a typology of the civil-military relationship that motivates military participation in politics on three factors; the strength of the civil political institutions, the strength of the military and the character of the boundaries between the military and its socio-political environment. Luckham (1971) further attempted to demonstrate how existing theories on civil-military relations could be aggregated and synthesized to arrive at a more general framework.

The first factor or summary of variables is the strength of the civil political institutions which Finer (1962) refers to as '*level of political culture*'. According to him, weak political institutions lacking legitimacy attract the military to intervene in politics. Luckham (1971) considers this as likely in Africa and other developing countries but not the industrialised countries. The provision of adequate definition of strong institutions and clear-cut criteria for its determination were observed by Luckham (1971) as a challenge. Finer (1962) suggests publicly agreed procedures for transfer of power, public office holders' legitimacy and the effectiveness and level of influence of private associations such as labour unions, political parties, churches, among others as criteria. The elements in the strength of civilian institutions identified by Luckham (1971) are public support aggregated by political structures, the degree of political mobilisation and the extent of political communication and awareness of the government.

The second factor for the involvement of the military in politics as considered by Luckham (1971) is the strength of the military institutions. The resources at the disposal of an army determines its power. The resources are in three kinds: coercive and strategic resources, organizational resources and political resources (Luckham, 1971). The coercive and strategic resources of the military include its absolute and relative size in relation to the population, the allocation of the national budget it receives, utilizable firepower, and organizational effectiveness. The organizational resources of the military establishment comprise its capacity to deliver both in the political arena and in delivery of firepower. The number of personnel with the potential of being recruited into political roles on assuming political power such that normal positions in the echelons would not be compromised is a crucial consideration. The

experiences, skills and exposures gained by military elites through various professional, educational and training courses should be adequate to resource the military in negotiations, leadership, administration and so on in the political arena. The political resources of the military are a function of its coercive and organisational power and extent of conversion into political resource, the extent of integration of the military with civilian power structures, and its social legitimacy which reflected in the amount of diffuse political support it can generate.

The third factor that determines the involvement of the military in politics according to Luckham (1971) is the interaction between military power and civilian power. While political institutions specialise in creating consensus within the ranks and diffusing support, the military requires a level of social consensus around its goals and methods in order to gain legitimacy. A balance of power between civil and military institutions in a state is necessary for stability. However, that balance of power in new nations of Africa is that of mutual weakness where the greater efficacy of violence is such that the military can both take a wider role in political allocations and be exposed to greater political pressures to do so from outside political groups wishing to co-opt the means of violence to support their interests.

The different sets of parameters within which the role of the military may be defined could be considered from the three summary variables just outlined above. Relating the parameters to the distinctive roles a military establishment may play in politics to provide a comprehensive general view of the motivations of the involvement of the military in politics. Luckham (1971) provided a more general schema for civil- military relations, while taking cognisance of a number of existing models. The existing models acknowledged are Huntington's (1957) distinction between objective and subjective controls by the military; the characterization of the apparat-state by Ionescu; Lasswell (1941) garrison state; of the praetorian state and nation-in-arms hypifications by Rapoport; and the constabulary concept by Janowitz (1960). Luckham's (1971) Guardian State and Post-Colonial Guardian State typologies are to provide a more realistic picture of the motivations for the involvement of the military in African politics.

## **Re-Emergence of Coups in Africa: What is the Empirical Connection?**

### ***Peril of Africa Political Independence***

As regards Africa's political independence, it is becoming clear that without a coordinated and concerted effort by civil society, the continent will slip completely into tyrannical rule. The signs are clear; we do not need to pontificate over this nor do we have to be to know this. What is evident is that on a daily basis political leaderships sing the national anthems and recite pledges to uphold the nations' constitutions and resist oppressors' rule, yet political oppression has become entrenched in the body polity in the continent.

Africa returned to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s after many years of military rule and dictatorships, and many years plagued by civil wars and many conflicts in almost all the countries in the continent. Political independence in Africa has been achieved through the foresight and vision of our forefathers and especially the first president of Ghana, the late Dr Kwame Nkrumah and many other great African leaders in the past. Though Africa's political independence sought to open up the whole continent to bring the people together, and derive dividends of democracy, this political independence is now being exploited to the advantage of ruling parties and elites in Africa. Political independence has been observed to be exploited by Africa's political elites, and thereby contributing to emerging deep-seated tensions that have the potential to explode. These tensions are largely political; created by a mindset in recent years which insists that only a segment of the population in various countries of the continent has the right to rule.

And so, all efforts are being made to disenfranchise voters' and particular ethnic groups in order to minimise the chances of the opposition winning elections in many of the countries in Africa in recent times. Some African Presidents, such as President Museveni of Uganda and President Paul Biya of Cameroun, have extended their tenure virtually to life Presidents after amending presidential term limits in their national constitutions. Other African leaders, like the former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo

and President Alpha Conte of Guinea have attempted to amend their constitutions and failed but others like President Alassane Ouattara of La Côte d'Ivoire have succeeded. In this democratic quagmire, the military which prides itself as custodians and restorers of constitution is inclined to intervene. Hence, the re-emergence of coup d'états in Africa such as Mali in 2019 and Guinea in 2021 are cases that are contingent on this political phenomenon in Africa's emerging democratic history.

### ***Africa Democracy under Threat***

Africa democratic governance beginning in the 1990s is expected to ensure that fundamental liberties as are enshrined in national constitutions are respected. Defined as 'government by discussion' democracy as a system of governance allows for the respect of dissenting views in formulating and implementing public policies. It would appear however that a narrow view of democracy prevails today in Africa focusing on ballots and elections, and not the broader sense of the concept of democracy. These authors and all advocates of democracy caution on the shortcomings of narrowly conceiving the idea of democracy as public balloting. The effectiveness of ballots themselves depends on what goes with balloting such as free speech, access to information, and freedom of dissent. Freedom of dissent is becoming a rare commodity in Africa today.

Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 outlined two major threats to democracy that have negative implications for upholding democracy as a whole, and these are playing out in Africa today. The threats are as follows: 1) the selfish interests of individuals especially of the power holders who use their positions of state authority to amass wealth for themselves and their cronies, and 2) the tendency to use majoritarian positions to sideline and marginalise other groups.

Because of the social contract between the citizens and the State as espoused by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, laws of the State are supposed to be universal and applicable to all citizens. But when majority groups use that position to pass laws without any input from the minority groups, such laws are no longer universal. When minority groups

obey these laws, they are no longer free citizens in that country but 'slaves'. When we use the majority in parliament to pass laws that deny the vote to many citizens, this is no longer democracy but tyranny. The military considered the characteristics and political tendencies of the ruling class in Mali, Guinea and Burkina as undemocratic, hence the call for probity and political accountability through coup d'états that ousted the elected governments in those countries in 2019, 2021 and 2022 respectively.

### ***Rise of Democratic Tyrants in Africa***

An offshoot of majoritarian rule where the minority has little or no say under a supposedly democratic rule is the tendency of rulers in those countries to assume de facto dictatorial postures. We should be reminded of the fact that dictators such as Adolf Hitler of Germany (1933 – 1945) and Mussolini of Italy (1922 - 1943) came into power through democratic elections. These leaders changed world history in a rather brutal way through the terror they unleashed and the millions of lives lost during the Second World War (1939 – 1945). Dictatorship is defined as a system of government controlled by an individual or a group who hold virtually absolute power. Dictators throughout history have used force or the threat of it to stay in power. In modern times, they forbid elections or manipulate the electoral systems to stay in power for life. Plato warned humanity on how democracies can degenerate into tyranny in *The Republic* (380BC). According to the philosopher, the key driving feature of democracy is the desire for freedom and so emerges a plurality of interests. Plato predicted that the only way anything could be achieved under a democracy is to have a strong leader who can unite the various interests, and such strong leaders may ultimately become tyrants.

Modern day dictators (tyrants and demagogues) derive their power from the people through democratic elections. Once they are in power, they start a systematic process of dismantling and crippling the checks and balances that make democracies work. These are some of the characteristics of modern-day dictatorships. For instance, leaders such as Viktor Orban of Hungary, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, Abdel Fatah al-Sissi of Egypt and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil are undoubtedly

in this category. Former President Donald Trump of the USA (2017-2021), but for constitutionalism and the time-tested democracy of the USA, would have exhibited similar tendencies in his tenure. There are many democratically elected African leaders today that can be similarly described as modern day benevolent political dictators Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Paul Biya of Cameroun.

Africa faces the threat of democratic reversal through greed, whilst marginalization, nepotism and corruption are making it impossible for governments to apply State resources efficiently to grow the economies and create the wealth and jobs for the growing populations. Civil strife and even wars, particularly coup d'états thrive in such contexts as evident in the recent coups in Chad, Sudan, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. For instance, a survey of the terrain shows that there are currently about 50 absolute dictators in the world (planetrulers.com, 2020). Out of this number, 19 are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), 12 are in the Middle East and North Africa, 8 in the Asia Pacific region, 7 in Eurasia, 3 in the Americas and 1 in Europe (planetrulers.com). The rise of modern dictatorship is a direct result of the failings of democracy. In many developing countries, democracy has yet to deliver on the promise of accountability as well as freedom and equality, which are the fundamental principles upon which democracy claims superiority over other forms of government.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This paper is a contribution towards understanding political undercurrents of the re-emerging coup d'états in Africa. Africa's emerging democracy and elections are seemingly under threat. For instance, the debate over the presidential term limit in Africa has received wide public reaction across the world. The debate is whether the presidential terms in African countries should be extended or there should be a ceiling on the presidential term limit. Some African leaders are flouting constitutional term limits which has received wide public reaction across Africa and the world.

Unfortunately, civil society in many of the African countries has become so cowed that the voices of reason have become silent. Also, some civil

society groups in many of the African countries adopt a “choose and pick” attitude in their criticisms. When it is their party in government everything is good, and when it is not their party in government everything is bad in the country. People have become silent observers in many of the African countries for fear of their lives. Others are also part of the spoil system and therefore benefiting from the bounty and so care less about the rest of society. Africa is at the crossroads: going forward with the system will further entrench tyranny. The only way left is to resist oppression and this is the reason for military coups in some African countries in recent times such as those in Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Guinea and Sudan. Unfortunately, the coup d'états are not the sine qua non but merely the symptoms, leaving in their trail worse records of human rights abuses, insecurity, inequality and poverty.

However, Rousseau developed the idea of the ‘social contract’ in modern political development, and explained the need for people to live in freedom, liberty and happiness within a democratic society. By joining the social contract, individuals accept to alienate their natural liberty to embrace the conventional liberty. Therefore, due to the social contract, individuals have a new kind of liberty. Civil liberty and the state become the guarantor of three main rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Africa is currently not in a position to guarantee these fundamental rights to all citizens under the current democratic dispensation. Hence, members of the armed forces who pride themselves as custodians or restorers of constitutional governance in Africa will therefore act on the rhetoric that democratic principles will be better upheld or served by their direct intervention in the political administration of the State as in Mali in 2019, Guinea in 2021 and Burkina Faso in 2022 in the West Africa sub-region. We therefore conclude and recommend that critical stakeholders need to act proactively, and in concert to structurally address the putative democratic deficits obviously eroding the dividends of democracy and the socio-economic aspirations of ordinary Africans.

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