

Western Africa's recent coups

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Coups in Africa are back in the news and on Africa's security agenda. Within the last three years, eleven coup attempts took place in Africa, seven of them successful in seizing power. 2021 alone saw four successful coups in Africa - in Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan - as many as last seen in 1999¹. By early February 2022 a successful coup in Burkina Faso and a failed coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau have already taken place.

An analysis of the [Ibrahim Index of African Governance \(IIAG\)](#) trends and scores over the decade 2010-2019 for Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali reveals interesting findings, highlighting common patterns among these countries and pointing to early warning signs.

What is a coup d'état?

According to Powell and Thyme, coups are "overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of state using unconstitutional means. A coup attempt is defined as successful if the coup perpetrators seize and hold power for at least seven days."

Once a coup, always coups?

Of the countries that have seen a change in leadership between 2020 and 2022 triggered by a coup, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali stand out as countries having a common history of coups within the past 15 years, followed by electoral democracy periods that have put in place the presidents that were toppled by the most recent coups (see timeline).



Successful coup



Failed coup



Assassination attempt



Elections



Mass protests oust President



Constitutional referendum

► GUINEA

2008



December 2008:

- After the death of long-term President Lansana Conté, the military stages a coup
- Moussa Dadis Camara installed as Interim President

2009



December 2009: Moussa Dadis Camara wounded in an assassination attempt, Sékouba Konaté installed as Interim President

2010



November 2010: Alpha Condé elected as President

2011



July 2011: Soldiers engage in an assassination attempt against President Alpha Condé

2015



October 2015: President Alpha Condé re-elected

2020



March 2020: Constitutional referendum that resets and extends presidential terms allowing President Alpha Condé to run for another two terms

October 2020: President Alpha Condé elected for a third term

2021



September 2021:

- President Alpha Condé ousted by military coup
- Mamady Doumbouy installed as Interim President

¹ Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Niger.

► MALI

2012



March 2012: President Amadou Toumani Touré ousted in military coup

April 2012: Dioncounda Traoré installed as Interim President

May 2012: Failed counter-coup by soldiers supportive of ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré

2013



August 2013: Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta elected as President

2018



2018: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta re-elected

2020



August 2020:

- President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta ousted by military coup
- Assimi Goïta installed as new Interim Leader

September 2020: Bah NDaw appointed by the coup leader Assimi Goïta as civilian Interim President

2021



May 2021:

- President Bah NDaw ousted by military coup
- Assimi Goïta installed as Interim President

► BURKINA FASO

2014



October 2014:

- Mass protests and a military take-over oust long-term President Blaise Compaoré
- Michel Kafando installed as Interim President

2015



September 2015: Members of the presidential guard engage in a failed counter-coup attempt against the interim government

December 2015: Roch Marc Christian Kaboré elected as President

2020



November 2020: President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré re-elected

2022



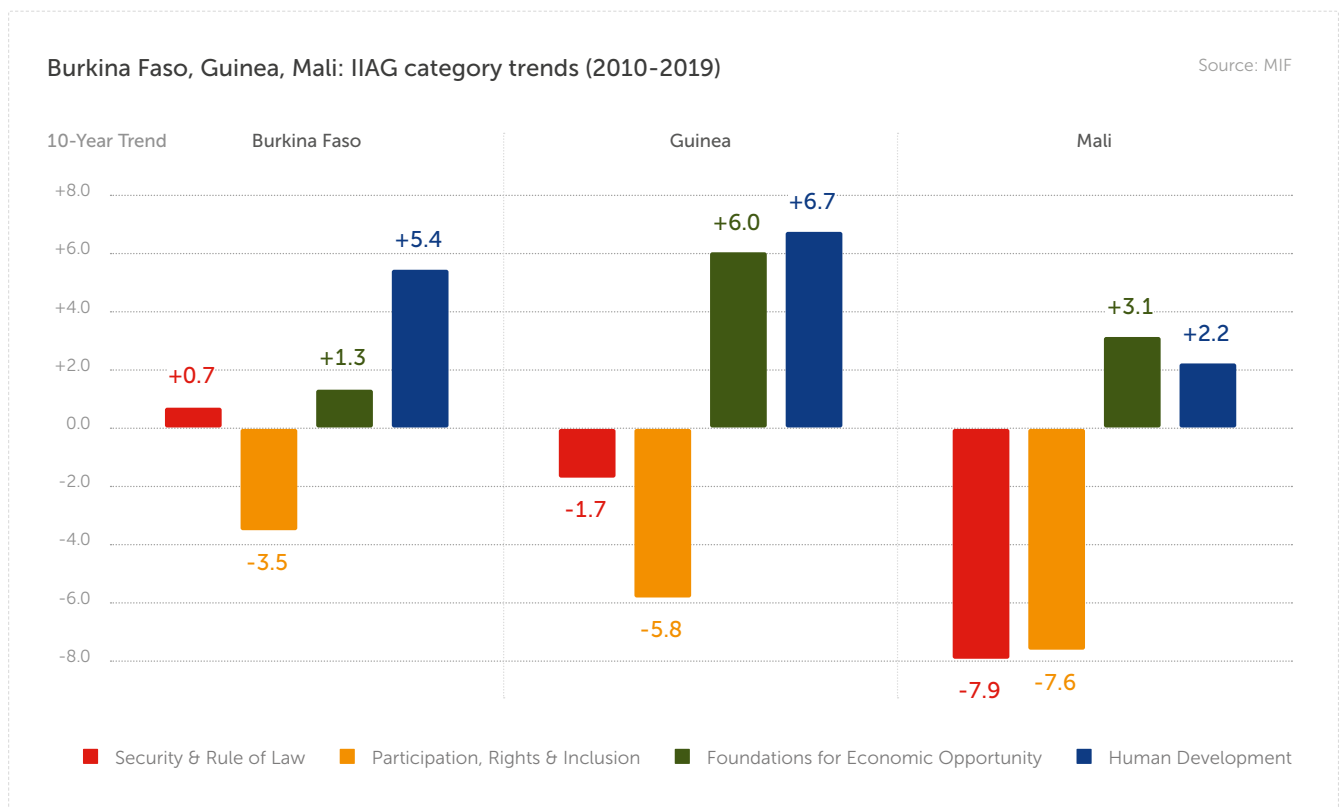
January 2022:

- President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré ousted by military coup
- Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba installed as Interim President

What the IAG shows: pre-coups, all countries faced security, rule of law and rights deteriorations

While coup dynamics must be understood in each specific country context, data from the [Ibrahim Index of African Governance \(IIAG\)](#) unearth similarities between the countries' governance paths and highlight warning signs.

At first sight, there are three different country paths at *Overall Governance* level. While Mali's *Overall Governance* score in 2019 is lower than in 2010 with decline having happened faster since 2015, Guinea has improved since 2010 and at a faster pace since 2015. Burkina Faso scores higher in *Overall Governance* in 2010 than in 2019 but has started to decline in 2015, risking overturning progress made over the last decade.



Improvements in *Foundations for Economic Opportunities* and *Human Development* are hampered by declines in *Security & Rule of Law* and *Participation, Rights & Inclusion*

However, digging deeper, the three countries seem to follow more similar directions.

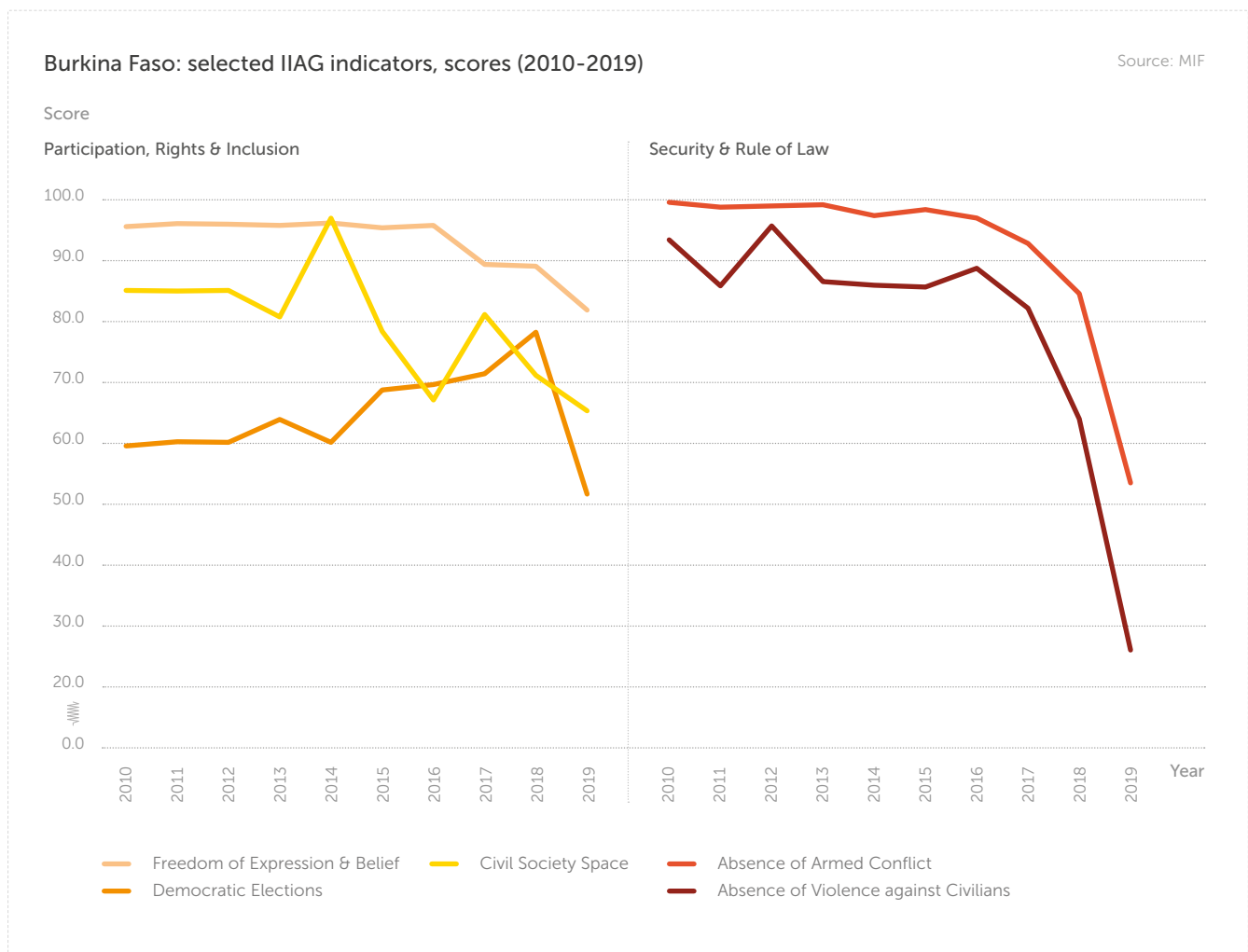
Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali have all improved in *Foundations for Economic Opportunity* and *Human Development*. This has driven the positive *Overall Governance* trajectory of both Burkina Faso and Guinea over the decade and has prevented an even larger decline in Mali.

However, at the same time all three countries have since 2010 deteriorated in *Participation, Rights & Inclusion* whereby the declines have all been faster since 2015. Burkina Faso and Guinea see the lowest scores for the category over the ten-year time period in 2019. For all three countries, this negative trend has most notably been due to deteriorations in *Participation* and *Rights*.

Against the backdrop of shrinking rights and participation opportunities, both Guinea and Mali have seen deteriorations in *Security & Rule of Law* since 2010 with the pace of decline having increased since 2015. While Burkina Faso's *Security & Rule of Law* score in 2019 is higher than in 2010, it has started to decline since 2015.

Burkina Faso: the extreme decline in the country's security situation as a key trigger

In Burkina Faso, the integrity of elections and civil society space have seen large deteriorations and all *Rights* related indicators are scoring lower in 2019 than in 2010. Freedom of expression and digital rights have been particularly restricted. In addition, there have been large setbacks in the extent to which different strata of society enjoy equal levels of civil liberties. Burkina Faso has seen its security situation since 2010 deteriorating the most on the continent. It went from being among the top 10 in 2010 (7th) to being among the bottom 10 (46th) in 2019 for *Security & Safety*. The decline is driven by an increase in armed conflict in the country and in violence against civilians, committed particularly by non-state actors. In no other country on the continent has this type of violence increased more than in Burkina Faso. The extreme worsening of the security situation in the country and the struggle of containing armed extremist groups was a key trigger for the 2022 coup.

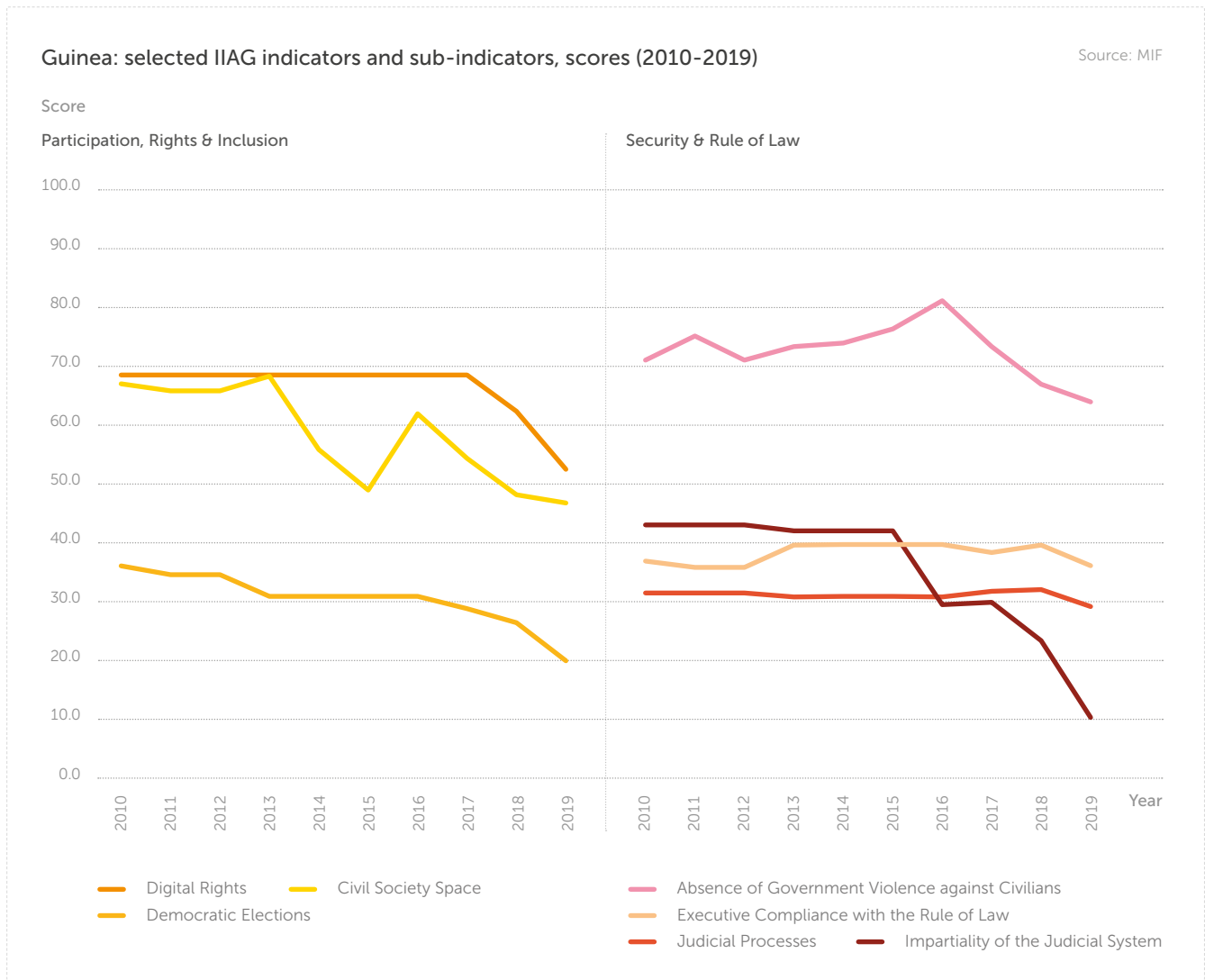


Burkina Faso is among the ten most declined countries for *Absence of Armed Conflict* and *Absence of Violence against Civilians*.

Guinea: failed compliance with the constitution and Condé’s third mandate as key triggers

In Guinea, political pluralism and civil society space have been largely restricted since 2010 and all *Rights* related indicators have also declined, most notably *Digital Rights* and *Media Freedom*. Political power is less equally distributed in 2019 than in 2010 and the extent to which different strata of society enjoy the same civil rights has been limited. While a rise in violence against civilians, in particular committed by state forces, has also led to a declined security situation in Guinea, deteriorations in *Rule of Law & Justice* are driving the downwards trend of *Security & Rule of Law*. A less impartial judicial system, less rigorous judicial processes and a lower compliance of the executive with the rule of law are areas of concern. The rule of law situation in Guinea was already on a negative trajectory before President Condé’s amendment of the constitution in 2020 which allowed him to run for two more terms. The grievances behind the flawed 2020 presidential elections and President Condé’s third mandate were among the main motivations behind the 2021 coup in Guinea.

According to Afrobarometer surveys in 2019, 76.1% of Guineans are in favour or strongly in favour of limiting presidential term limits to a maximum of two.



Guinea is the 7th most declined country on the continent for the *Rule of Law & Justice* sub-category. In 2019, it sits at 41st place in the ranking table.

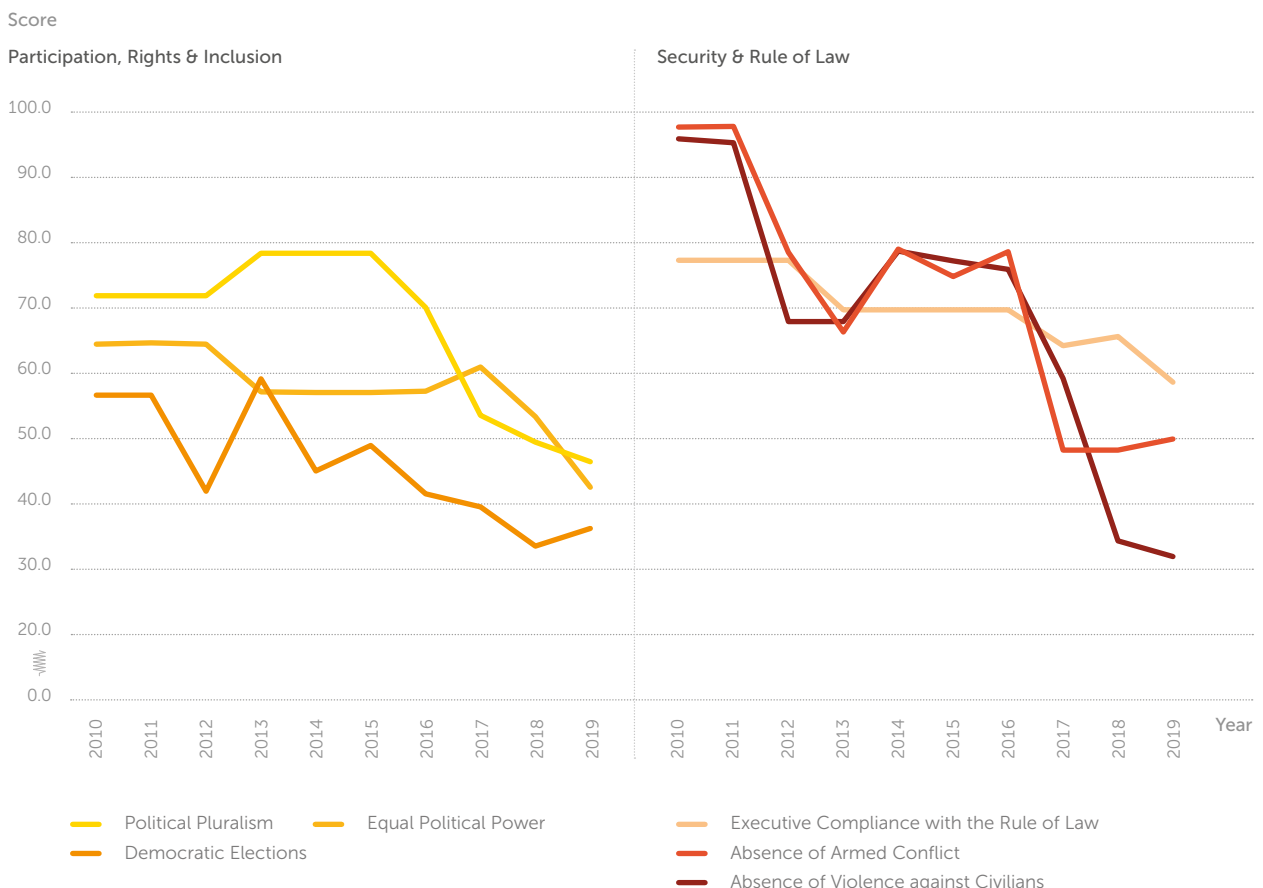
Mali: executive's neglect for the rule of law and flawed elections as key triggers

In Mali, the integrity of elections and political pluralism in the country have largely declined, with political pluralism and freedom of assembly being at their lowest over the ten-year time period in 2019. Further, there have been large restrictions to media freedom and digital rights and political power has become less equally distributed among different strata of society. Mali is among the ten most declined countries on the continent for *Security & Rule of Law*. The decline in this category is most notably driven by a deterioration in *Security & Safety* due to a large increase in armed conflict and violence against civilians. Only in Burkina Faso has violence against civilians by non-state actors increased even more. Mali has also seen declines in its rule of law, most notably in the executive's compliance with the rule of law. In no other country on the continent has this declined more than in Mali. Frustration over flawed legislative elections in 2020 when results for 31 legislative seats were overturned in favour of President Keita, growing insecurity through increasing violent extremism and accusations of corruption led to popular protests against President Keita and are believed to be the main triggers for the coup in August 2020.

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, citizens consider crime and security the most important problem that their governments should address. Less than one-third of Malians think that their government is doing a good job at preventing or resolving violent conflict.

Mali: selected IIAG indicators, scores (2010-2019)

Source: MIF



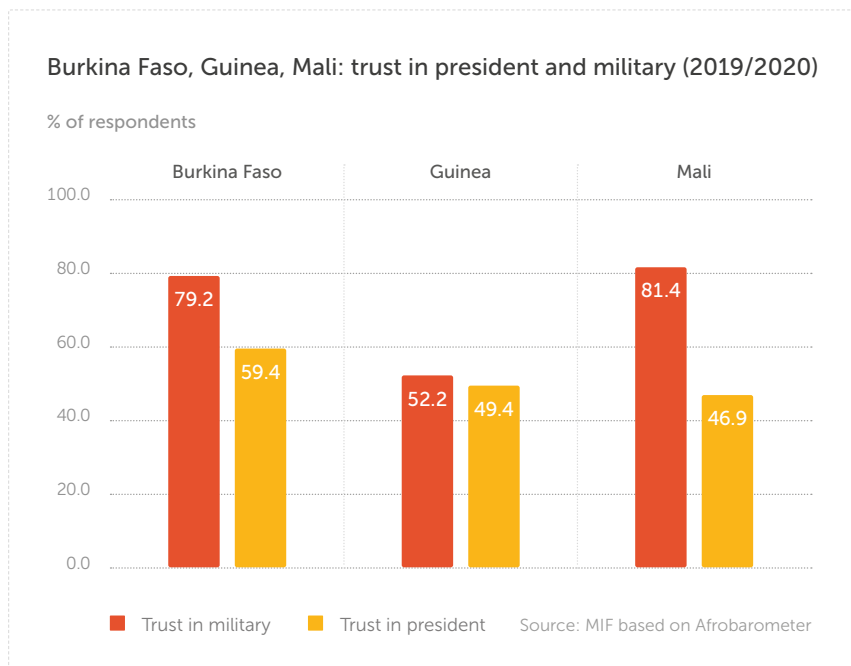
Mali is the most declined country for *Executive Compliance with the Rule of Law* as well as the second most declined country for *Democratic Elections* between 2010 and 2019.

Trading off security, the rule of law and rights is unsustainable

The results from the 2020 IAG highlight two main points. First, many of the factors that triggered the coups have long been brewing in the respective countries. Second, as outlined in the [2020 IAG report](#), the strongest correlations with *Overall Governance* span across all four IAG categories, underlining the need for a balanced governance approach and the unsustainability of compromising on some governance areas for others. The three coup countries are a case in point, showing that improvements in development and at economic level cannot be made at the expense of security, the rule of law, rights and participatory space.

For Africa's citizens, military coups offer quick alternatives to dissatisfaction with democratic processes but are no long-term solution

Citizens in each of the coup countries are not satisfied with democracy in their countries as shown by the most recent Afrobarometer data (2019/2020). While around 45% of Burkinabe are not at all or not very satisfied with democracy in their country, the share of unsatisfied citizens is as high as almost 70% in Guinea and over 75% in Mali. Almost half of Burkinabe and around 60% of Malians and Guineans think that elections are not enabling people to remove unpopular leaders.



In the run-up to the most recent coups, all three countries saw waves of anti-government protest, emphasising citizens' dissatisfaction with governance in their countries. Presidents are also facing a trust crisis, in all three countries the military is a more trusted entity than the president. In Burkina Faso and Mali around every 8 out of 10 citizens trust the military somewhat or a lot. Combined with environments where democratic means of leadership change appear limited, this can reinforce support for the military to intervene and make coups a tool for political change. However, while military coups oust unpopular leaders, they are not offering a permanent solution to citizens' grievances. In Burkina Faso, almost half of citizens reject military rule while more than two-thirds do so in Guinea and Mali. For more than two-thirds of citizens in all countries, democracy is the preferred form of government.

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