A coup is never a solution

Analysis of the warning signs and impact of recent coups in Western Africa
Coup contagion in Western Africa: unpacking warning signs of recent coups

The volatile security context in the Sahel

Timeline of events: recurrent coups

Deteriorating security and shrinking participatory environment: warning signs of Western African coups according to the IIAG

Burkina Faso: largest security deterioration in Africa foreshadowed 2022 coups

Guinea: shrinking democratic space and decreased accountability anticipated 2021 coup

Mali: deteriorating security and decreased accountability in build-up to coups of 2020 and 2021

Niger: a worsening security situation and increased corruption foreshadow 2023 coup

Coups in Western Africa are not realising their commitments

Burkina Faso: militant attacks show no sign of abating since coup

Mali: security situation almost twice as bad as pre-coup

Guinea: still no elections as civil unrest grows

Spotlight: Support for democracy down, pro-military attitudes up

Warning signs in other African countries: who is next on the list?

Alarm bells in Security & Safety and Participation for many other countries on the continent

Spotlight: Coups and uprisings ousting long-term leaders across the continent

Spotlight: The AU’s growing stance against unconstitutional changes of government

Balanced progress in all governance dimensions is key

References
Coup contagion in Western Africa: unpacking warning signs of recent coups

The spate of recent coups in Africa is showing no sign of abating. Coups in Africa are back in the news and on Africa’s security agenda. Since 2020, in just three years, 13 coup attempts took place in Africa, eight of them successful in seizing power in Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

With the exception of Sudan and Gabon, these coups have taken place in Western Africa. Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger were all party to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) when the coups occurred and all but Guinea were party to the GS Sahel and faced major common security concerns.
The recent coups in the Sahel, with the exception of Guinea, have occurred against a backdrop of increasing insecurity. These security trends have been further intensified by the worsening impacts of climate change, the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, and worsening humanitarian, food security and livelihoods crises.

Following the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, the Sahel region saw an influx of both foreign and returning fighters from Libya as well as significant arms-trafficking through porous state borders in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger. In the subsequent years, this proliferation of arms and fighters resulted in the emergence of local Islamist militant groups affiliated to Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda as well as the emboldening of local criminal networks and other separatist groups such as the Tuareg insurgency. Over the following twelve years, this led to a substantial deterioration in the region’s security.

These various armed groups have often overwhelmed national military capacities and targeted civilians in the Sahel, despite the French military’s counter-insurgency Operation Barkhane. This has occurred against a backdrop of intensifying grievances across the Sahel regarding lack of support and insufficient wages in the military, primarily in Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as widespread corruption issues that have frustrated militaries across the region.

Amid this context, the region has for decades acted as a platform for competing geopolitical influences, with France, the US and Russia providing a physical military presence and military support. However, in recent years, increasing anti-French sentiment in former French colonies such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, along with the failure of international missions to stem the militant violence, have led to the gradual withdrawal of French forces.

While French influence has declined, the Sahel has seen an increase in Russian influence, most clearly in the presence of the Wagner Group, a private military company with links to the Russian state, but also in anti-French messaging deployed by Russian social media outlets. The Wagner Group has featured most prominently in Mali, providing security support in exchange for preferential access to resources.
Timeline of events: recurring coups

**BURKINA FASO**

**2022**
January 2022:
- President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré ousted by military coup
- Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba installed as Interim President

September 2022:
- Interim President Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba ousted by military coup
- Captain Ibrahim Traoré installed as President

**2020**
November 2020: President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré re-elected

**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

**2014**
October 2014:
- Mass protests and a military takeover oust long-term President Blaise Compaoré
- Michel Kafando installed as Interim President

**GUINEA**

**2021**
September 2021:
- President Alpha Condé ousted by military coup
- Mamady Doumbouya installed as Interim President

**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

**2015**
October 2015: President Alpha Condé re-elected

**2010**
November 2010: Alpha Condé elected as President

**2008**
December 2008:
- After the death of longtime President Lansana Conté, the military stages a coup
- Moussa Dadis Camara installed as Interim President

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**Key**
- Successful coup
- Failed coup
- Mass protests oust President
- Constitutional referendum
- Elections
**MALI**

- **2021**
  - May 2021: President Bah N’Daw ousted by military coup
  - Assimi Goïta installed as Interim President

- **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

- **2018**
  - 2018: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta re-elected

- **2013**
  - August 2013: Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta elected as President

- **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

**NIGER**

- **2023**
  - July 2023: A military coup led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani overthrows President Mohamed Bazoum

- **2021**
  - March 2021: An attempted coup days before newly elected President Mohamed Bazoum is due to be sworn in

- **2020-2021**
  - December 2020: Elections take place
  - February 2021: President Mohamed Bazoum declared winner by the electoral commission

- **2016**
  - March 2016: Mahamadou Issoufou is re-elected in a run-off election

- **2015**
  - December 2015: Attempted coup fails to overthrow President Issoufou

- **2011**
  - March 2011: Mahamadou Issoufou wins presidential elections

- **2010**
  - February 2010: President Mamadou Tandja is ousted in a coup and senior army officer, Col Salou Djibo, named head of a military government

*Source: MIF*
Deteriorating security and shrinking participatory environment: warning signs of Western African coups according to the IIAG

The four Western African countries to experience a coup d’état between 2021 and 2023 – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, shared common trends on the IIAG between 2017 and 2021, the latest five-year period:

- All four countries declined in Overall Governance, as well as the categories Security & Rule of Law and Participation, Rights & Inclusion.
- All four countries experienced a decline in the sub-categories Security & Safety, Anti-Corruption, Participation, Inclusion & Equality, and Business & Labour Environment.
- At least three of the four countries also experienced declines in the sub-categories Rule of Law & Justice, Accountability & Transparency, and Rights.
- On average, the sub-categories Security & Safety (-14.2) and Participation (-10.6) saw the biggest declines across the coup countries over the past five years.

The 2022 IIAG shows a decline between 2017 and 2021 both in Overall Governance and in the categories Security & Rule of Law and Participation, Rights & Inclusion for all four Western African coup countries.

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
<th>Guinea</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Africa Average</th>
<th>Trend</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security &amp; Safety</td>
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Selected countries: IIAG sub-category trends (2017-2021)

Burkina Faso (-34.2, 1st), Mali (-12.1, 5th), and Niger (-8.9, 7th) were all among the ten most declined countries in Africa in the sub-category Security & Safety since 2017.
Burkina Faso: largest security deterioration in Africa foreshadowed 2022 coups

Since 2014, Burkina Faso has experienced three coups and one attempted countercoup. The most recent took place in September 2022, following another coup in January 2022 that ousted President Roch Marc Kaboré, ending a period of democracy that started in 2015. The 2022 coup leaders both claimed deteriorating security to be their primary motivation.

The IIAG shows Overall Governance had been improving in Burkina Faso between 2012 and 2017, reaching a peak score of 57.3. However, in the last five years Overall Governance has declined (-2.7). This decline preceded the coup d’etats of 2022, that took place in the context of deteriorating security and democratic restrictions.

- Between 2012 and 2017 all four IIAG categories improved in Burkina Faso. However, over the past five years, Security & Rule of Law (-9.0), Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-4.3) and Foundations for Economic Opportunity (-0.8) all declined.

- The decline in Security & Rule of Law in the last five years has been overwhelmingly driven by the Security & Safety (-34.2) sub-category.

- Every indicator in Security & Safety has declined over the past five years. No African country has declined more than Burkina Faso in Absence of Armed Conflict (-72.0) and Absence of Violence against Civilians (-63.0) since 2017. This decline has been driven by a large increase in attacks by non-state armed groups.

- The Rights (-9.5) sub-category was the second most declined sub-category over this period, primarily driven by declines in Digital Rights (-22.0), with a greater restriction on expression in the digital space and an increase in internet and social media shutdowns.

Burkina Faso: most declined indicators (2017-2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2021 Score</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>2021 Rank</th>
<th>Africa Average Score 2021</th>
<th>Africa Average Trend (2017-2021)</th>
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<td>Absence of Armed Conflict</td>
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<td>Rights</td>
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<td>-4.8</td>
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<td>Security &amp; Safety</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
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</table>

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance
Guinea: shrinking democratic space and decreased accountability anticipated 2021 coup

Since 2008, two coups have occurred in Guinea, the most recent being in 2021, which led to the ousting of President Alpha Condé. The coup leaders justified the coup on the grounds of poverty and endemic corruption.

The IIAG shows that in Overall Governance Guinea had been improving (+1.6) between 2012 and 2017 but declined by an almost equal amount in the following five years (-1.5). This decline preceded the coup d’état of 2021, that took place in the context of human rights abuses, a shrinking participatory environment and increased corruption.

- Between 2012 and 2017, every category improved in Guinea. However, in the latest five years Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-6.6) and Security & Rule of Law (-3.3) have seen marked declines.

- Participation is the most declined sub-category (-14.8) since 2017, even though Guinea had improved in this measure between 2012 and 2017 (+3.6). Rights (-8.2) and Accountability & Transparency (-9.0) are the next most declined in the last five years.

- Of the five most declined indicators in the Participation, Rights & Inclusion category since 2017, three are within the Participation sub-category including Democratic Elections (-18.8), Civil Society Space (-17.5) and Freedom of Association & Assembly (-12.5). Since 2017 Personal Liberties (-22.8), which sits in the Rights sub-category, was the most declined indicator in the category.

- The most declined indicators in the Security & Rule of Law category since 2017 highlight the growing attacks on checks, balances, and accountability mechanisms in the build up to the coup. The five most deteriorated indicators include Absence of Undue Influence on Government (-24.4), Anti-Corruption Mechanisms (-13.1), Impartiality of the Judicial System (-12.8), Institutional Checks & Balances (-7.9) and Accessibility of Public Records (-7.8).

Guinea: most declined indicators (2017-2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2021 Score</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>2021 Rank</th>
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<th>Africa Average Trend (2017-2021)</th>
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<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>Civil Registration</td>
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<td>Accountability &amp; Transparency</td>
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<td>Rights</td>
<td>Personal Liberties</td>
<td>24.9</td>
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<td>42.9</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Democratic Elections</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>-18.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance
Mali: deteriorating security and decreased accountability in build-up to coups of 2020 and 2021

Since 2012, Mali has experienced three coups and one attempted countercoup. Most recently, in May 2021, President Bah N’Daw was ousted and replaced by a military government who cited ongoing security concerns as a primary motivation for the coup.

The IIAG shows that Mali has declined in Overall Governance (-3.3) over the decade. While the decline started before 2017, it has accelerated in the last five years. This preceded the 2021 coup, in a context where security had been deteriorating and political freedoms were in decline.

- At the category level, Mali had experienced small declines in Security & Rule of Law (-1.6) and Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-2.9) between 2012 and 2017. However, the pace of decline has accelerated in the latest five-year period.
- Since 2017, Security & Rule of Law (-7.3) was the most declined category, deteriorating at five times the pace of the five years prior. Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-3.9) also saw its pace of deterioration accelerate.
- At sub-category level, Participation (-16.3) was the most declined since 2017, followed by Security & Safety (-12.1) and Accountability & Transparency (-11.5). Over the past five years, the pace of decline in Security & Safety has almost doubled in comparison to pre-2017. Since 2017, no country has declined more in Accountability & Transparency than Mali.
- Within Security & Safety, Absence of Violence against Civilians (-44.7) was the most declined indicator for Mali since 2017, driven by an increase in attacks on citizens by rebel groups and militias.
- In the Participation sub-category, decline was primarily driven by the Democratic Elections (-42.7), which is in itself a likely reflection of the 2021 coup.
- In the Accountability & Transparency sub-category, decline since 2017 has been driven by rapid declines in Absence of Undue Influence on Government (-35.5), an indicator that even experienced major improvement between 2012 and 2017 (+27.9).

In the period 2017-2021, no country has declined more in the IIAG Accountability & Transparency sub-category than Mali.

Mali: most declined indicators (2017-2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2021 Score</th>
<th>Trend 2021</th>
<th>Rank 2021</th>
<th>Africa Average Score 2021</th>
<th>Africa Average Trend (2017-2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>Civil Registration</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>-50.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>+1.4</td>
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<td>Security &amp; Safety</td>
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<td>Democratic Elections</td>
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<td>Accountability &amp; Transparency</td>
<td>Absence of Undue Influence on Government</td>
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<td>-19.7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance
Niger: a worsening security situation and increased corruption foreshadow 2023 coup

The coup in July 2023 marks Niger’s fifth coup d’état since gaining independence in 1960. This coup follows a period of democratic rule since the previous coup of 2010. The coup leaders cited the deteriorating security situation as their primary motivation for ousting President Mohamed Bazoum.

The IIAG shows that Niger has declined in Overall Governance (-2.6) over the decade with the pace of decline accelerating in the past five years. This decline preceded the coup d’etat of 2023, which took place following years of deteriorating security and increased corruption.

- At the category level, Participation, Rights & Inclusion has experienced the largest decline (-7.6) over the decade. However, in the past five years Security & Rule of Law shows the greatest decline (-3.9) ahead of Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-2.7).

- In the last five years, the most declined sub-categories sit within Security & Rule of Law. Security & Safety (-8.9) has been the most declined sub-category, with the pace of decline more than five times that of the previous five years (2012-2017). Anti-Corruption (-7.8) is the next most declined.

- From 2017, the most declined indicators are within the Anti-Corruption and Security & Safety sub-categories including Public Procurement Procedures (-33.9), Absence of Violence against Civilians (-26.9) and Absence of Armed Conflict (-15.6). The increase in attacks on civilians and armed conflict is a result of increased activity by rebel groups and militias in the latest five years.

Niger: most declined indicators (2017-2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security &amp; Safety</td>
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<td>Security &amp; Safety</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance

Legislative and judicial checks on the executive

Two of Western Africa’s coup countries, Niger (-14.5) and Mali (-11.7) have experienced the third and fourth largest deteriorations in the IIAG Institutional Checks & Balances indicator in the latest five years (2017-2021).
Coups in Western Africa are not realising their commitments

Military leaders who took power in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and now Niger have cited a range of justifications for orchestrating coup d'états. Security has emerged as the primary reason in the latter three, as well as deteriorating economic and democratic spaces. In Guinea, endemic corruption, human rights and economic mismanagement were cited as primary reasons. However, in the subsequent years since the coups, little has improved in these countries. Promises of elections have failed to materialise and living conditions have not improved. Civic space continues to be restricted across all countries, while the security situation in Burkina Faso and Mali is even worse.

Burkina Faso: militant attacks show no sign of abating since coup

In Burkina Faso, civilians are just as vulnerable to violent attacks as they were prior to the coups of 2022. On average, there were nearly 53 incidents of violence against civilians per month in the 19 months following the first coup of February 2022. This is slightly more than in the 19 months prior to the coup, which saw almost 47 incidents per month on average.

Burkina Faso: average monthly incidents of violence against civilians incidents pre- and post- coup (June 2020 - July 2023)

Additionally, roughly half of Burkina Faso's territory remains effectively outside of government control. As of July 2023, more than 1 million people were living in 36 localities blockaded by militant operations. In these areas, access to basic public services and essential supplies remains extremely limited and expensive.

Beyond the security situation, two-thirds (66.6%) of Burkinabe surveyed by Afrobarometer viewed their living conditions as bad or very bad in the round of 2021/2023, an increase from 41.1% compared to the round of 2019/2021. Meanwhile, the share of Burkinabe who said that they went without food at least several times has risen to 40.7% in the round of 2021/2023, from 31.8% in the round of 2019/2021.

The latest 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) findings for Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger highlight a declining security situation and a shrinking participatory environment over the years 2017 to 2021. Further analysis using data from 2021 onwards shows that coups did not have a positive impact on the security situations they allegedly aimed to address – but on the contrary brought higher insecurity and worsening domestic circumstances. In short, whatever the failings of existing regimes may be, a coup is never a solution.
Mali: security situation almost twice as bad as pre-coup

In Mali, civilians are even more vulnerable to violent attacks than prior to the 2020 coups. Incidents of violence against civilians have almost doubled, with an average of more than 49 incidents per month in the 34 months following the coup, in comparison to 25 incidents per month in the 34 months prior.

Mali: average monthly incidents of violence against civilians incidents pre- and post- coup (October 2017 - July 2023)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Coup (Oct 2017-Aug 2020)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Coup (Sept 2020-July 2023)</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In August 2023, a new UN report suggested that the Islamic State group has almost doubled the territory it controls in Mali in under a year.

Beyond security, the cost of living has risen after the country was hit by ECOWAS sanctions. 37.6% of Malians surveyed by Afrobarometer said that they went without food at least several times in the round of 2021/2023 compared to 30.2% in the round of 2019/2021.

Guinea: still no elections as civil unrest grows

Guinea’s coup leaders claimed the army had little choice but to seize power due to “rampant corruption, disregard for human rights and economic mismanagement” under former President Alpha Condé. This came against a backdrop of widespread civil unrest against Condé’s leadership after he amended the constitution to allow himself a third term.

In terms of human rights, there is little evidence that the situation has improved. It could even be said to have declined. In May 2022, the military junta banned demonstrations indefinitely and later, doubled down on its repression by dissolving the country’s opposition coalition on political grounds. The junta has also restricted access to news sites and social media networks.

Beyond this, there has been no improvement in living conditions. About two-thirds (66.4%) of Guineans surveyed by Afrobarometer viewed their living conditions as bad or very bad in the round of 2021/2023, almost the same as in the round of 2019/2021 (65.3%).

Transition back to civilian rule? All promises, no action

Burkina Faso: The military junta in Burkina Faso has stated it intends to hold elections by July 2024. However, it has also claimed that if it holds elections before the security situation improves then the results would not be recognised due to various regions being inaccessible.

Mali: Following the May 2021 coup, Interim President Assimi Goïta agreed to hold elections on 27 February 2022, in line with the election timetable set out by the previous transitional administration. However, these have been delayed until October or November 2023 for legislative elections and February 2024 for the presidential election. Initially, President Goïta wished to delay the elections until 2026 but due to ECOWAS pressure he reduced this timeframe.

Guinea: Following negotiations with ECOWAS, Interim President Mamady Doumbouya agreed to an electoral timetable, scheduling elections for an unconfirmed date in early 2025. However, in April 2022, the government stated that no elections would be held until a general census had been conducted.
**SPOTLIGHT**

Support for democracy down, pro-military attitudes up

Afrobarometer perception data shows that in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger support for democracy has declined.

- Mali has experienced the largest decline with only 37.7% of those surveyed in 2021/2023 in favour of democracy - down 27.5% compared to the 2016/2018 survey round.
- Guinea has the highest number of respondents that still support democracy in the 2021/2023 survey round, with nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of Guineans surveyed still in favour of democracy. However, it has seen a decline of 12.3 percentage points compared to the 2016/2018 survey round.


![Bar chart showing support for democracy and military rule in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger](chart.png)

At the same time, support for the military is rising considerably.

- In the 2021/2023 survey round, over three-quarters (79.1%) of Malians surveyed were in favour of military rule - a sharp increase from 31.1% in the 2016/2018 survey round.
- In Burkina Faso support for military increased from 50% in the 2016/2018 survey round to 63.5% in the 2021/2023 survey round. While those rejecting rule by military declined from 42.6% in the 2016/2018 survey round to 27.1% in the 2021/2023 one.
- In the 2016/2018 survey round, roughly one fifth (20.7%) of the respondents in Guinea approved of military rule, while in the 2021/2023 one, this figure grew to roughly one third (36.4%) of respondents.

64.5% of Malians surveyed by Afrobarometer were not in favour of military rule in the 2016-2018 survey round. However, almost 80% of Malians supported military rule in the 2021-2023 survey round.
Warning signs in other African countries: who is next on the list?

Alarm bells in Security & Safety and Participation for many other countries on the continent

The 2022 IIAG findings for these measures also highlight potential warning signs in other African countries showcasing similar or worse levels of deterioration.

- **Security & Safety**: while Burkina Faso (-34.2) has been the most declined country in this IIAG sub-category between 2017 and 2021, Ethiopia (-18.9), Cameroon (-18.6) and Uganda (-13.6) have all declined more than Mali in the same time period (-12.1), while Mozambique (-11.9) has declined more than Niger.

- **Participation**: Mali (-16.3) is the third most declined country in this IIAG sub-category between 2017 and 2021, behind Benin (-28.2) and Liberia (-18.2). While Nigeria (-16.2), Ghana (-15.1), and Comoros (-14.8) have all seen bigger declines than Guinea in Participation since 2017.

Ten most deteriorated African countries: Security & Safety (2017-2021)

Ten most deteriorated African countries: Participation (2017-2021)

- Between 2017-2021, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Uganda and Mozambique have shown declines in the IIAG Security & Safety sub-category that are larger than in some recent coup countries.

- Between 2017-2021, Benin and Liberia have shown declines in the IIAG Participation sub-category that are larger than in any of the recent coup countries.
**SPOTLIGHT**

**Coups and uprisings ousting long-term leaders across the continent**

A coup is never a solution and should never be used against a democratically elected government. A democratically elected government with a bad track record should be voted out in a free and fair election. However, a coup may be the only option on the table to support the people in a country with an authoritarian government and no checks and balances.

**Algeria: nationwide protests led to President Bouteflika’s resignation**

In April 2019, nationwide protests took place in Algeria following President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s nomination for a fifth term. President Bouteflika, who had been in charge for two decades and was 82 years old at the time, resigned shortly after the military called for his removal from office in support of the protestors. The transition back to civilian rule was quick, with elections taking place in December 2019. Former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune eventually won although protestors called for mass boycotts. While opposition continued following the elections, the pandemic, coupled with the repressive actions of the regime, largely weakened the momentum for protesters, leading to a wave of political detentions in April 2021.

*Overall Governance* (+2.5) improved in Algeria between 2012 and 2019, but in the two subsequent years has deteriorated by -0.4. In the years leading up to the uprising, two IIAG categories showed a decline - *Security & Rule of Law* (-0.5) and *Participation, Rights & Inclusion* (-0.1). The two most deteriorated sub-categories prior to the uprising were *Rights* (-5.8) and *Accountability & Transparency* (-5.6). Following the uprising, the pace of decline for the *Participation, Rights & Inclusion* category accelerated declining by -2.7 between 2019 and 2021. Among the five most deteriorated sub-categories since the coup, three are from the *Participation, Rights & Inclusion* category including *Participation* (-8.7), *Rights* (-3.7) and *Women's Equality* (-2.4).

**Gabon: the end of a dynasty?**

In late August 2023, President Ali Bongo of Gabon, aged 64, was removed from power by the military shortly after the country’s Electoral Commission announced the official results of the August 26th presidential election. This handed Ali Bongo a third consecutive term and extended the Bongo family’s 55-year rule over Gabon. Major concerns were expressed over the transparency and legitimacy of the election.

The 2022 IIAG shows that Gabon has improved by +2.1 points at the *Overall Governance* level between 2012 and 2021. In this same period, *Security & Rule of Law* is the only IIAG category to register a decline (-1.0). At the same time, at the sub-category level, the largest declines were registered in *Accountability & Transparency* (-9.2) and *Rights* (-6.0).
Sudan’s revolution ousted President Bashir

In April 2019, after a wave of popular uprisings during the Sudanese Revolution since late 2018, long-term President Omar al-Bashir, aged 75, was ousted in a military coup, ending his 30-year grip on power. With the transitional military government in charge, protests continued in Sudan calling for power to be handed to civilian authorities. This eventually led to a power-sharing agreement between the military and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

Two years into the three-year power-sharing period, a military coup led to the arrest of ministers from the transition cabinet, including Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. Despite briefly being reinstated as Prime Minister following mass protests, Abdalla Hamdok resigned from his post in January 2022 leaving the military as the sole authorities in charge.

Most recently in April 2023, a power struggle between Sudan’s de facto head of state and his deputy has resulted in an attempted coup and a wave of violence across Sudan which have displaced many.

The 2022 IIAG shows that Sudan improved in Overall Governance by +2.6 points between 2012 and 2019. In the period following the 2019 coup, Sudan continued to improve but at three times the pace. Between 2012 and 2019, all four IIAG categories were improving with Security & Rule of Law improving the most (+6.1) followed by Participation, Rights & Inclusion (+3.5).

From 2019, Security & Rule of Law became the only category to register a decline, albeit small (-0.5). Participation, Rights & Inclusion was the most improved between 2019 and 2021, increasing by +7.6 points. Three out of the eight declined subcategories from 2019 to 2021 were from the Security & Rule of Law category, with Security & Safety deteriorating the most (- 9.4).

Zimbabwe: the end of President’s Mugabe’s era

In November 2017, after 37 years of rule by President Robert Mugabe, 93 years old, and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the military removed President from office, with the stated aim of “bringing the criminals who surrounded Mugabe to justice for the social and economic suffering they caused”. The military takeover was sparked by the dismissal of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa which intensified division within the ruling ZANU-PF with one faction led by First Lady, Grace Mugabe, and the other led by Mnangagwa, largely backed by the military and war veterans. Mnangagwa took over from Mugabe and he has since won two contested presidential elections (2018 and 2023) with ZANU-PF remaining firmly in power.

The 2022 IIAG shows that Zimbabwe has slowly improved by +1.0 between 2017 and 2021 in Overall Governance, but this is actually slower than the pace of improvement prior to the coup. At category level, three of the four IIAG categories have continued to improve since 2017, with the exception of Participation, Rights & Inclusion (-2.1). Between 2017 and 2021, there have been improvements in four IIAG sub-categories that were previously declining such as Accountability & Transparency (+7.0), Anti-corruption (+6.2), Security & Safety (+2.4) and Rights (+1.6). However, there have been declines in seven sub-categories that were improving prior to the coup, with the largest declines seen in Participation (-7.7) and Rule of Law & Justice (-5.9).

Chad: In April 2021, following the death of Chad’s long-time president Idriss Déby Itno amid ongoing clashes between government forces and rebel groups in the country, his son, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, took control of the country and dissolved the government and suspended the constitution.

While unconstitutional in nature, the military takeover has not been officially classified as a coup by the international community and the African Union which have nevertheless repeatedly called for return to a civilian government. So far, however, the 18-month election timeline initially planned has not been respected and the country is still under military rule, with elections tentatively scheduled for 2024.
Longest mandates, oldest leaders, yet youngest populations: a growing divide?

### 10 longest tenures of office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Took Office</th>
<th>Still in Office</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Teodoro Obiang</td>
<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>44 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Paul Biya</td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>41 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Yoweri Museveni</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>37 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Ismail Afwerki</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>30 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Denis Sassou Nguesso</td>
<td>Congo Republic</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>26 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Ismail Omar Guelleh</td>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>24 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Paul Kagame</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Faure Gnassingbé</td>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>18 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Alassane Ouattara</td>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Salva Kiir Mayardit</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12 years in power</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This list does not include leaders from African countries which use a hereditary monarchy system. This includes: Eswatini, Lesotho and Morocco.

Source: MIF

In 10 African countries, accounting for 10.5% of the continent’s population, the head of state or government has been in power for more than 10 years.
The AU’s growing stance against unconstitutional changes of government

The AU has developed a series of definitions and response toolkits to deter unconstitutional changes of government and protect democracy on the continent.

- In the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the AU provides its definition of “unconstitutional changes of government” that go against a democratically elected government (via a coup d’état, refusal by an incumbent to relinquish power to the winner in a free and fair election, amendment or revision of the constitution of legal instruments, etc.).
- The AU’s response toolkit includes suspension from all the organisation’s activities, as well as sanctions in cooperation with Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

As of September 2023, countries suspended for unconstitutional changes of government are Burkina Faso (February 2022), Gabon (August 2023), Guinea (September 2021), Mali (June 2021), Niger (July 2023) and Sudan (April 2023)

The AU’s response to popular uprisings: between constitutional and non-constitutional

Coups and uprisings: different actors, techniques, objectives and legitimacy

In summary, coups are typically characterised by a more centralised and organised effort, often involving the military, with the goal of seizing power and replacing the government. Uprisings, on the other hand, are broader and more diverse movements driven by a wide range of grievances and demands, with less centralised coordination and a focus on social or political change rather than a direct seizure of power.

The African Union (AU) is considering excluding popular uprisings against authoritarian rulers from their definition of unconstitutional changes of power. Popular uprisings, such as the ones in Algeria and Sudan in 2019, require the support of the armed forces to prosper. In Algeria, President Bouteflika, who had been in charge for two decades at the time, had to resign shortly after the military called for his removal from office in support of the nationwide protests against him. Similarly, in Sudan, there was a military takeover to depose long-term dictator Omar al-Bashir in support of the will of the people expressed in the streets.

As of September 2023, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger are under ECOWAS sanctions which range from travel/visa bans to financial asset freezes

Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT)

In July 2023, the AU and UNDP launched the AFSIT to provide specific programmatic support to countries undergoing complex political transitions or at risk of political crisis to assist in the development of credible, inclusive and legitimate transition roadmaps, mechanisms and institutions, ultimately leading to the restoration of constitutional rule, democracy and stability in relevant countries.
Balanced progress in all governance dimensions is key

Selected countries: IIAG category trends (2017-2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
<th>Guinea</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Africa Average Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security &amp; Rule of Law</td>
<td>-9.0</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>-7.3</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation, Rights &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations for Economic Opportunity</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>+2.6</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development</td>
<td>+2.2</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>+1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance

The 2022 IIAG shows that the African average score for Overall Governance has followed a positive trajectory over the past five years (2017-2021). However, improvement has only been driven by higher levels of economic and human development on the continent, while at the same time an increasingly perilous security situation and widespread democratic backsliding concerningly undermine further governance progress.

The IIAG performance of Western Africa’s coup countries in the same time period clearly reflects these diverging trends at the IIAG category level:

- Burkina Faso and Mali have only improved in the Human Development category, while they have deteriorated in Security & Rule of Law, Participation Rights & Inclusion, as well as Foundations for Economic Opportunity.

- Guinea has most closely replicated the diverging underlying trajectories at the African average level, with improvements in the Foundations for Economic Opportunity and Human Development categories being put at risk by deteriorations in Security & Rule of Law and Participation, Rights & Inclusion.

- Niger has only experienced a small improvement in the Foundations for Economic Opportunity category, while it has deteriorated in Security & Rule of Law, Participation, Rights & Inclusion, as well as Human Development.

Only balanced progress between governance dimensions can ensure sustained stability. A coup is never a solution.

Given that deteriorating security and democratic space were often cited as justification for Western Africa’s coups, it is no surprise that, on average, Security & Safety (-14.2) and Participation (-10.6) were the two most declined IIAG sub-categories among the coup countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger) between 2017 and 2021. At the indicator level, the largest average declines were registered in Absence of Violence Against Civilians (-34.2) and Absence of Armed Conflict (-24.1).

“Nothing can justify the overthrowing of a democratic government”

Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation
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