CONFLICT TRENDS

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ACCORD
THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

29 Years of Working Towards Peace

CONTENTS

Cover: Social media platforms play a prominent role in modern society by providing tools for various voices to communicate ideas, perspectives and worldviews. Photo by @Nini.

EDITORIAL

BY **VASU GOUNDEN**

On 7 July 2021, the former President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, turned himself over to prison authorities to begin a 15-month sentence handed down by the Constitutional Court. Zuma received the sentence for failing to obey a court order to appear before an official inquiry investigating corruption allegations. His incarceration set off an unprecedented wave of protests and rioting.

Major highways were barricaded and long-haul trucks were burnt along the main arterial road from the port city of Durban to the economic heartland of Johannesburg in an attempt to destabilise supply lines and cripple the already weak economy. This was followed by six days of rioting and looting of businesses in and around Durban and Johannesburg, which led to the death of over 300 people and the destruction of commercial property and goods with a value of R50 billion (US$3.3 billion).[1]

The sheer scale and pace of the destruction are unprecedented in a democratic South Africa and left a grossly unprepared security apparatus paralysed. The local police and intelligence services were found wanting when it came to anticipating and responding to the chaos, prompting President Cyril Ramaphosa to deploy the military to arrest the situation. In the absence of the police, citizens armed themselves and hired private security to protect their property and families.

On 1 November 2021, South Africans went to the polls to elect representatives for local government. The voter turnout was the lowest it has been in years. The ruling African National Congress (ANC), previously headed by the late Nelson Mandela, gained less than 50% of the votes for the first time since it took power in 1994.

The incidents in July and the November election results have implications for the future of democracy in South Africa and the rest of Africa. The initial violent protests, which were believed to be orchestrated, quickly escalated into widespread looting and rioting driven by a number of factors. These include the failure of successive governments to deal with an exponentially growing population that is rapidly urbanising into an apartheid-era spatial development that accentuates race and class. It was also driven by the slow-growing economy that does not create jobs or meet the developmental needs of its growing population. The consequences are increased poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

The inability of the police to deal with the riots over six days further eroded any trust that citizens and the private sector had in the government to provide them with security. Resorting to private arms leads to a more securitised and militarised country, with the police competing with private security and citizens for a monopoly on arms and violence. In addition, the rise of vigilantism, which resulted in some of the killings, had racial overtones that threatened the fragile social cohesion that exists in South Africa's multi-racial, multi-ethnic society with deep class fissures.

South Africa is arguably Africa's most advanced and sophisticated economy. It has delivered regular free and fair elections, and thus far, it has been relatively stable. However, its failure to address the deep structural challenges inherited from apartheid and roll back poverty, create employment, and narrow the inequality gap will continue to threaten its stability. The State, which oversees a deteriorating public service, including a police service that has serious challenges in maintaining law and order, is fast losing the trust and confidence of its citizens. This will lead to an electorate that, as in other parts of the world, either disengages from exercising its democratic right to vote or will, in its vote, prioritise stability over democracy.

This move to the right begs the question of whether democracy is delivering or dying. The situation in South Africa is a microcosm of what is prevailing in the rest of Africa. Three decades of neoliberal democracy have seen small groups of political and business elites benefiting by exploiting state resources through a system of corruption and cronyism under the guise of democracy. The marginalised majority have continued, over these three decades, to live in hope.

However, it is now increasingly clear that this hope is turning to frustration and desperation. People are taking to the streets to remove governments or turning to radicalised extremists or criminal syndicates to meet their basic needs. In response, we have seen a steady move to authoritarianism, either through the centralisation of power by force or the removal of governments and the subsequent centralisation of power by the military.

South Africa is not in danger of being replaced by an authoritarian government or the military anytime soon. However, if nothing changes, it will steadily move on this trajectory. South Africa will, therefore, have to make difficult choices in how it configures the social compact to maintain stability and democracy and ensure rapid development. It has a choice to continue along its neoliberal path in the hope that this will eventually deliver inclusive development, or like several African countries, it can shift focus towards the Chinese model of developmental authoritarianism in the hope of attaining stability and development. A third option may be for South Africa and other African countries to forge their own social compact that ensures development and democracy, creating the conditions for stability. Such a social democratic compact has been successfully implemented in Nordic countries with exceptional results for democracy, development, equity, and stability.

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ILLUSTRATION BY BRYCE OGUAYE

A NEW COUP ERA FOR AFRICA?

BY
JONATHAN POWELL, ABIGAIL REYNOLDS AND **MWITA CHACHA**

Introduction

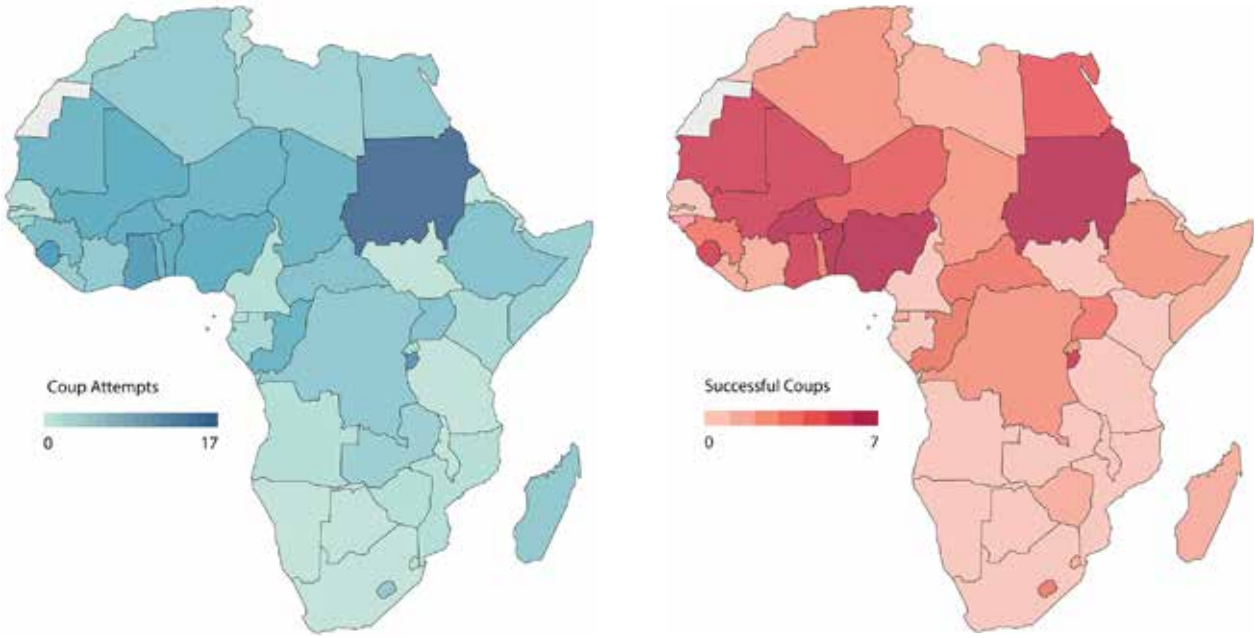
It was not long ago that the decline of coups was being celebrated, not just in Africa, but globally. *New African* magazine asked in Fall 2015 why coups are going out of style.[1] Writing in September 2017, Schiel and her co-authors pointed to a two-year period since the last attempted coup in Africa, with the continent approaching three full years since the last successful attempt.[2] A month later, former Malian Foreign Minister Kamisssa Camara – even in the context of herself serving shortly after a coup – suggested that 'the time for coups is over'.[3] Though perhaps not a long period at first glance, this was the longest coup-less stretch in Africa since decolonisation. Various efforts have been made to explain this shift, including the institutionalisation of more open political systems and the role of external actors such as the African Union (AU).[4] Though the November 2017 coup against Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe was a new coup, coups remained something of an afterthought in subsequent years.

More recently, commentary at the Council on Foreign Relations concluded that 'old style' coups in which soldiers attempted to seize power had been supplanted by incumbents scheming to maintain it.[5] This has changed since August 2020, with successful coups taking place in Chad, Guinea, and twice in Mali as well as a failed effort to seize power in Niger, and both a failed and successful coup in Sudan. This apparent resurgence in the phenomenon has prompted much discussion on the causes of these events, whether they are related, and what – if anything – the region can do to buck the trend. Independent African states have experienced over 200 coup attempts since 1950, of which over 100 have succeeded (see Figure 1).[6]

Above: Recent coups in Mali and Guinea have prompted fears of a resurgence.

Figure 1: Coup Attempts in Africa since 1950[7]

JONATHAN POWELL AND CLAYTON THYNE



This article reviews the recent 'coup epidemic' within a larger historical context, reflecting on commonalities, disparities, and how these events fit into international frameworks designed to deter coups. The region's recent coups point to two important challenges with the AU framework on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG). First, though the AU had been heralded for becoming less tolerant of military coups, the organisation has been less responsive to the unconstitutional maintenance of power. As the continent witnesses an increased willingness of leaders to flout the institutions that allowed them to come into power, the accompanying loss of popular legitimacy has either directly motivated or provided surface legitimacy for coups against what are seen as increasingly dictatorial incumbents. Second, recent years have seen acquiescence to military coups that at times is more in line with the AU's predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Though post-coup responses might be seen as having little to do with the cause of any specific coup, we argue that these responses provide important cues to future plotters. Since the international community demonstrates an unwillingness or inability to visit sufficient costs upon coup-born regimes, the international community will continue to lose its ability to deter coups.

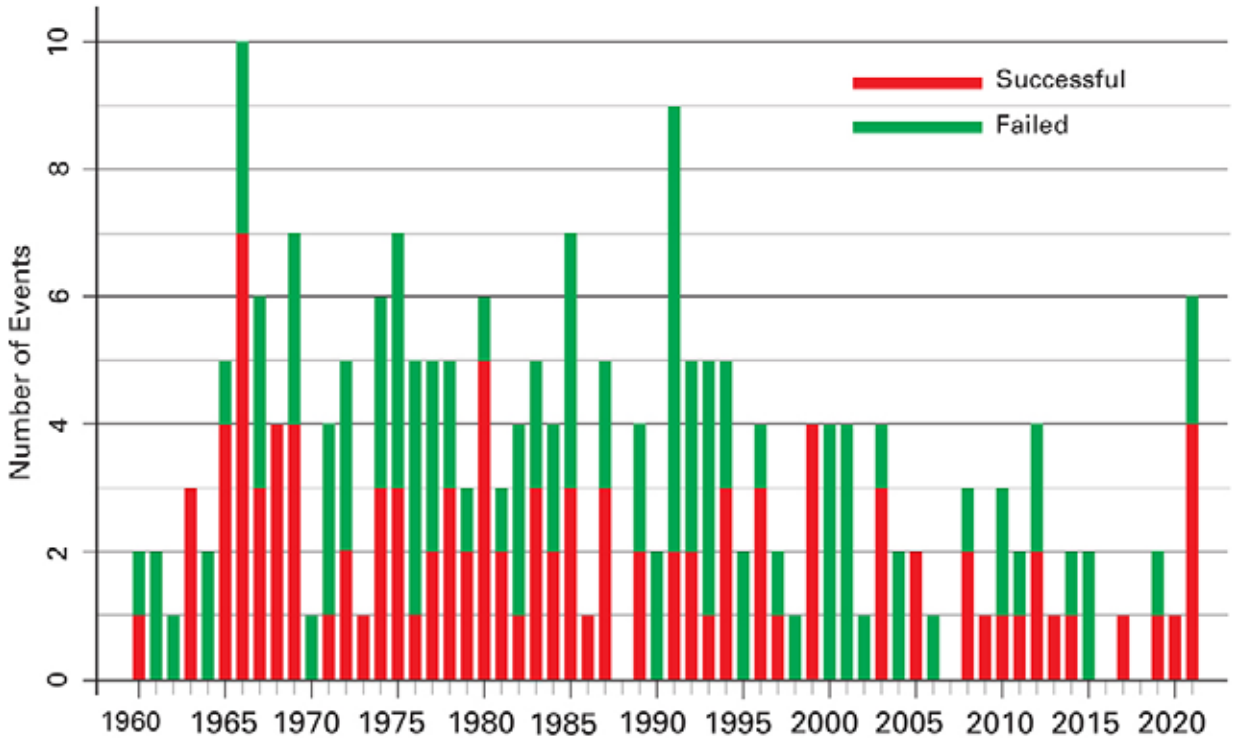
The Coup Epidemic of 2021

Attention to coups shifted to southeast Asia following Myanmar's 1 February 2021 coup against its young democracy. This attention returned to Africa following a short-lived coup effort from elements of the Nigerien air force on 31 March 2021. Three weeks later, Chad's military installed General Mahamat Idriss Déby following the death of his father, President Idriss Déby. A power vacuum was created after the latter became the first head of state to be killed in Africa in battle since Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia fell to Mahdist forces in March 1889. Mali soon saw interim President Bah N'Daw removed on 21 May 2021, just eight months after the country's previous coup. Guinea's Alpha Conde was the next victim, with his

PHOTO:CHRISTOPHE PETIT TESSON/POOL VIA REUTERS

Chad's military installed General Mahamat Idriss Déby as leader in 2021, following the death of his father, President Idriss Déby.

Figure 2: Successful and Failed Coups in Africa Over Time



JONATHAN POWELL AND CLAYTON THYNE '

5 September 2021 ousting. Though the next coup attempt failed in Sudan on 21 September 2021, the armed forces successfully removed Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok on 25 October 2021.

As difficult as it would be to overstate the seriousness of Africa's coup resurgence, some observers have managed the task. Following Sudan's October coup, *The Wall Street Journal* declared military coups to be at their highest level since the end of colonialism.[8] Though hyperbolic, 2021's departure from recent history has been dramatic enough to earn comparison with the independence era. *The Economist* more accurately noted that 2021 has seen more coups than the previous five years combined.[9] Our exploration of the data indicates that the year has seen the most successful coups in Africa since 1999 and the most total coup attempts since 1991. Perhaps more importantly, the coups have not fallen into any particular pattern with regard to victims. They have occurred within the context of leadership vacuums, young regimes and long-entrenched ones, countries moving both toward and away from democracy, those with ongoing insurgencies, and those in relative peace. It is perhaps more intriguing that this high number of coups in 2021 occurred within the context of the AU UCG framework, that since 1997 has sought to discourage coups and other illegal seizures of power.

Growth of the Anti-Coup Norm?

With the loss of foreign patrons and sweeping challenges in Africa, such as structural adjustments and unprecedented pressure for democracy, the immediate post-Cold War period saw a spike in coup attempts. Soon, however, the region began moving toward a more formal anti-coup framework. In 1997, Robert Mugabe declared, 'We are getting tougher and tougher on coups [...]. Coup-plotters [...] will find it more difficult to get recognition from us. [...] we now have a definite attitude against coups'.[10] Mugabe's words came in the midst of the OAU Summit in Harare, during which Nigerian forces under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) commenced a bombardment meant to dislodge Johnny Paul Koroma's recently established junta in Sierra Leone.

Mugabe's remarks were followed by the 1999 Algiers Summit decision on UCG.[11] This decision urged the restoration of constitutional rule in those countries that had experienced illegal power seizures since the Harare Summit and called on the OAU Secretary-General to facilitate constitutional governance in Member States. The 2000 Lomé Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to UCG went even further by defining what actions constituted UCG and stipulating the OAU's responses to such illegal power seizures.[12] In the Lomé Declaration, UCGs included coups against democratically elected governments, power seizures by mercenaries, armed rebels, and dissident groups, and incumbents' refusal to relinquish power following electoral defeat. Additionally, the Lomé Declaration outlined two responses from the OAU Central Organ in the event of a UCG:

1. Condemnation of the act, suspension of participation in OAU decision-making, and a six-month deadline to restore constitutional rule;
2. The OAU Secretary-General's use of diplomatic pressure and coordination with Member States, regional organisations, and other international actors to facilitate the restoration of constitutional rule. Further pressure, in the form of targeted sanctions, visa restrictions, limited diplomatic contacts, and trade embargoes, was to be deployed in those instances where the illegal regime was not making progress towards a return to constitutional rule.[13]

The Lomé Declaration continues to inform the AU policy on UCG. For instance, the 2002 Constitutive Act of the AU and the protocol establishing the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) confirmed the Lomé Declaration as its formal document on dealing with illegal power seizures, reiterating that governments acquiring power through illegal means would be suspended from participating in the AU and could face further sanctions. The provisions of the Lomé Declaration were further strengthened through the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (Addis Ababa Charter).[14] This charter, which entered into force in 2012, makes three notable amendments to the Lomé Declaration. First, the charter includes attempts to amend or revise constitutions to extend one's rule as UCG. Second, the charter authorises the AU PSC to respond to UCG events. And third, the charter stipulates that those who obtain power through unconstitutional means should not participate in or contest the elections aimed at restoring constitutional rule.

Academic commentaries on international conflict indicate that deterrence occurs when actors 'define the behavior that is unacceptable [and] publicize the commitment to punish and restrain transgressors'.[15] While the OAU may have taken steps in Harare and Lomé toward the former, it was not until the abandonment of the non-intervention norm and the launch of the AU that the latter could be established. Even then, efforts to 'define' and 'publicize' an anti-coup policy might have been meaningless in the absence of demonstrating a commitment to the framework. Just months after the Lomé meeting, for example, General Robert Guei was allowed to represent Cote d'Ivoire following his coup against President Henri Konan Bedie. While the early years saw some inconsistencies in response, the establishment of the AU PSC represented an important shift toward invariably condemning coups.[16] At the time of Souaré's seminal study on the AU as a 'norm entrepreneur' on military coups d'état in Africa, every coup

GEORGES GOBET/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Following the 2008 coup in Mauritania led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, the African Union suspended Mauritania and later imposed sanctions on the coup-born regime.

ZIMBABWEAN-EYES

The Zimbabwe army takes control of Harare (November 2017).

between 2004 and 2012 saw the regimes suspended from the AU, with half witnessing the ensuing junta being forced from power.[17] It was within this context that coup attempts dropped by nearly 60% from pre-AU levels, and nearly 50% from the post-Cold War period immediately preceding the AU.[18]

Decline of the Anti-Coup Norm?

Closer inspection reveals a mixed record in the AU's implementation of its UCG policy, particularly towards coups. Following the 2008 coup in Mauritania led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, the AU suspended Mauritania and later imposed sanctions on the coup-born regime.[19] Subsequent to an agreement being reached to facilitate a transition to constitutional rule in 2009, the AU lifted Mauritania's suspension and sanctions and accepted Abdel Aziz as the new democratically elected leader, despite his participation in the 2008 coup.[20] Similarly, despite labelling Abdel Fatah el Sisi's takeover in Egypt in 2013 as a coup and suspending Egypt from the organisation, the AU nonetheless accepted Sisi's election as president in 2014 and lifted Egypt's suspension, contrary to the Addis Ababa Charter.[21] The AU quickly described the Burkinabe armed force's seizure of power in the vacuum created by President Blaise Compaoré's resignation in 2014 as 'constituting a coup'.[22] However, the organisation baulked at following through on its threats of suspension and sanctions, even after Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Zida – who had illegally assumed power – was formally announced as Prime Minister of the transitional government.[23] The Burkina Faso case required the PSC to balance the unconstitutional seizure of power with the fact that Compaoré's resignation was the product of a 'people's right to overthrow oppressive regimes'.[24] Though also targeting an oppressive regime, the coup against Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe in 2017 was hardly an effort by or on behalf of 'the people', and instead represented a clear effort to preserve the privileges of the armed forces and their allies. Instead of suspending the new government or even acknowledging that a coup had taken place, actors, including the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), accepted Mugabe's exit as a resignation and 'tacitly' endorsed the coup.[25]

THE BURKINA FASO CASE REQUIRED THE PSC TO BALANCE THE UNCONSTITUTIONAL SEIZURE OF POWER WITH THE FACT THAT COMPAORÉ'S RESIGNATION WAS THE PRODUCT OF A 'PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO OVERTHROW OPPRESSIVE REGIMES'

More recently, Chad's 2021 coup demonstrated a clear break from a directly comparable case: Togo's 2005 coup.

REUTERS/NOEL KOKOU TADEGNON

Faure Gnassingbé, the son of Togo's deceased president, was appointed as president in February 2005, by the military, despite condemnation from African leaders who denounced the swift succession as unconstitutional.

After 36 years in power, Togolese President Gnassingbé Eyadéma died in office after suffering a heart attack in February 2005. Constitutionally, the head of the National Assembly should have succeeded Eyadéma, but the military appointed Eyadéma's son, Faure Gnassingbé, as the new president. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other relevant actors strongly condemned the coup, imposing a travel ban on coup leaders, freezing their assets, establishing an arms embargo, and enacting a diplomatic suspension, all of which would be lifted only if constitutional order was restored. Following a post hoc effort to amend the constitution to accept the manoeuvre, ECOWAS further demanded a reversal of efforts to legitimate the coup.[26] The AU suspended Togo's membership, endorsed the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS, and threatened further sanctions, if deemed necessary, on 'de facto authorities' in the country.[27] Following the lead of these regional actors, the United States terminated military assistance and supported the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS until Togo conformed with ECOWAS's communiqué sent on 9 February 2021.[28]

In stark contrast, the instalment of President Idriss Déby's son in Chad in April 2021 saw a complete reluctance to describe the event as a coup or as falling under the UCG framework. This reaction was viewed as illustrating an 'erosion of the AU consensus on unconstitutional changes of government'.[29]

AFRICA WAS CELEBRATED FOR TURNING THE TIDE AGAINST COUPS, AND A MAJOR PART OF THAT EFFORT WAS ATTRIBUTED TO THE ACTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

International Cues and the Future of the Coup in Africa

Africa was celebrated for turning the tide against coups, and a major part of that effort was attributed to the actions of the international community. Whatever anti-coup norm had been established, however, appears to have weakened. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has referred to the problem as a current 'epidemic of coup d'etats'.[30] The context of the pandemic emphasises the importance of efforts to mitigate the further spread of Covid-19. While individuals might implement social distancing and

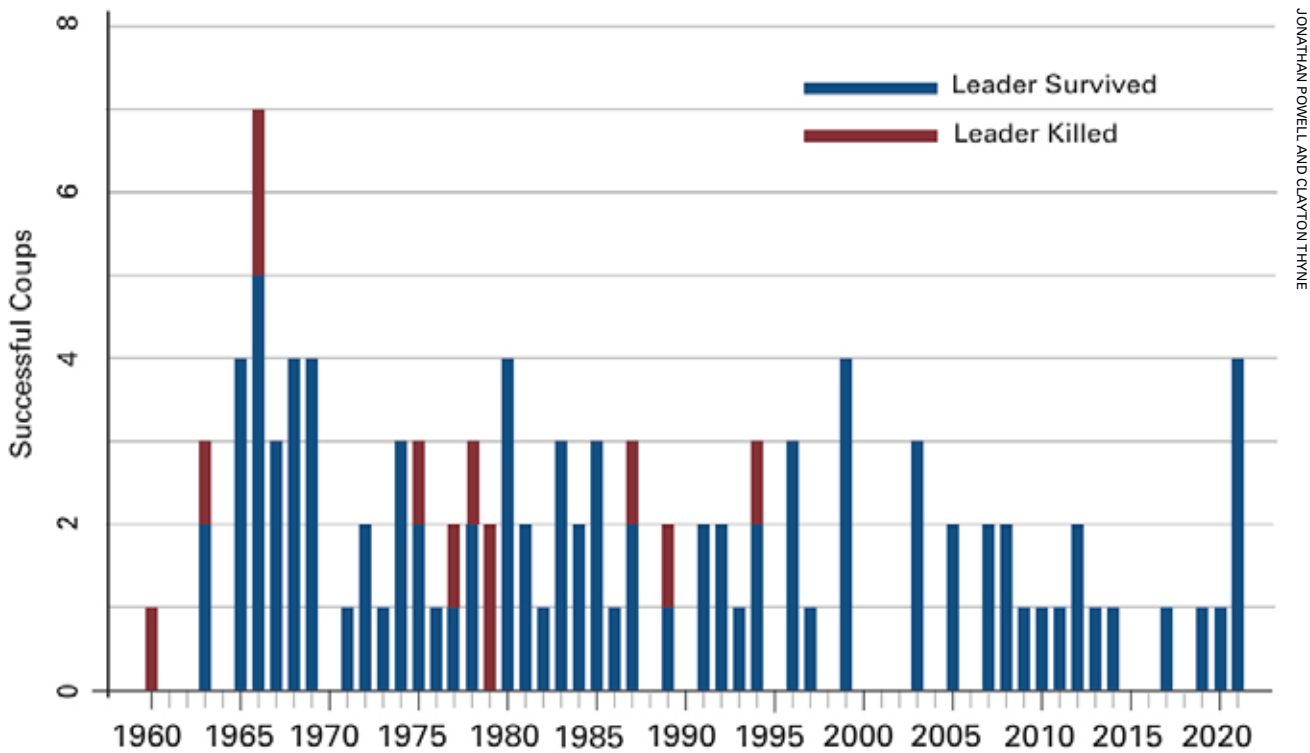
hygiene practices, the actions of outsiders are also important. Secretary-General Guterres pointed to the need for the international community – particularly 'big powers' – to guarantee 'effective deterrence' against coups. Any prior effective deterrent, accounting to Guterres, has been undermined by the Covid-19 pandemic. With an ineffective Security Council and the financial stresses of the pandemic, Guterres argues we are now in 'an environment in which some military leaders feel that they have total impunity, they can do whatever they want because nothing will happen to them'.[31]

SECRETARY-GENERAL GUTERRES POINTED TO THE NEED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY – PARTICULARLY 'BIG POWERS' – TO GUARANTEE 'EFFECTIVE DETERRENCE' AGAINST COUPS

The danger of a lack of deterrent lies not in an inability to reverse coups that have already occurred, but rather in preventing future coups by unequivocally demonstrating that they will not be tolerated. Every successful coup that fails to see such a signal will contribute to a weakening of the norm. Would be coupists not only will be more willing to act on their schemes, but the continent could soon see more serious post-coup effects. Recent studies pointing to the ability of the international community to promote post-coup democratic transitions, for example, rely on the assumption that coup leaders are more likely to return to the barracks and allow transitions specifically because of the costs associated with trying to retain power.[32] Though perhaps at first seeming counterintuitive, a growing number of studies have suggested that coups against dictators can roughly double the likelihood of a democratic transition.[33] Even a sceptical assessment of this 'democratic coup' thesis reported that around 40% of post-Cold War coups have been followed by a democratic transition. To be clear, each of these studies notes that democracy remains a difficult prospect in post-coup environments. To the degree that democracy is possible, however, these studies are in agreement that transitions are largely the product of international pressure.

A robust anti-coup norm might be unable to deter all coups. However, those that occur in this context are significantly more likely to see a return or transition to civilian rule. A weakening of the norm could mean an increased likelihood of officers such as Colonel Zida attempting to maintain power or eventually heads of state such as Abdel Fattah al-Sisi dropping any pretence of a return to civilian rule. Simply put, the lack of a deterrent consequently translates into an increased likelihood of renewed or worsened authoritarianism, and potentially even military rule.

Figure 3: Decline in Leader Deaths via Coups Over Time[34]



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ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The leader of Niger, Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, was killed in a coup in 1999.

A lack of restraint could also translate into more sinister coup practices. Though the phenomenon has – to our knowledge – not been empirically investigated, the growth of the anti-coup norm was accompanied by improved outcomes for executives who were removed from power. Fourteen African leaders have been killed during, or in, the immediate aftermath of coups since 1960. None, however, have been killed in a coup since the assassination of Ilbrahim Baré Maïnassara during Niger's 1999 coup.[35] In fact, leader fate closely parallels international developments. Twelve of the 67 (18%) successful Cold War coups saw the leader killed.[36] The post-Cold War, pre-AU era (1990–2001) saw two leaders killed in 16 coups (12.5%). Under the AU (2002–2021), however, no leaders were killed in the 21 successful coups witnessed on the continent. The current 24 consecutive coups without a leader death is easily the longest streak the continent has seen. Not only did the growth of the anti-coup norm decrease coups, when coups still occurred, they may have been executed with more restraint.

NOT ONLY DID THE GROWTH OF THE ANTI-COUP NORM DECREASE COUPS, WHEN COUPS STILL OCCURRED, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN EXECUTED WITH MORE RESTRAINT

Conclusion

Compared to other continental organisations, the AU stands out as having a framework against UCG that guides African states in their responses to coups. However, the resurgence of coups in 2021 highlights gaps in the AU framework, particularly the extent to which the AU consistently reacts to coups and other illegal power seizures and its ability to influence coup-born regimes, and in the process, discourage others from orchestrating such power grabs. To strengthen its framework, it is perhaps time for the AU to implement its UCG policy fully beyond coup events. Had the AU implemented its UCG policy against Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali for attempting to extend his rule, the 2020 coup would probably not have taken place, and a stronger signal would have been sent to leaders seeking to remove term limits. Responding to ECOWAS's decision to suspend Guinea following the coup against Alpha Conde, Liberian president George Weah noted, 'While we are condemning these military coups, we must also muster the

courage to look into what is triggering these unconstitutional takeovers. Could it be that we are not honouring our political commitments to respect the term limits of our various constitutions?'[37] It is time for the AU to pay closer attention to this growing threat to constitutional rule in Africa.

Additionally, the ability of the AU to pressure coup-born regimes hinges on the extent to which it can influence other actors with closer ties to the affected state. Although the AU UCG framework includes a set of punitive measures, these perhaps may not be sufficient to compel coupists to relinquish power. The AU does urge coordination and cooperation with other relevant actors in responding to coups. Yet, the extent to which such collaboration takes place remains unclear. Suspension from the AU is punitive, although it is doubtful how much damage this does to the suspended state, especially if it continues to maintain its other relations with other states. Similarly, sanctions, visa bans, and the freezing of assets may hurt, but this depends on the degree to which the coupists are linked to other states in Africa. Enhanced collaboration, both formal and informal, between the AU and those actors that have closer relations with the coup-afflicted state can be a more effective means of pressuring coup-born regimes to relinquish power.

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36 This statistic likely underreports deaths by excluding individuals who were effectively given death sentences via conditions of their imprisonment. Grégoire Kayibanda, for example, is believed to have been intentionally starved to death following his ousting from the Rwandan presidency in July 1973. As he is believed to have lived for three years, he is excluded as a case here.

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POLITICAL REFORMS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND INSTABILITY IN WEST AFRICA: THE WAY FORWARD FOR ECOWAS AND MEMBER STATES

BY **MUBIN ADEWUMI BAKARE**

Introduction

With the restoration of democratic order in the Gambia in 2017, the West African region regained the attention of the world with renewed hope and optimism for democratic consolidation in Africa. The Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) rejection of the undemocratic retention of power by former President Yahya Jammeh and its threat to apply force, coupled with Gambians' resistance, resulted in the restoration of democratic order in the country. Similarly, ECOWAS' preventive diplomacy efforts following the recent military incursion in 2021 affirmed the regional

Above: Gambians cheer on Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) soldiers as they arrive in Banjul to secure President Adama Barrow's arrival from neighbouring Senegal, as Gambian leader Yahya Jammeh leaves the country he ruled for 22 years to cede power to President Barrow and end a political crisis (22 January 2017).

PHOTO: PAUL KAGAME

President Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, who spent 14 years in office, contested and won the presidential election in 2019 amid sustained protests.

body's zero-tolerance stance for power acquired through unconstitutional means. The practice of accessing political power through credible elections under the watch of civil society and international actors is progressively taking firm root across the region. However, despite these democratic gains, the region is also witnessing setbacks in emerging political developments across Member States.

According to the Freedom House 'Freedom in the World Report 2021', of the 12 countries with the most significant decline in democracy year-on-year, five are in West Africa.[1] The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (2020) showed that only Ghana and Cabo Verde still qualify as fully-fledged democracies in the region.[2] Recently, the region has also witnessed a resurgence in military interregna in Mali and Guinea. This democracy backsliding portends political instability, and its attendant economic consequences for the ECOWAS is concerning considering the developmental agenda of the region. Central to this negative democratic trend are concerns around political reforms that have undermined electoral integrity, inclusiveness and legitimacy in Member States. The application of some of these reforms has fuelled crises, which have led to the resurgence of coups and threatened stability, peace and security in the region.

THE PRACTICE OF ACCESSING POLITICAL POWER THROUGH CREDIBLE ELECTIONS UNDER THE WATCH OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IS PROGRESSIVELY TAKING FIRM ROOT ACROSS THE REGION

Ordinarily, political reforms are critical for enhancing democracy and inclusive socio-economic development. But in the recent past, a number of problematic political reforms were introduced. These have favoured unconstitutional retention of power, on the one hand, and reforms that appear to be politically motivated and seek to exclude or disqualify key political opponents from contest, on the other hand.[3] Notably, change and/or modification of constitutions relating to eligibility for political leadership and term limits have been witnessed in Togo, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea, among others. These constitutional reforms, which largely followed contentious processes, allowed incumbents to extend their term in power. In Togo, for instance, after changing the Constitution through a controversial legislative process, President Faure Gnassingbé, who had spent 14 years in office, contested and won the presidential election in 2019 amid sustained protests that saw at least 16 people killed.[4]

Today, the question of stability in West Africa is more prominent at regional, continental and global levels than it has ever been. ECOWAS and other international actors have called into question political reforms that have impacted governance dynamics and the sustainability of social, economic and political processes in the region. This is significant as the surge in instability came when the region, as in other parts of the world, witnessed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought human suffering, uncertainty, and major economic disruption, among other unexpected challenges, while exposing the fragility of ECOWAS Member States. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economy of sub-Saharan Africa will shrink by 3% due to the pandemic, which is 'the worst outcome on record'.[5] Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic raised the stakes in the recent crises fuelled by the implementation of political reforms in the region. Stability in West African States is crucial to the security and economic prosperity of the region.

Leveraging its preventive diplomacy efforts, ECOWAS successfully managed the recent crises in Togo, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire.[6] Though ECOWAS was able to manage these crises through mediated solutions, the root causes of the political impasses that engulfed these countries might not have been necessarily addressed. The recent resurgence in coups d'état in Guinea and Mali indicate the need to overhaul ECOWAS' democratic governance architecture because most of the reforms undertaken since 2015 in West Africa have resulted in a disconnection between the political elite and the people.[7] This trend has become an emerging trigger for democratic backsliding and instabilities in Member States and constitutes a litmus test for ECOWAS' resolve in upholding the defence of democratic norms and standards for the consolidation of peace and security in the region.

Clearly, ECOWAS' Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance was adopted over two decades ago to provide a concerted regional response to structural conflicts and instability in the region. The Protocol prohibits the modification of constitutions or electoral codes six months prior to elections unless such amendments receive the support of the majority of political actors. More critically, the possibility of an ostensibly ambitious incumbent government amending a constitution has allowed opportunities for abuse. Also, many other recent legal and policy reforms across Member States have explicitly or implicitly compromised inclusivity, fairness, integrity, the rule of law, and human rights – all of which are the hallmark of ECOWAS' democratic norms and standards.

Under these prevailing circumstances, ECOWAS' commitment to advancing democracy is faced with a dilemma in consolidating democratic gains and maintaining stability in the region. The regional body adopted normative and legal instruments to promote democracy and democratisation in Member States to maintain stability, peace and security. But the experiences of enacting and implementing political reforms in recent times have more or less fuelled instability, thereby posing a serious threat to peace and security in the region. ECOWAS' normative and legal instruments have proven less appropriate to address the recent undemocratic political reforms in the region.

This article, therefore, addresses the question: is ECOWAS well-equipped to prevent or manage political tenure elongation orchestrated through constitutional and electoral reforms in Member States? The article analyses the

PHOTO: ABOUBACARKHORAA

Soldiers parade in the streets of Conakry, the capital city of Guinea, following the 2021 coup (6 September 2021).

context of recent political reforms in West Africa, including political reforms induced by ECOWAS. The article examines the implications of recent political reforms for democracy and stability. It further suggests policy directions which ECOWAS and Member States can pursue to prevent and manage undemocratic retention of power through the combination of strengthened regional normative and legal instruments and technical support for Member States.

Context of Recent Political Reforms in West Africa

Political reforms have been an integral, although challenging, component of democratic transitions in West Africa. Managing the conflict that accompanies political transitions has been a critical factor in the enactment and implementation of political reforms in West Africa. For example, post-World War II political reforms brought about political self-determination and democratisation in West Africa and Africa at large.[8] The period 1990–1999, following the end of the Cold War, showed political reforms leading to multi-party systems and regular elections in practically all states in West Africa. However, reforms undertaken since 2015 in West Africa have often resulted in a disconnection between the political elite and the people.[9]

RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS HAVE IMPLICITLY RESET THE CLOCK OF TENURE FOR INCUMBENT LEADERS TO ZERO IN TOGO, COTE D'IVOIRE, AND GUINEA

This article, therefore, focuses on the recent change of national constitutions and other ancillary policies relating to political leadership, term limit, and inclusivity, which have increasingly become sources of instability in the ECOWAS region. The context of these reforms has been argued to be not only controversial, non-inclusive and untrustworthy, but also the reforms have either been tacitly exploited for tenure elongation by incumbents or constituted legal barriers that have prevented opponents from participating in elections.

Constitutional Reform Favouring Tenure Elongation

Respecting constitutionalism is a cornerstone of democratic governance. The constitution as a foundational norm of any nation is supreme. Its legal order and normative disposition guide the exercise of power, political governance, and electoral processes. West African States have embarked on a range of constitutional reforms to deepen democratic culture, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. For example, the repeal of the principle of *ivorite* in the Ivoirian Constitution has allowed more inclusive political processes and entrenched national unity and stability in Cote d'Ivoire. Comparatively, West African States have made significant strides in strengthening democracy.

PHOTO: PAUL KAGAME

Former president Alpha Conde of Guinea sought constitutional reform after 10 years to extend his stay in power.

However, in recent years, politicians have adopted more complex and sophisticated ways to retain power in the ECOWAS region. Recent constitutional reforms have implicitly reset the clock of tenure for incumbent leaders to zero in Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea. The incumbents had reached their absolute term limit but argued that the new constitution enabled them to start with fresh mandates unrestricted by previous constitutional limits. In essence, by invoking the application of the non-retroactivity principle of law, newly adopted constitutions have been argued to have no legal effect on the previous term of office of incumbents. These countries embarked on such opportunistic reforms despite the track record of African leaders who have stayed in power at times for more than 10 years being marred by repression, corruption, financial instability, underdevelopment, and conflict.[10]

In Guinea, for example, despite having experienced 50 years of authoritarian rule and a legacy of misgovernance,

PHOTO BY CELLOU BINANI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Voters queue at a polling station in Conakry, Guinea, during a constitutional referendum (22 March 2020).

former President Alpha Conde sought constitutional reform after 10 years to extend his stay in power. Some analysts have argued that the 2020 constitutional reform was illegitimate as it was singlehandedly authorised by the President of the National Assembly in contravention of the Constitution, which requires a consensual decision of Parliament to authorise a constitutional reform. Similarly, the credibility of the referendum for the adoption of the new Constitution has been called into question by some analysts as grievous irregularities marred the process. On the day of the referendum, local media outlets and social media reported that there were not enough 'No' ballots at some stations. Voter cards were confiscated, some were told to wait outside while someone else voted on their behalf, and others said they were forced to vote 'Yes'.[11] The voter turnout was another source of disagreement between civil society actors and the government. While the former noted a turnout rate of 30% and less than 15% in Conakry, the government pegged the official turnout rate at 58%, with 89% voting for the adoption of the new Constitution.[12] While a number of people were killed,[13] the recent coup d'état has further exacerbated democratic decline in Guinea.

In Togo, the constitutional reform of May 2019, which was adopted in circumstances that have been described as controversial and non-inclusive, paved the way for a fourth and possibly 50-year mandate for the incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé in 2020. The boycott by the opposition coalition, C14, of the 20 December 2018 election enabled the ruling party, alongside its allied political parties, to secure a four-fifths majority in Parliament. Parliament adopted the new Constitution, which reinstated the two-term limit on the presidency as an absolute majority in Parliament could replace the need for a constitutional referendum. However, the prospective application of the Constitution allowed the incumbent to evade the two-term limit. While ECOWAS' role in facilitating dialogue between the government and opposition groups could be commended, the legitimacy crisis with regard to Faure Gnassingbé's presidency hampers efforts towards democratic consolidation in Togo.

HENCE, BEYOND REQUIRING THAT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM FOLLOW ESTABLISHED CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURE, ECOWAS AND MEMBER STATES MUST ENSURE THAT THE PROCESS IS LEGITIMATE, INCLUSIVE, AND RESPECTS HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW

While the scenario in Guinea and Togo also played out in Cote d'Ivoire, it is important to note that the cases of constitutional reforms across these ECOWAS Member States largely followed procedures set out in the relevant constitutions, as measures such as required majorities were achieved, and required referenda and/or legislative adoption were also realised. However, superficial compliance with constitutional requirements smartly disguised constitutional and legal manipulations, as the principle of non-retroactivity of law was invoked to justify tenure extension in these Member States. These practices defeat both legal and normative understandings of constitutionalism. Hence, beyond requiring that constitutional reform follow established constitutional procedure, ECOWAS and Member States must ensure that the process is legitimate, inclusive, and respects human rights and the rule of law.

Extra Constitutional Reforms in West Africa

Besides clear-cut constitutional reforms that have reset presidential terms to zero, incumbent governments have also adopted policies with exclusionary principles and/or exploited the restrictive interpretation and instrumentalisation of the judiciary to disqualify strong presidential opponents. Electoral reforms around the parrainage (sponsorship) policy were politically applied to undermine competitive and participatory democracy in ECOWAS Member States.

Parrainage Policy

Parrainage is a process of endorsement and sponsorship of candidates for elections. The policy, which is prevalent across Europe, requires a candidate to amass a number of signatures from citizens or elected officials in a specified number of regions across the country to be eligible to run in an election. The rationale for this policy is hinged on the need to address the proliferation of fanciful candidates, enhance competitiveness, and deepen the quality of elections.

Parrainage has been entrenched in the recent electoral reforms undertaken in some French-speaking ECOWAS Member States, but in marked variations in both the nature and substance of the policy. While some Member States adopted citizen parrainage, others preferred elected official parrainage. Due to the application of parrainage in Benin Republic, the number of registered political parties increased from 118 in 1998 to more than 250 in 2019, but has since been reduced to four major parties before the 2021 presidential election. As laudable as the parrainage system appears to be, its implementation has shown a deleterious interplay among democracy, equal participation, and politics across Member States. Implementing parrainage has led to abuse of democratic principles and manipulation of democratic institutions by the incumbent government for undue political advantage over the opposition.

Senegal, known for its frequent reforms, introduced parrainage for presidential aspirants of political parties and political formations in 2018. According to the Electoral Code as amended, a potential candidate is required to gather sponsorship from a minimum of 0.8% (53 457) and a maximum of 1% (66 820) of registered voters in at least seven regions, with a minimum of 2 000 per region.[14] Based on this requirement, the Constitutional Council announced the confirmation of only five eligible candidates (Macky Sall, Ousmane Sonko, Madicke Niang, Idrissa Seck and El Hadji Sall) out of 27 for the 2019 presidential election. The parrainage requirement was suddenly modified by the ruling government without the consent of the major political actors. This development heightened the already tense political environment as Senegal moved towards the election.

In addition, the inability of the Constitutional Court to try this contentious reform before the 2019 presidential election raised serious rule-of-law concerns and undermined equal political participation. More importantly, the applicability and consistency of parrainage for the electoral framework will be a serious factor affecting instability in future elections in Senegal.

PARRAINAGE HAS BEEN ENTRENCHED IN THE RECENT ELECTORAL REFORMS UNDERTAKEN IN SOME FRENCH-SPEAKING ECOWAS MEMBER STATES, BUT IN MARKED VARIATIONS IN BOTH THE NATURE AND SUBSTANCE OF THE POLICY

Furthermore, the list of sponsors, which is expected to contain sensitive information about electorates (names, dates and places of birth, and voter registration numbers), is attached to the endorsed candidate's nomination form for the Constitutional Council's validation and undermines the secrecy of voting. This approach to parrainage plays out as an election before the main election as the electorate declares in advance which candidate they intend to support since a voter can only endorse one candidate. In addition, this practice carries enormous risks for electorates who grant their sponsorship to a candidate as they may be subject to harassment and attacks by the opponent's political party supporters. This concern, among others, served as the premise on which the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice ruled that the Senegalese government must restore the rights of disqualified candidates by abolishing the parrainage system which constitutes a real obstacle to the freedom and secrecy of the right to vote on the one hand, and a serious infringement on the right to participate in elections as a candidate, on the other hand.[15]

Conversely, Benin Republic and Burkina Faso operate *grand electeurs* parrainage as only elected officials are allowed by law to sponsor candidates for the presidency.

PHOTO BY ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In Burkina Faso, the January 2020 reform of the electoral code requires every presidential candidate to be sponsored by at least 50 elected officials.

In Burkina Faso, the January 2020 reform of the electoral code requires every presidential candidate to be sponsored by at least 50 elected officials. When sponsors are municipal councillors, they must be located in at least seven of the 13 regions of the country. In Benin Republic, the electoral code requires candidates to be endorsed by 10% of mayors or parliamentarians. The application of parrainage in the two countries created more obstacles for new political parties and independent candidates to participating in the electoral process as elected officials' loyalty to their parties is undisputable, except in exceptional circumstances. Democracy is, therefore, at peril, particularly as old political parties have used parrainage as a tool to stifle equal access to competitive elections and limit citizens' options for changing leadership. Parrainage may be worsening in countries like Nigeria and Ghana, where citizens have harkened to calls for alternative platforms as traditional political parties are increasingly losing their credibility and/or a party's supremacy has hindered the emergence of credible candidates.

The Way Forward for ECOWAS

The costs of democratic backsliding for West African States and ECOWAS are high in terms of democracy, stability, human rights, reconciliation, violent extremism, security, and development. The implications of these political reforms explain the relationship among prolonged stays in power, instability, and violent conflict that the region has experienced. In fact, there is a strong correlation between these concerns and the recent resurgence in coups d'état in Mali and Guinea. Strengthening ECOWAS' legal democratic instruments, including norms to enthrone good democratic practices and mechanisms to enhance checks and balances and democratic accountability against opportunistic reforms can help overcome democratic backsliding in the region. Also, Member States should undertake efforts to ensure that political reforms are consensual, inclusive, and emanate from credible and transparent processes. This is critical to complementing regional initiatives and ensuring that political reforms attain the goal of deepened political liberalisation, greater political accountability, and socio-economic development for the benefit of ordinary citizens.

Enhancing ECOWAS' Legal Instruments

In spite of the significant potential of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance for entrenching democratic practices and culture, lessons drawn from two decades of its implementation have

revealed some of its weaknesses, particularly with regard to emerging political developments in the region. Issues around presidential term limits, constitutionalism, democratic institutions' credibility, political reforms legitimacy, democratic support and enforcement mechanisms, as well as some cross-cutting issues like gender and human rights, are critical standards to be strengthened in the Protocol to upgrade its effectiveness, relevance and responsiveness.

Presidential Term Limit

ECOWAS' principles on zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means and the fundamental principle of free, fair and transparent elections have come under criticism in the face of recent undemocratic trends and the retention of power through opportunistic reforms in Member States. Evasion of term limits by incumbents has undermined the efficacy of the Protocol.

In strengthening the Protocol, presidential two-term limits of varied duration (seven, five or four years) should be clearly institutionalised as part of the Constitutional Convergence Principles. Research has shown that countries lacking term limits tend to be more unstable, and a third of these 18 countries are facing armed conflict. In contrast, just two of the 21 countries with term limits are in conflict.[16] Term limits are not only a democratic principle that must be respected, their scrupulous implementation across Africa has demonstrated stability.

Having presidential term limits institutionalised in the constitution is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means to ensure that leadership succession is structured and peaceful, while safeguarding democratic principles and maintaining stability. Other factors such as disregard for constitutionalism and ambiguous term limit provisions have undermined the effective application of presidential term limits in West Africa. In addressing these concerns, some Member States introduced an 'unamendable clause' in their constitutions to ensure that a term limit can never be changed. This approach is, however, less effective as it can hardly stand the test of legality when the principle of non-retroactivity of law is invoked when a new constitution is adopted to reset the clock for the incumbent president to zero. Therefore, moving forward, an important priority for ECOWAS is that presidential terms be made an absolute maximum of two, without prejudice to restriction on the number of consecutive terms a person may serve. This implies that no person can serve more than two terms as president, whether consecutive or not. Consequently, the 2015 proposal by the ECOWAS Commission to adopt a regional obligation on term limits could be re-introduced for consideration by the Authority of Heads of State and Government. The timing seems

PHOTO BY I REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE

The Economic Community of West African States' leaders formally debated a proposal to adopt a regional obligation for presidential term limits at a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria (22 September 2015).

PHOTO BY ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission engages former Heads of State to lead ECOWAS Election Observation Missions.

appropriate as Togo and Gambia, the two Member States that were antagonistic to the adoption of the presidential term limit in 2015, have now entrenched term limits in their respective national constitutions.

Strengthened Democratic Institutions

A major challenge of democracy in West Africa is the excessive power wielded by the executive arm and flawed checks and balances exerted on this autocratic tendency. Strong democratic institutions exert checks on the exercise of power by the executive. For democracies' superior performance, three overarching qualities stand out: shared power, openness, and capacity for self-correction.[17] Independence and effective functioning of the judiciary, parliament, civil society, and free press with inclusive political participation and political equality are critical norms that need to be further entrenched in the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. In addition, ECOWAS' legal instruments should enhance parliamentary immunity and basic functions in political governance processes to deter undemocratic practices in Member States. There should be regular capacity enhancement on key legislative functions (oversight, representation, and law-making) to ensure parliamentarians put national interests above personal, party, regional, or religious considerations when political reforms with the potential of tenure elongation are brought to the fore. In this regard, the tension between party loyalty and partisanship should be resolved in favour of bipartisanship and patriotism in legislative practice and debate, particularly on matters of constitutional reform for undemocratic retention of power by incumbents.

Democratic Support

ECOWAS' support in terms of democratic strengthening, electoral assistance, and election observation have deepened electoral integrity, political participation, and electoral security in Member States. But this support needs to be expanded to incorporate new initiatives to enhance constitutionalism, participation, pluralism, and human rights. Specifically, in view of structural conflict orchestrated by the application of national constitutions, ECOWAS should facilitate the development of a Model Constitution that will be hinged

on the Constitutional Convergence Principles and other international best practices. It should also reflect international standards on electoral management and administration, leadership succession, party registration, democratic and good governance norms, among others. In addition, given the controversies surrounding parrainage across Member States, ECOWAS should facilitate the development of regional guidelines on parrainage. These guidelines should comprise harmonised principles that govern the application of parrainage with particular emphasis on domestic political and socio-cultural context of States without prejudice to human rights, the rule of law, participation, and electoral quality.

Similarly, ECOWAS needs to maximise its engagement with past Heads of State and Governments to promote peaceful power transfer and after-office security. The ECOWAS Commission has been engaging former Heads of State to lead ECOWAS Election Observation Missions. In other instances, former Heads of State and Government have been appointed by ECOWAS as chief mediators and facilitators. While these initiatives are commendable, their ad hoc nature and limited scope have made the efforts less effective and efficient, considering the enormous opportunities available for these personalities to enhance democratic practice and stability in the region. Besides leading Election Observation Missions, ex-presidents should be appointed as champions of democratic courses, human rights advocates, and peace ambassadors.

POLITICAL REFORM CAN EITHER AID IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES OR CREATE VULNERABILITIES FOR INSTABILITY AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

In addition, other non-state actors, such as the media and civil society, play a vital role in upholding norms of democratic accountability. Importantly, ECOWAS' engagement with civil society organisations and the media should be further strengthened. The media and civil society organisations should be supported to educate the public on the implications of changes to provisions on eligibility, equal participation, and leadership succession. These actors should empower the general public to exert sustained pressure against illegal and illegitimate political reform to deter an incumbent government's attempt to extend its stay in power undemocratically. Against this backdrop, the civic space should be consistently protected, and any attempt aimed at regulating civil society and censoring media should be resisted.

Elections are a process and not an event. ECOWAS should, therefore, refocus its democratic support towards sustainable democratic institution-building. ECOWAS should be focused on building national expertise and capacities to enhance electoral systems. This will engender national ownership of the regional initiatives to deepen institution-building. Funding partners should also align with this vision of supporting democratic institutions to deliver credible and democratic elections.

Reforming Electoral Processes

Political reform can either aid in the consolidation of democratic institutions and processes or create vulnerabilities for instability and violent conflict. The interplay between reforms and their consequences is central to whether such reforms will fuel instability and conflict. Hence, to improve political stability in West Africa, ECOWAS must set certain principles to guide Member States in enacting political reforms. Principally, political reforms should be conducted in compliance with democratic tenets, while ensuring a maximum level of respect for fundamental human rights, accountability and sustainability. Democratic tenets for political reform should promote consensus, inclusivity, credibility and transparency as key principles guiding the process and implementation.

The question of consensus should be addressed alongside the timeline within which political reforms relating to political leadership, term limit, and inclusivity can be adopted. This is important because the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance bans any electoral reform six months before the holding of an election, except when such reform is agreed upon by the majority of political actors. The possibility of amendments to the constitution by an ostensibly ambitious incumbent government has opened the way for abuse. Clearly, the six-month period during which a reform can be accepted has outlived its importance as opportunistic politicians have undertaken reforms that resulted in undemocratic retention of power between one and four years before the holding of an election (Cote d'Ivoire in 2016, Togo in 2018, and Guinea in 2019). This does not imply banning electoral reform. Rather, ECOWAS and Member States should focus on ensuring that reforms are consensual and legitimate both in process and content.

Reaching consensus on political reforms has been difficult across Member States largely due to corruption and intimidation. While consensus does not equate with unanimity, the reductionist conception of pluralism has restricted the scope of actors required to consent to political reforms. Attaining consensus on political reforms should be hinged upon broad-based pluralism of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, traditional and socio-cultural authorities, trade unions, and professional bodies. This approach to political reforms accords more legitimacy and sustainability to the reforms. The process and outcome of political reforms are important to enhance the credibility of the reform.

Enforcement Mechanisms

The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and other relevant legal and normative instruments commit Member States to constitutionalism, the rule of law, and human rights. This provides the basis for developing robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure the effective application and protection of these norms. Sanctions are contained in the Protocol to make Member States comply with democratic and human rights principles. Lessons learnt from sanction application shows that they are less appropriate to address emerging political reforms that favour presidential term extension and/or policies that exclude opposition or discriminate against women and youth. In strengthening the sanction regime, ECOWAS should consider the progressive application of suspension of electoral support, including election observation boycotts, trial and ban of perpetrators from contesting elections, and non-recognition of governments emanating from such elections.

Conclusion

The quality of democracies in the ECOWAS region is declining, driven by disrespect for constitutionalism, illegitimate and exclusionary electoral policies, weakened checks and balances, shrinking civic spaces, and increasing gender inequality. In this context, the implication of democracy backsliding in West Africa may lead to a resurgence in coups d'état, regional instability, and negative effects on international peace and security. ECOWAS' democracy and governance assistance is increasingly difficult to execute, but ever more crucial to nurturing and consolidating legitimate democratic gains recorded over the years.

Given the significant investment that ECOWAS and other domestic, regional and international actors make in West Africa to promote democracy and mitigate conflict, it is important for the regional body to recalibrate its efforts towards entrenching adherence to constitutionalism, strengthening democratic institutions, refocusing democratic support, supporting efficient enforcement mechanisms, and reinforcing civil society.

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PRESIDENCE DU BENIN

SELF-DEFENCE MILITIAS AND STATE SPONSORSHIP IN BURKINA FASO

BY **VILJAR HAAVIK**

Burkina Faso has been engulfed in an ongoing conflict with jihadist insurgent groups active across the Sahel in West Africa. The conflict originally started in Mali in 2012 and later spread to Niger. In June 2021, the worst attack in Burkina Faso since 2015 occurred in the village of Solhan, where suspected jihadists massacred 160 civilians.[1] Naturally, discussions in the media revolved around who perpetrated the attack, but the attack also brought to the forefront the role of self-defence groups or militias in the Burkina Faso conflict. While the use of armed militias in Burkina Faso has become widespread and is actively sponsored by the State, there are concerns that self-defence militias perpetuate conflict. The main reasons are that self-defence militias in Burkina Faso are exacerbating mutual distrust, tension and violence among different communities, while the use and State sponsorship of militias are exposing the civilian population to reprisals from the insurgents who perceive them as a threat. The result is that President Roch Marc Kaboré may be doing more harm than good by creating self-defence militias under the legal framework of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDPs) adopted unanimously by Burkina Faso's Parliament in January 2020.

Above: President Roch Marc Kaboré created self-defence militias under the legal framework of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland in January 2020.

However, seen from the government's perspective, its State Security Forces (SSF) are not scaled to cover the whole territory, and neither do the forces have the capacity (and sometimes the will) to deploy in vulnerable and remote areas rapidly and secure the civilian population. Even if the government wishes to expand the SSF and their capacities significantly, it does not have the resources.[2] As the SSF and international coalition forces proved unable to counter the increasing influence of jihadist insurgents in Burkina Faso, supplying civilians with weapons and training to create counterinsurgency militias can be seen as a pragmatic and resource-effective solution to combat widespread insecurity in the country's conflict-affected areas. At least the government is seen to be doing something. However, more often than not, the use of militias to counter insurgencies perpetuates the conflict they initially set out to quell.[3]

Self-defence militias in Burkina Faso are part of the broader West African regional context where multiple and multifaceted militias have proliferated in recent decades. For example, during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the 'invincible' rebel group Revolutionary United Front was met with fierce resistance from the Kamajors militia and eventually lost the advantage in the war. The Kamajors are one of the more successful militias in Africa, as they improved the security of the people in the southeast parts of the country. However, they were also accused of human rights violations.[4] During a crime wave in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s, a group of hunters called Dozos formed the Benkadi movement and initially, they became a successful crime-fighting militia providing a nonpartisan form of public security. However, increasing entanglement with the State and political circumstances polarised the Dozos' identity vis-à-vis the State, and in the end, some of them joined the rebel side in the Ivorian civil war.[5] In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni created Local Defence Units (LDUs) in conflict-affected provinces where the State fought the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Self-defence militias have a long history in Uganda, but the context changed with State sponsorship and tacit approval to orchestrate violence. The LRA interpreted the lack of popular support and enlistment for militias as indicating support for

the government, and the strategy led to brutal attacks on civilians by the rebels. No consideration was given to the consequence of civilian involvement in counterinsurgency efforts; it was viewed as a case of self-inflicted harm caused by the State.[6] In Burkina Faso, the involvement of self-defence militias in counterinsurgency activities was more or less tolerated by the State until January 2020, when the new law called for volunteers to fight against the jihadist groups and legalised State-sponsored militias. This law constitutes a break in Burkina Faso's history and calls into question whether counterinsurgency militias in the country are doing more harm than good and what the long-term consequences of weaponising the civilian population will be.

To discuss the use of militias in Burkina Faso, I utilise a framework for analysing militia violence that situates this case in a broader context of counterinsurgency 'on the cheap', or at a very low cost, in areas of violent conflict and fragile statehood.

How Militias Perpetuate Conflict

According to Schneckener, 'militias [are] a special form of organised violence found in many civil wars and fragile states, and their formation is an indicator of a fragmented and highly politicised security sector under the circumstances of fragile statehood.'[7] Militias often claim to defend an established political or social order from internal and external threats, as opposed to rebels who are using violence to achieve revolutionary social and political change. This article uses Tisseron's understanding of militias as 'non-jihadist, armed actors which are supporting the state of Burkina Faso in its challenge to guarantee inner security for its citizens.'[8] As ideal types, the Burkinabé militias can be considered counter-crime or counterinsurgency militias depending on their objectives, which vary from location to location.

MILITIAS OFTEN CLAIM TO DEFEND AN ESTABLISHED POLITICAL OR SOCIAL ORDER FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL THREATS, AS OPPOSED TO REBELS WHO ARE USING VIOLENCE TO ACHIEVE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

PHOTO BY ALEXIS HUGUET/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Self-defence militias generally act as alternatives to an absent, ineffective or illegitimate State.

PHOTO: J. DREVET

A member of the Dan Na Ambassagou militia group holds a flintlock rifle.

Schneckener argues that there are a few typical delegitimising effects associated with militia violence that over time become endemic in society and often perpetuate conflict:

1. Militias are difficult to demobilise as their mission usually develops beyond their original purpose;
2. The original stakeholders, such as elite sponsors, lose what control they initially had over the militia. State-sponsored militias risk developing into entities with social and political power beyond what the state is capable of reigning in;
3. The 'enemy' of the militia often develops to include more targets, leading to unrestrained violence in an attempt to set an example for others who oppose or criticise the militia.[9]

In addition, militias put civilians at risk of becoming targets of reprisals by insurgents, as seen in Uganda.

From Counter-crime to Counterinsurgency

Local security initiatives have been common throughout Burkina Faso's history, but since 2014, self-defence militias have proliferated across much of the territory. The absence of the State and insufficient provision of public security in a context of widespread crime has led to feelings of abandonment as well as revolts and the need to develop local security initiatives. In this context, a self-defence militia called the Koglweogo emerged as an endogenous alternative to the ineffectiveness of the SSF, and it largely reduced crime in several regions of Burkina Faso between 2014 and 2015.[10] The Koglweogo co-exists with a more long-standing group of hunters called the Dozo, who operate as a counter-crime militia and provide security in western Burkina Faso. In north-western Burkina Faso, the militia Dan Na Ambassagou, which is mostly active in Mali, has units and rear bases from which it is combatting jihadist insurgents. Together, this fragmented nature of different militias is part of a hybrid security environment, the forms of which vary from time to time and place to place, in a context where the State does not maintain a monopoly on the legitimised use of violence. Self-defence militias generally act as alternatives to an absent, ineffective or illegitimate State, both in cooperation and autonomously.[11]

The Burkinabé State deals with the militias with tolerance and pragmatism and provides a measure of leadership, but has struggled to bring them under its authority. The State attempted to bring the Koglweogo into a community policing initiative in 2016; however, the Koglweogo leadership

refused to join the initiative.[12] The militia has also shown its willingness to enter into conflict with the State when its interests are threatened. In 2018, the Koglweogo surrounded a courthouse in Kaya to secure a member's release.[13] This indicated that the militia's social and political power had evolved beyond what the State is capable of controlling as it had indebted itself to the militias and given them free rein.

Militias often develop beyond their original purpose, and the eruption of a jihadist insurgency in 2016 forced segments of the Koglweogo, in particular, into conflict with jihadist groups that today consist of the Al-Qaida affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). State sponsors, such as the former minister and 'father' of the Koglweogo, Simon Compaoré, explicitly stated that the SSF did not have a sufficient number of soldiers or the resources to cover the whole territory. They thus supported the creation of self-defence militias throughout Burkina Faso to fight the jihadists under State supervision.[14] However, the national leadership of the Koglweogo was reluctant to align themselves with the State officially as it recognised the dangers of doing so. While the Koglweogo largely reduced crime in the rural areas of central and eastern Burkina Faso, the jihadists proved to be a much tougher foe for both militias and the SSF.

In 2019, the security situation deteriorated rapidly, and the ineffectiveness of the SSF demanded a response from the government. President Kaboré called for the mobilisation of volunteers to support the State in the fight against terrorism. Legislation was enacted in January 2020 which created the legal framework for establishing State-sponsored self-defence militias referred to as VDPs who are supplied with arms and training. By June 2020, over 2 000 civilians had been recruited, mainly in the North, where most jihadists were active. By encouraging and legalising local security initiatives, the State opened Pandora's box and allowed the militarisation of communities without the capacity to supervise them effectively, particularly when they operate in isolated localities.

Counterinsurgency 'on the Cheap'

Militias are a double-edged sword as they can help strengthen the State's security network and support the SSF, but they also risk perpetuating conflict by exacerbating community tensions and violence.[15] As circumstances on the ground changed with the growing influence of jihadist

PHOTO BY OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Demonstrators in Burkina Faso protest against the worsening security situation and demand a response for the jihadist attacks in Solhan, Ouagadougou (July 2021).

FLORIAN PLAUCHEUR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A member of the Civilian Joint Task Force screens an elderly civilian at the entrance of the town of Damasak, Nigeria (25 April 2017).

groups in northern and eastern Burkina Faso, self-defence militias became involved in counterinsurgency operations, which was mostly tolerated by the State. The International Crisis Group warned against the perils of relying on militias for self-defence in Burkina Faso as they were upsetting the balance between different communities by mainly recruiting from the majority ethnic groups in their respective regions. For example, in the Centre-Nord, which has seen significant communal violence, the Koglweogo mainly recruit from the Mossi, the largest ethnic group in the region. This unbalance has fed into conflicts between farmers and herders to the detriment of the Fulani herder community. The Koglweogo, many of whom are sedentary farmers, have been settling land disputes in their favour and exploiting their relative power.[16]

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE-SPONSORED MILITIAS AND THE VDPS HAS RAISED FEARS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE OCCURRING IN OTHER REGIONS OF BURKINA FASO

The Koglweogo's 'enemy' thus expanded to include the Fulani community as their primary targets in the Centre-Nord. The Fulani have been stigmatised as the main recruits for the jihadists, a similar process seen in central Mali. Threatened by the Koglweogo, the Fulani sought the protection of the Rouga, a group of Fulani herder representatives, whom the Koglweogo, in turn, perceived as 'jihadists in disguise'. The conflict took on a communal dimension and created a climate of strong distrust.[17] The Koglweogo perpetuated the conflict with the jihadist groups, which culminated in two massacres. On 31 December 2018, unidentified gunmen killed six people in Yirgou, including the Mossi village chief and his son. In retaliation, the Koglweogo killed between 100 and 200 Fulani civilians.[18] In March 2019, a second massacre was perpetrated by Fulse, also recruited by the Koglweogo, against the Fulani in Arbinda (Soum), bordering the Centre-Nord.[19] Since then, several smaller attacks on Fulani communities have been perpetrated by the Koglweogo and the VDPs, resulting in the Fulani approaching the jihadists to seek protection or exact revenge. The deteriorating situation in the Centre-Nord and elsewhere largely benefits the insurgents in extending their influence and perpetuating conflict.

The establishment of State-sponsored militias and the VDPs has raised fears of communal violence occurring in other regions of Burkina Faso. First, as the call for VDP recruits mainly resonates within existing local security initiatives, such as the Koglweogo, the State risks reproducing and exacerbating communal divisions. The more neutral stance taken by the Koglweogo's leadership changed with the establishment of the VDPs, and they encouraged their men to enlist. Second, by using poorly trained counterinsurgency militias in counter-terrorism operations, the State risks sanctioning the targeting of ordinary civilians who are conflated with jihadists by the militias and thereby exacerbating communal violence. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), VDP groups have been involved in 40 acts of violence against civilians since February 2020, and some of them involve extrajudicial killings of Fulani civilians.[20] This means that VDP counterinsurgency activities echo the trajectory of the Koglweogo with retribution and settling of scores. If the VDPs are not sufficiently supervised, they can do whatever they want under the guise of fighting terrorism.

BURKINA FASO SHOWS WORRYING INDICATIONS OF THE TENDENCY OF MILITIAS TO PERPETUATE CONFLICT OVER TIME

Self-inflicted Harm – When Communities Take Sides and Become Targets of Violence

The creation of State-sponsored militias which recruit civilian volunteers from villages and peri-urban neighbourhoods seems to be perceived by the jihadists as an act of choosing to side with the Burkinabé State. According to Savadogo, the jihadist groups have waged open warfare against the VDPs.[21] ACLED has recorded 113 battles between jihadist insurgents and VDPs, including a number of ambushes on VDP positions.[22] For example, in November 2020, ISGS claimed responsibility for an attack killing at least eight VDP fighters at a mining site in the Soum region.[23] The VDPs regularly claim to be successful in repelling attacks, but the resistance is taking its toll and generates discontent. Following the death of three VDPs in Niagré in the East region in September 2020, demonstrators brought the bodies to the authorities in Fada N'Gourma to express their anger. According to Tisseron, some VDPs have ended their involvement due to threats against communities setting up self-defence militias.[24] This has also occurred among the Koglweogo groups in the East. It shows that self-defence militias do not necessarily represent the rapid strengthening of Burkina Faso's security network, as was hoped.

Furthermore, the VDPs have exposed the civilian population to reprisals. In October 2020, the United Nations (UN) reported that 25 men in the north-central province of Sanmatenga were executed by an armed group whose members had allegedly identified themselves as jihadists. The killings were a reprisal for the presence of VDPs in the village.[25] In May 2021, presumed JNIM or ISGS militants killed four people in the village of Takatami. The victims were family members of young people who enlisted in the VDP. In the case of the Solhan massacre in 2021 mentioned above, the attackers targeted a volunteer fighter (VDP) position and mining sites, as well as the neighbouring villages of Mossiga and Gountoure. According to Tanguy Quidelleur, a researcher in politics and social sciences, the civilians were massacred because they were considered complicit.[26] The cycle of vendettas is similar to what has been observed in the Mopti region of Central Mali between the Fulani and Dogon communities. However, the massacre may also be linked to an ongoing conflict between JNIM and ISGS, and so one should be careful to consider the attack merely a reprisal against civilians who dared to create a self-defence militia.

VDP recruitment represents a nationwide blurring of the distinction between civilians and the military and mimics a similar dynamic seen in Nigeria, where the establishment of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) exacerbated violence against civilians.[27] Civilians were caught in a difficult position when jihadists considered villages with CJTFs as their enemies, while Nigerian security forces perceived any refusal to establish a CJTF unit as a sign of support for the jihadists.

Conclusion

Burkina Faso shows worrying indications of the tendency of militias to perpetuate conflict over time. The use of counterinsurgency militias may be doing more harm than good, as jihadist insurgents seem to target the VDP and their communities in brutal reprisals for choosing to side with the State. In other words, civilians have become targets of insurgent violence due to their perceived affiliation with State-sponsored militias, similar to what happened in Uganda with the LDUs who faced brutal reprisals from Joseph Kony's LRA. At the same time, the activities and conduct of the VDPs echo the trajectory of the Koglweogo regarding the stigmatisation of the Fulani ethnic group. The result is that civilians are conflated with jihadists, leading to unlawful killings. The effect is the same as with harsh counter-terrorism operations carried out by the military and gendarmes in which targeted communities are forced to flee or seek protection due to indiscriminate violence. The State's policies on self-defence militias can therefore exacerbate distrust and insecurity between communities, undermining its own efforts to combat violence and insecurity.

As militias have the potential to fuel crime and destabilise and weaken State authority, it is crucial for governments to consider the consequences of arming the civilian population carefully, both in the short and long term. For fragile states, such as Burkina Faso, the issues of demobilisation, loss of control, and perpetuation of conflict can quickly outweigh the short-term benefits of lessening the burden on the SSF

by tolerating or supporting self-defence militias. In Burkina Faso, it is likely that the Dozo, Koglweogo and VDPs will continue to mutate and evolve as political circumstances change. Therefore, they risk a similar politicisation to the Dozo militiamen, who evolved from legitimate local civilian guarantors of security to rebels in Côte d'Ivoire. In the meantime, the Burkinabé State authorities are hard-pressed to find sustainable solutions to the violent conflict and insecurity.

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MICHAEL FLESHMAN

BANDITRY IN NIGERIA: INSIGHTS FROM SITUATIONAL ACTION AND SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION THEORIES

BY **TOPE SHOLA AKINYETUN**

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria is a recurring phenomenon that threatens the well-being of its citizens. The multipronged occurrence constitutes a bane to development and leads to the proliferation of crime. As a multifaceted quandary, insecurity assumes varying dimensions in different geopolitical zones. The South West is plagued by a surge in cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping, domestic crime, extrajudicial killings, herder-farmer conflicts, ritual killings, and banditry. The South East is a haven for ritual killings, commercial crime, secessionist agitation, kidnapping, herder-farmer clashes, attacks by unknown gunmen, and banditry. The South remains threatened by militancy, kidnapping, and environmental agitation. The North East has been subject to a humanitarian crisis lasting over a decade and caused by the Boko Haram insurgency and the Islamic State in West Africa Province. Meanwhile, the North West is enmeshed in illegal mining, ethnoreligious killings, and banditry. It is, therefore, an axiom that insecurity in Nigeria

Above: Banditry in Nigeria, which includes kidnapping, is a significant security problem in Nigeria.

has assumed a disproportionate geopolitical stance and that it has claimed thousands of lives and extensive damage and loss of property.

In the context of the aforementioned security problems, banditry has recently come to the fore with increased activities in the northwest region of the country, particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina states. Banditry refers to 'a type of organized crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources'.[1] Some of the factors that have led to the rise and persistence of banditry in Nigeria are under-governed spaces, a weak security apparatus, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, socioeconomic conditions such as poverty and unemployment, cattle rustling, and illegal mining activities in the North West.

Even though the incidence of banditry in Nigeria is beginning to attract scholarship, the theoretical expositions remain embryonic. This article fills the gap by offering explanations for the occurrence of banditry in Nigeria through Situational Action Theory (SAT). This is done bearing in mind that an understanding of the motivating factors of crime provides insights and potential solutions. Furthermore, the available literature largely fails to characterise the phenomenon adequately and tends to offer vague solutions. The article thus proposes practical solutions through the strategies of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). The article presents an overview of banditry in Nigeria and SAT, as well as discussing mitigating the challenge of banditry through SCP.

An Overview of Banditry in Nigeria

Banditry is a serious crime that poses a security challenge to democratic governance and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Bandits often terrorise communities in the North West region. Their activities include kidnapping, arson, shooting, rape, cattle rustling, killing, and looting.[2]

The prevalence of under-governed spaces where the government's control is ineffective and limited is a major factor giving rise to banditry.[3] Such areas are characterised by bad governance, weak legitimacy, protracted conflict, and poor leadership, which makes citizens vulnerable

to exploitation by terrorist groups, traffickers, and other criminal elements. Such areas are not generally entirely devoid of the government's control but are governed poorly and differently from larger communities. These poorly governed territories are plagued by bandits and other criminal gangs due to their remoteness, which allows for the perpetuation of an array of illegal business activities. It is not uncommon to find human trafficking, piracy, cattle rustling, and illegal mining in such areas. These areas are used to promote and sustain an illegal, informal economy. Examples of such include large forests in Rumah/Kukar Jangarai, Kamuku, Balmo, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kano states. Meanwhile, the Nigerian police are generally understaffed and poorly equipped, leaving them incapable of promoting security in under-governed spaces, a major factor that encourages criminality in these areas.

Under-governed spaces coupled with the country's porous borders have increased the influx of small arms and light weapons from the Sahel region – thus increasing the opportunities for crime. This is facilitated by vast forests which allow the illegal arms trade to fester. It is further complicated by the socioeconomic conditions prevalent in the North West, which leave the youth vulnerable to recruitment for criminal activities. The socioeconomic realities that exist include multidimensional poverty, widespread unemployment, deprivation, inequality, marginalisation, exclusion and lack of access to basic amenities. Even though this is a national challenge, the North is particularly affected. For example, Zamfara, Jigawa, and Sokoto states have poverty levels of 74%, 87%, and 87.7%, respectively.[4] These conditions make the region even more susceptible to crime, including as a result of the activities of Boko Haram and now, banditry.

Another major factor that has increased the incidence of banditry is the complex relationship between pastoralists and farmers. Desertification, drought, climate change, cattle rustling, insurgency, and population growth have led to the ongoing migration of pastoralists or herdsmen. This migration has seen pastoralists clash with farmers over the encroachment of farmland and destruction of crops. In extreme cases, these conflicts have led to the wanton destruction of life and property of both the farmers and pastoralists, thus contributing in no small degree to the level of insecurity in the country.[5]

Another cause of banditry in Nigeria is the illegal mining activities in the North West region of the country. Illegal mining is prominent in Niger, Kebbi, Katsina and Zamfara states, has triggered violent conflict over the control of minefields, and has led to the deaths of thousands of people.[6] Due to the displacement caused by the conflict, the people

PHOTO BY CRISTINA ALDEHUELA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Illegal mining occurs in the North West region of Nigeria.

PHOTO BY HEINRICH-BÖLL-STIFTUNG

The prevalence of poverty and widespread unemployment in Nigeria makes the youth susceptible to involvement in crime.

of the region engage in banditry as an alternate means of survival.[7] Meanwhile, the increase in illegal activities has been attributed to poor governance, poor service delivery, the prevalence of poverty, and widespread unemployment in the geopolitical zone, which makes the youth susceptible to involvement in crime.

The effect of banditry is extensive. In addition to complicating the security crisis in the country, it has also increased the incidence of forced migration, food insecurity, cattle rustling, destruction of property, health challenges, displacement, humanitarian crises, and death. For example, between 2018 and 2020, an estimated 4900 people lost their lives to bandit attacks, while 309 000 internally displaced persons and 60 000 refugees have been recorded.[8]

Situational Action Theory and Banditry in Nigeria

SAT is a theory of crime developed in 2004 by Per-Olof Wikström. It attempts to explain what moves people to action such as crime by incorporating ecological, criminological, sociological, and behavioural sciences. Crime is an action that violates the law and is a result of the interplay between an individual's exposure to criminogenic settings and the propensity for criminality, that is, an individual's time in an unsupervised or poorly governed space and level of self-control determine the occurrence of crime. SAT posits that crime is motivated by an individual's morality and the prevailing situation. People are responsible for their actions, but the causes of their actions are situational. Therefore, an act of crime is the product of a choice made after considering various alternative scenarios and stimuli presented by a particular situation. Thus, crime is committed when it is perceived as a worthwhile and suitable alternative, given the prevailing situation, and/or when a person fails to apply moral restraint.[9]

The situational stance advanced by SAT rests on four major elements: the person (psychological make-up, experience, and so on), the setting (the environment an individual is exposed to), the situation (choices resulting from interaction with the setting), and action (the person's behaviour). SAT explicates the notion that factors that induce crime are the same for all people, regardless of their age and criminal career stage. The theory argues that people's propensity to commit a crime is different, just as environments also vary. The setting an individual finds themself in determines whether a crime will be committed or not. For example, an individual who struggles as a result of multidimensional poverty and finds themself in an environment without guardianship, but with certain

escape options and resources, is likely to commit crime. Crime occurrence, therefore, is the interaction between an individual's crime propensity and the setting's criminogenic incentive. A person with a low crime propensity – due to a strong moral rectitude and/or the presence of government authority – will be less susceptible to criminogenic incentives, while a person with a high crime propensity is less likely to resist crime inducement.[10]

SAT proposes the following key basic assumptions:

1. People are essentially rule-guided creatures. They express their desires and respond to friction within the context of rule-guided choices;
2. Social order is based on shared rules of conduct. Patterns in human behaviour are based on rule-guided routines;
3. People are the source of their actions. People perceive, choose, and execute their actions;
4. The causes of action are situational. An individual's particular perception of action alternatives, the process of choice, and execution of the action are triggered and guided by the relevant input from the person-environment interaction; and
5. Crimes are moral actions. Crimes are actions that break rules of conduct (stated in law) about what is the right or wrong thing to do in a particular circumstance.[11]

SAT explains different crimes ranging from theft to terrorism. In explaining radicalisation and terror, SAT highlights the key problems of vulnerability, exposure, and emergence. To develop crime propensity, the individual has to be exposed to crime-supportive moral contexts; a setting that induces crime must be present and the person in regular contact with it; and the individual has to be sensitive to the influence of the crime-supportive setting that they come into contact with.[12]

When applied to banditry in Nigeria, SAT expounds on the interaction between the person, setting, situation, and action. The individual (especially with a low crime propensity) is motivated by the situation to consider crime as a worthwhile alternate to realise the desired outcome. Because the individual is a product of the society they live in, they are likely to subscribe to society's norms. Following Wikström's postulations, crime results from an interaction between a person and the environment.[13] Therefore, in a society characterised by criminogenic inducement, the individual becomes vulnerable to crime. The situation and settings thus motivate an individual's action. The psychological experience resulting from multidimensional poverty, exclusion, unemployment, marginalisation, inequality, and displacement coupled with the prevailing circumstance in the setting, such as under-governed spaces, illegal mining activities, the influx of small arms and light weapons and a poorly equipped security apparatus, engenders a negative situation which encourages deleterious action (banditry). Put differently, the increase in banditry in Nigeria is attributable to the interactions among people who are victims of adverse socioeconomic conditions in the setting. The setting is characterised by recurring social malaise. Negative choices result from interaction with the setting, which leads to criminal action.

IT STRESSES THE NEED TO REMOVE THE SITUATIONAL FACTORS THAT WARRANT CRIME, SUCH AS POORLY GOVERNED SPACES, TRANSHUMANCE, THE PROLIFERATION OF ARMS, ILLEGAL MINING ACTIVITIES, AND OTHER POOR SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Mitigating the Challenge of Banditry through Situational Crime Prevention

As SAT argues, to change people's criminal behaviour, we must change people, change environments, and change people's exposure to environments. This will help reduce crime propensity and external criminogenic incitement and interaction. SCP is applicable in addressing situations that increase the propensity for crime. SCP was developed by Ronald Victor Clarke in the 1970s as a means to reduce the opportunity for crime in an action setting by carefully manipulating the situational factors that engender crime.[14] It calls for the elimination of situational opportunities that motivate crime through intervention. Appropriate strategies to remove crime opportunities and prevent crime can thus be devised. The SCP model includes five strategies incorporating 25 techniques for crime reduction. This intervention strategy involves making crime less likely by deterring offenders and/or reducing situational actions that motivate crime. [15] The situational prevention technique includes:

1. Increasing the effort;
2. Increasing the risks;
3. Reducing the rewards;
4. Reducing provocation; and
5. Removing excuses.[16]

This model is relevant in addressing banditry in Nigeria. It stresses the need to remove the situational factors that warrant crime, such as poorly governed spaces, transhumance, the proliferation of arms, illegal mining activities, and other poor socioeconomic conditions. To adequately prevent banditry will require increasing anti-crime efforts. This includes making the target more difficult to exploit by encouraging community policing; managing access to facilities through controlling transhumance activities; deflecting offenders by reducing the porousness of borders; and controlling tools or weapons by reducing

PHOTO BY: MARCO SIMONINI/REDA&CO/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Formal surveillance can be increased through the use of drones to monitor activities in forests.

the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as implementing laws to punish illicit arms dealers.

Another technique presented by SCP is to increase the risk for offenders when committing a crime. To achieve this, emphasis should be placed on extending guardianship through increased government presence in vast under-governed spaces; assisting natural surveillance through improved security; and reducing anonymity through identifying offenders and sponsors of banditry. SCP also proposes the use of messaging that communicates the government's intolerance for crime and reward for community vigilance. This should be accompanied by the strengthening of formal surveillance, for example, through the deployment of forest guards and the use of drones to monitor activities in forests.

SCP further suggests the reduction of rewards that motivate crime. This involves discouraging illicit gold mining; converting the vast forests for government use; identifying property, for example, by branding cattle to reduce cattle rustling; disrupting markets by monitoring illicit trade hotspots; and denying benefits by desisting from paying ransoms to bandits for the release of kidnapping victims.

ANOTHER TECHNIQUE PRESENTED BY SCP IS TO INCREASE THE RISK FOR OFFENDERS WHEN COMMITTING A CRIME

Provocation must also be reduced. This involves the reduction of frustration through policies that reduce poverty, marginalisation and unemployment; the control of violent attacks and management of disputes, particularly between pastoralists and farmers; discouraging imitation by arresting and prosecuting offenders; and responding swiftly to distress calls.

SCP also advocates for the removal of excuses for crime by implementing reasonable measures, such as granting licenses for mining activities; appealing to individuals' conscience through messages such as 'crime does not pay'; and discouraging drug abuse among youths.

Conclusion

The incidence of banditry in Nigeria is a growing phenomenon that gravely threatens human security. It is prevalent in the North West geopolitical region of the country but has the potential to expand into transnational crime. Thus, it is imperative to pay close attention to the threat. This article presented the theoretical underpinnings of SAT and SCP in relation to this threat. It established that banditry is a situational crime necessitated by the interplay of the person, setting, situation, and action. As such, banditry in Nigeria is sustained by the interaction between a person's experience and prevailing economic realities, such as poverty and unemployment (environment or setting). It is encouraged by a weak security apparatus in large under-governed spaces, which is part of the setting, and characterised by illegal

AU UN IST PHOTO / DAVID MUTUA

The government of Nigeria should reform the security apparattus with an emphasis on increasing the size, funding, training, intelligence, support, and communication equipment of security forces.

mining and cattle rustling (action). As banditry is conceived of as a situational crime, a situational solution is proposed. SCP emphasises changing the criminogenic setting that necessitates crime and reducing the situational factors for crime propensity. The government should adopt social risk management techniques to reduce poverty and vulnerability, particularly in the North. The government should also reform the security apparatus with an emphasis on increasing the size, funding, training, intelligence, support, and communication equipment of security forces. It is also recommended that the government establish its presence and make use of effective leadership in poorly governed spaces in the country. This will reduce the situational factors that compel crime and encourage the adoption of a situation-based prevention strategy.

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THE INTERACTION OF MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUELLING ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN ETHIOPIA

BY **MUNA SHIFA AND FABIO ANDRÉS DÍAZ PABÓN**

ACCORDIHS

Introduction

Social media platforms play a prominent role in modern society by providing tools for various voices to communicate ideas, perspectives and worldviews. Such potential has been illustrated by the role of these platforms in supporting social movements, mobilisation in defence of the environment, and the defence of marginalised communities and groups across different latitudes.[1] However, in many instances, social media has also been used to spread misinformation, broadcast hate speech, and incite violence.

The role of social media has been documented as interacting and co-creating narratives with mass media in contexts of conflict. We understand mass media as a diverse set of media platforms that use mass communication to reach a large audience and operate within visible organisational structures. Platforms such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines are examples of mass media. We define social media as decentralised broadcasting platforms that allow users to create and share content as well as engage in social networking. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are examples of social media platforms.

The role of social media and its interaction with mass media in relation to conflicts remains a growing area of

Above: Social media is used to spread misinformation, broadcast hate speech, and incite violence.

PHOTO: ALISDARE HICKSON

The Arab Spring highlighted the importance of social media in social mobilisations leading to uprisings.

study, particularly after the Arab Spring.[2] The Arab Spring highlighted the importance of social media in social mobilisations leading to uprisings and the emergence of armed conflicts. It illustrated how conflicts and even armed action can be coordinated via social media platforms (as in Syria and Iraq). Despite this, the role of social media and its interaction with mass media in fuelling tensions across 'ethnic' groups in armed conflicts remains an under-researched area. Thus, while social media and mass media appear ubiquitous, little research has been conducted to examine how traditional mass media and social media interact in fuelling ethnic conflict.

The armed conflict in Ethiopia in 2020 presents a more recent example of the interaction of both forms of media in exacerbating conflicts in relation to ethnic factors. While the conflict relates to a long history of tensions, there are serious risks of armed violence being systematically deployed on a larger scale against civilians and along ethnic lines. Expressions of violence directed against particular groups have been effected by the different contending armed actors in the current and previous conflicts. However, the increase in violence against specific groups and the explicit incitement of violence against different ethnic groups via social media and mass media are worrying developments.

Social media is a tool with incredible reach and self-selection mechanisms. This allows not only the deployment of marketing, but of more effective propaganda, which can inflame hatred and fuel conflict at a fraction of the cost of other propaganda tools.[3] Social media platforms are being misused by exploiting their shortcomings in controlling the spread of hate speech, misleading information, and incitement to violence. This is especially true of social media platforms in languages other than English, which are particularly susceptible to such misuse given the limited moderation of social media hate speech and false news. It is concerning that some political actors publish hate speech, false narratives, and misleading information on social media as mass media platforms. For example, the narratives used in Brexit or the discourses inciting armed violence at the Capitol Building in the United States (US) were both deployed through social media.

This article discusses the interaction between mass media and social media in conflict contexts and the risk associated with normalising hate speech. It does so by

THUS, WHILE SOCIAL MEDIA AND MASS MEDIA APPEAR UBIQUITOUS, LITTLE RESEARCH HAS BEEN CONDUCTED TO EXAMINE HOW TRADITIONAL MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACT IN FUELLING ETHNIC CONFLICT

examining the case of the ongoing conflict and ethnic tensions in Ethiopia. The article begins by presenting the context for the emergence of armed conflict in Ethiopia in 2020, and then it examines the role of social media and mass media in fuelling tensions. Finally, the article discusses the centrality of social media in ongoing and future armed conflicts.

The Tensions Leading to Armed Conflict

The underlying causes of Ethiopia's current armed conflict are linked to what is known as 'the nationalities question', which has been a major point of contention for Ethiopian central governments since Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913) established modern Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century.[4] Following the expansion of the Ethiopian State to include most present-day southwestern, southeastern, and southern territories, the emergence of modern Ethiopia involved the cultural, political, and economic subordination of different nationalities. The failure of successive regimes to implement policies aimed at integrating newly incorporated ethnic groups into the centre of power has informed the grievances and tensions that emerged with the proliferation of nationalist movements. This calls into question the concept of a single Ethiopian nation, as well as Ethiopian nationalism.

After the overthrow of the military regime in 1991 by a coalition of various ethnic-based armed groups, the nationalities question was addressed in the 1995 Constitution, which granted the various nationalities of the country the unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession (Federal Constitution, Art. 39(1)).[5] This provision was framed within an ethnic-based federal system that hoped to put an end to authoritarian and centralised governance structures, while strengthening representation within various ethnic groups.

However, disagreements remained over the role of the ethnic federal system in resolving the nationalities question after 1995. Opponents of the federal system argue that the

PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER - ETHIOPIA

Abiy Ahmed Ali has been Prime Minister of Ethiopia since 2 April 2018.

federal model did not help resolve the nationalities question, but rather exacerbated ethnic tensions, and that the very foundations of national unity and territorial integrity could be eroded. Supporters of the ethnic-based federal system, on the other hand, claim that the governance system does not provide regions with meaningful autonomy and power over political and economic decisions. The latter group advocated for greater regional autonomy, and they were the main driving force behind protests in the Oromia region, which resulted in a government change and Abiy Ahmed Ali coming to power in 2018. Abiy faced the difficult task of balancing the demands of groups that supported the ethnic federal system (for example, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)) and those who opposed it (mainly the Amhara and urban elites).

In the era of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), political parties that were not organised along ethnic lines were pushed out of the political space and were vilified as supporters of the hegemonic old empire. The EPRDF also successfully pushed out its challengers among ethnically organised political parties, including the OLF, by labelling them 'terrorist' organisations. Similar tensions surfaced after Abiy took power in 2018.

Abiy initially enjoyed considerable support from the TPLF, as seen in his re-election as Prime Minister in October 2018. The conflict emerged after several prominent former-TPLF members were imprisoned in connection with different corruption scandals. The TPLF leaders argued that Abiy's anti-corruption efforts were manipulated to target Tigrayans. These tensions escalated with the formation of a new political coalition, the Prosperity Party, at the end of 2019 and the TPLF's refusal to join the new party, claiming that the process of dissolution of the EPRDF was unconstitutional. The TPLF and other political parties opposed the formation of the Prosperity Party, claiming that it would consolidate the central government's power and erode the existing ethnic federal structure and the power of parties representing the interests of different ethnic groups. Tensions mounted with the postponement of the elections in 2020 and reached their

THE CONFLICT EMERGED AFTER SEVERAL PROMINENT FORMER-TPLF MEMBERS WERE IMPRISONED IN CONNECTION WITH DIFFERENT CORRUPTION SCANDALS

zenith in the emergence of the war in the Tigray region in November 2020, following an alleged attack by TPLF forces on an Ethiopian army base in northern Tigray.

The Risk of Social Media and Mass Media Fuelling Ethnic Violence

The role of social media and mass media in fuelling tensions emerged before 2020. Different political groups have used mass media to push their narrative that other groups are a threat to the unity and continuation of the country following tensions around the shape of the State, leading to a highly polarised political environment. Social media further interacted with the political context and pre-existing tensions. It also interacted with the structure and the nature of the broadcasting landscape in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has a history of a lack of independent media, a legacy of the Derg regime which followed a communist model of State-centralised information. The transition away from the Derg regime after the 1990s brought several changes, but the symbiosis between the State and media outlets continued. As a result, the State continues to have a strong hold on mass media outlets via its control and influence over mass media broadcasting channels. Despite being classified as public broadcasters, official media outlets, such as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the Ethiopian News Agency, and other outlets, are thus mainly used to support the central government's communication strategy.[6]

This is why, during the early stages of the conflict, the Ethiopian government was extremely effective in establishing a media blackout. The imposition of a media blackout in the areas where clashes occurred made it difficult to report on the armed conflict beyond what was broadcast by government-controlled media outlets. Therefore, when federal forces claimed victory in July 2021, the claim was not contested. The gradual discovery of the Eritrean forces' involvement in human rights abuses, as well as the advancement of Tigrayan forces into the neighbouring Amhara and Afar states during 2021, illustrates the dissonance between the claims of the government and the reality faced by civilians caught in the crossfire.

In this context of armed conflict and skewed representation of facts by the government and other warring parties, social media plays a central role in reinforcing or

YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

People watch a television broadcast of political news at a coffee shop in Mekele, the capital of the Tigray region, amid a phone, electricty and power blackout (1 July 2021).

PHOTO BY JONATHAN ALPEYRIE. LICENSED UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS

The Tigray Defence Force and the Oromo Liberation Army captured of the strategic cities of Dessie and Kombolcha in 2021.

incepting new narratives. While Internet access is available to only around 25% of the population,[7] the role of social media has become extremely important and visible in the ongoing conflict. Social media is an important tool to access information given the media blackouts. Not only have social media platforms been used to denounce human rights abuses in Ethiopia, but they have also become a tool that allows different armed actors to create, influence or reinforce narratives of events associated with the armed conflict.

The importance of social media and its capacity to influence mass media and narratives of the conflict is illustrated by the developments following the announcement by the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) of the capture of the strategic cities of Dessie and Kombolcha (about 260 km from Addis Ababa) in 2021. After these announcements, rumours quickly spread on social media claiming that the federal forces were defeated due to the role of Tigrayan civilian 'sleeper cells' in providing information to the TDF.

Following these rumours, civilians of Tigrayan origin living outside of Tigray were labelled 'sleeper cells' on many social media channels. Such allegations are also being used, albeit to a lesser extent, to demonise civilians of other ethnic origins, such as the Oromos. It is in this context that some social media influencers openly discussed the possibility of executing all Tigrayans, while others on social media have called for Tigrayans to be in internment, similar to the US concentration camps for Japanese Americans.[8]

These narratives have been endorsed by high-ranking government officials who stated that there are sleeper cells in many parts of the country. For example, Daniel Kibret, the Prime Minister's Social Advisor, stated that federal forces lost in Dessie and Kombolcha because 'there are a large number of traitors in these areas when compared to other regions'.[9] Such narratives are widely disseminated not only on social media, but also through government-affiliated mass media outlets (including television) that report the statements of politicians, thereby legitimising the messages generated on social media.

Social media and mass media have also co-created narratives that justify action against certain groups in the conflict, such as the mass arrest of Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa and other cities following the accusations about the existence of sleeper cells.[10] The arrest of Ethiopians of Tigrayan origin took place after media personality Mesay Mekonnen used Facebook to request that the government intern all Tigrayans.[11]

The interaction between social media and mass media is bidirectional as the government has used social media to broadcast messages after the declaration of a state of emergency. Following the declaration, the slogans 'አካባቢህን ጠብቅ' [Watch your neighbourhoods], 'ወደ ግንባር ዝመት' [Join the military], and 'መከላከያን ደግፍ' [Support the military] have been broadcast through the mass media and on social media daily. The announcement of a new social media platform just for Ethiopians to be developed by the government[12] illustrates that social media is not a neutral platform in the context of armed conflict. It is also not seen as such by parties who use social media as a tool to stigmatise civilians from different ethnicities as potential suspects and incite violence along ethnic lines.

The Centrality of Social Media Platforms in Armed Conflict

An empirical examination of the relationship between communication technologies and political violence in 24 African countries revealed that the expansion of social media is associated with an increase in the incidence of collective violence.[13] One possible explanation for these empirical findings is that the expansion of social media allows for the reinforcement of identarian discourses, making divisive rhetoric and social segregation easier to produce.

While there is a greater understanding of the role of social media in facilitating violent acts, social media platforms continue to fail to identify and block incitements to violence in a timely manner. This is especially problematic in the case of non-English languages. In Ethiopia, social media is used to promote violence openly, such as the elimination of various groups. This is extremely dangerous in a civil war because the conflict has the potential to escalate into mass atrocities and genocide.[14] The case of Ethiopia also highlights the need for conflict researchers to look at the interaction between social media and mass media and their role in fuelling narratives that are used to justify or incite violence against civilians.

Although some social media platforms are now removing some of these messages inciting violence and blocking some of the accounts for spreading hate speech after the denunciation by several actors, the original posts in Amharic

YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Ethiopian refugees who fled the Tigray conflict watch a news website on a smartphone at the Border Reception Centre in Hamdayet, Sudan (8 December 2020).

PHOTO BY BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

Protestors in Ethiopia call for internet service, that was shut down on 30 June 2020, to be restored in the country (8 July 2020).

have already been widely shared across various platforms (for example, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Telegram). This is, therefore, not only a problem of enforcement, but also a problem of moderation on social media channels. In fact, community standards for social media platforms, such as Facebook, are not available in Amharic and other major languages in Ethiopia, making enforcement even more difficult.

There is limited effort by social media companies to take responsibility for the use of social media platforms as a tool for inciting violence, under the argument that those inciting violence are the users of such platforms and not the platforms themselves. Social media tools are products, and as such, their creators should be held accountable. While it is difficult to predict how actors intend to use social media to incite violence, companies' inaction to curb the incitement of violence is also analogous to plane manufacturers being warned of unsafe planes and failing to take corrective action.

Aside from social media companies, governments bear responsibility for the development of policies aimed at promoting social cohesion, combating hate speech, and protecting vulnerable groups during conflicts. While Ethiopian lawmakers enacted the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation in March 2020, many individuals and government-related organisations that posted hate speech have not faced repercussions, despite inciting violence.[15]

A need remains to understand the role of governments in incepting narratives that lead to tensions. This has been observed in other armed conflicts before the emergence of social media, for example, in the Rwandan genocide. Yet in a context in which media (social and mass) is mostly controlled by the State, as in Ethiopia, there is the inescapable outcome that these tools will serve the discourse and the narrative that the State chooses to wield, whether it is a discourse of reconciliation or of violence and hatred. In such cases, even when social media platforms aim to protect their users from hate speech, they will hardly be able to outweigh the messages of a State, especially when the State aims to have its own social media platform.

Conclusion

Conflicts, whether armed or nonviolent, are connected to the societies in which they take place. This highlights the importance of reflecting on the cultural and technological aspects informing the way armed conflicts unfold. The case of the ongoing armed conflict in Ethiopia since 2020 illustrates the interaction between mass media and social media, and the role of recent media platforms in armed conflict. Technology is not bad or good per se; its effects

depend on how technology is acted upon by different actors. The case of Ethiopia illustrates how the pernicious feedback between social media and mass media can fuel ethnic tensions via hate speech and narratives that justify violence along ethnic lines.

Hate speech and violence justifying narratives within armed conflicts are not new; however, the way in which they are being deployed operates via new channels and platforms. The transition from newspapers, television and radio to broadcasting violence-inciting narratives via memes, YouTube videos, WhatsApp message chains, and Facebook posts illustrates this.

Mass media and social media connect State and society. The case of Ethiopia highlights the need for conflict and peace researchers to examine the interaction between social media and mass media. The role of social media in influencing mass media and the different narratives associated with conflict is an area of research that needs more attention from conflict researchers and peacebuilders across the globe. Whether it be the escalation of violence or the promise of peace, social media will continue to be central in the Ethiopian conflict and other conflicts across the world.

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WHY INTEGRATE NATIONAL PEACE STRUCTURES? BUILDING COMMUNITY PLATFORMS FOR RESILIENCE, EARLY WARNING AND DIALOGUE

BY **BERNARD HUNVOUNOPWA BASASON**

REUTERS/FEISAL OMAR

Introduction

In the last two decades, West Africa has become an incubator for violent conflict whose origins are mostly believed to be rooted outside the region. The current climate of poverty, unemployment, under-development, poor governance, human rights abuses, repression, unprecedented delays and denial of access to justice, and ongoing conflicts have made West Africa a breeding ground for terrorism. The spread of terrorism across the region has intensified exponentially over the past 20 years more than any other time in the history of the region.

Terrorism is a major security challenge for Africa as a whole, considering the rising number of attacks, the multiplicity of active terror networks, and the growing links between and among terror groups. Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) are some of the deadliest terrorist organisations that are still highly active in Africa. They constantly mutate into incognito networks, and their actions are also labelled as banditry or cattle rustling, among others, in Nigeria. Terrorism is violence without borders, and its dynamics are highly

Above: Terrorism is violence without borders, and its dynamics are highly unpredictable.

REUTERS/ZANAH MUSTAPHA

Boko Haram militants embrace Boko Haram prisoners who were recently released in exchange for a group of 82 Chibok girls, who were held captive for three years by the militants, near Kumshe, Nigeria (6 May 2017).

unpredictable, especially with the skill and ingenuity with which terrorist organisations conceal their real identities.

Thus, over the last two decades, the African peace agenda has been dominated by debates on terrorist conflict prevention. The post-Cold War era has witnessed a paradigm shift from conflict management to conflict prevention in Africa. While conflict management focuses on armed aspects of conflict, conflict prevention envisions containing and resolving latent or brewing conflicts by responding to signals and indicators. The shortcomings of the reactionary rather than proactive nature of conflict management approaches essentially necessitated a shift from conflict management to conflict prevention.

The scourge of violent conflict is often fuelled by a scarcity of resources, inequality, an uneven distribution of power, injustice, grievances, and oppression, among other causes. The costs of violent conflicts are estimated not only in terms of the deaths and casualties and even the economic costs borne by the people involved, but also the social, developmental, environmental, and strategic costs of conflict. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), Oxfam, and Safeworld estimated that from 1990 to 2007, African economies lost about US$300bn to armed conflicts.[1] Research estimates from Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, and Uganda project an annual loss of US$18bn.[2]

ECOWAS' renewed vigour in ensuring a smoother transition to peace within the region in the wake of incessant uprisings, political impasses, communal conflicts, insurrections, and terrorism, among others, has necessitated multi-sectoral approaches to mitigate and address the current climate of insecurity. This new thinking embeds in it the concept of Infrastructures for Peace.

THE SCOURGE OF VIOLENT CONFLICT IS OFTEN FUELLED BY A SCARCITY OF RESOURCES, INEQUALITY, AN UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, INJUSTICE, GRIEVANCES, AND OPPRESSION, AMONG OTHER CAUSES

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Infrastructures for Peace refers to 'a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation, prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society'.[3]

As simple as the concept of Infrastructures for Peace may appear, it is, in fact, quite complicated with various definitions and schools of thought. This article tries to underscore the basic elements that underpin a host of seemingly interwoven and slightly divergent perspectives on the concept. This article refers to Infrastructures for Peace as organically derived systems stemming from responses to unique conflict contexts, which have the potential to deescalate or manage tensions. Ideally, Infrastructures for Peace aim to synchronise all levels of society to form a unique 'platform for constructive relationship-building between relevant stakeholders. It reflects an inclusivity that challenges the traditional notions of official peace actors, incorporating local and grassroots actors in addition to conflict parties and other state actors'.[4]

In traditional African societies, community leaders play a pivotal role in establishing community platforms that serve multiple purposes, including townhall functions, mediation and dialogues, sensitisation and awareness-raising, early warning and response, and information hubs, among others. Other community actors, such as religious leaders, community-based association leaders, government officials, security actors, and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), may also be involved.

History presents good opportunities to learn from and to plan in anticipation of the future. The Boko Haram insurgency that has engulfed much of the Northeast

IDEALLY, INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE AIM TO SYNCHRONISE ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY TO FORM A UNIQUE 'PLATFORM FOR CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING BETWEEN RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

REUTERS/CHRISTOPHER BLACK/WHO/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

In traditional African societies, community leaders play a pivotal role in establishing community platforms that serve multiple purposes, including townhalls, mediation and dialogues, sensitisation and awareness-raising, early warning and response, and so on.

REUTERS/KOLAWOLE ADEWALE

There is significant damage at a camp for displaced people in Dalori, Nigeria, following an attack by Boko Haram (1 November 2018).

and parts of the Northwest of Nigeria since 2009 is one such historical example. Whether or not it was entirely preventable is now a moot point. However, for us to prevent future such occurrences and to be able to respond more effectively to such violence, we need to draw lessons from the experience.

CEW PRIMARILY SEEKS TO FORECAST THE OUTBREAK OF ARMED CONFLICT OR, AT A MINIMUM, DETECT THE EARLY ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

What Can We Learn From the Experience of the Boko Haram Insurgency?

Responses to the Boko Haram insurgency were varied with accompanying different outcomes. For example, some communities were completely overtaken and subdued by the insurgents (low resilience). Other communities were able to recover after the shock to re-establish some normalcy (moderately resilient). Yet, in some cases, the insurgents were either routed out or never given the space to operate by the communities (highly resilient).

The manner in which communities responded to conflict early warning (CEW) and the outcomes of such responses were shaped by community resilience and coping strategies, which will be discussed in greater detail.

Understanding the Triad: Conflict Early Warning, Community Resilience, and Dialogue

Conflict Early Warning

CEW entails a systematic and mutually reinforcing routine that ranges from gathering early warning information about an impending conflict and risk analysis to information dissemination and formulating nuanced response actions or strategies. The steps are highly interdependent, and thus a failure in one step undermines the success of the steps to follow. CEW primarily seeks to forecast the outbreak of armed conflict or, at a minimum, detect the early escalation of violence. The objective is to prevent the outbreak or further escalation of violence and thus save lives.[5] Mobile phones, social media, crowdsourcing, crisis mapping, blogging, and big data analytics are increasingly being used in early warning and early response.[6] Unlike traditional intelligence, which also collects and analyses information and communicates the results, the objective of early warning is not primarily security for oneself or one's community,

but the security of another; in early warning, security is not self-directed.

Community Resilience

Community resilience is the ability of communities to adjust to their realities when faced with circumstances, events, and issues that could cause adversity. They do so by taking the required actions to maintain an acceptable level of capacity, function, and structure. Highly resilient communities are characterised by robust social networks and systems that support recovery after adversity. The most embracing definition of the term is given by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) as 'the ability of a system to reduce, prevent, anticipate, absorb and adapt or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner'.[7] In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency as a case study, community resilience refers to the way communities were able to resist, recover, or cope with the situation by establishing some levels of normalcy under abnormal situations. Community resilience is inherent in all societies; that is, every community has some form of resilience.

Key components and indicators of a framework to measure community resilience include:

- **Community Capacity** – includes quality of leadership, resource mobilisation, networking, partnership, infrastructure development, problem assessment, joint problem solving, and so on.
- **Community Strength** – is determined by socio-economic power, environmental endowment or assets, organisational structures, community attitudes, and the ability to galvanise support when needed.
- **Social Cohesion** – characterised by features of social organisation, such as trust, unity of purpose, reciprocity of kind gestures, favourable mutual norms, and networks.
- **Social Capital** – involves social interactions embodied in civic and religious groups, family memberships, informal community networks, and volunteerism.
- **Social Connectedness and Sense of Belonging** – feelings of belonging and attachment to people, places or social environments, such as family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, churches, and service providers, among others.
- **Community Participation** – involves engaging in non-essential activities and exposing people to others with shared interests, opening opportunities to initiate and strengthen friendships and widen social support networks.

REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE

Community resilience is inherent in all societies.

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Mobile phones, social media and crowdsourcing are increasingly being used in conflict early warning and early response.

- **Social Exclusion** – the process of being shut out from social, economic, political and cultural systems, which contributes to people's desire to be integrated into the community.
- **Dignity and Self-worth** – includes honour, honesty, reliability, decency, modesty, discipline, and sensibilities to the needs of fellow community members.

Community resilience can be dormant and often must be activated or enhanced. Proper engagement strategies can entrench trust in peacebuilding if suitable mechanisms are well integrated.

The increasing insecurity, collapse of local governance, and humanitarian effects of the Boko Haram crisis have further exacerbated socio-economic vulnerability and have torn the social fabric of communities, weakening their resilience and leaving them prone to recruitment and radicalisation by extremist groups. To confront these challenges, communities needed to become more resilient by promoting open dialogue that supports peaceful reintegration and reconciliation.

THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AFFECTED COMMUNITIES TO FOCUS ON THEIR OWN STRENGTHS AND CAPABILITIES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO THREATS OF VIOLENCE

Dialogue

There is an opportunity for affected communities to focus on their own strengths and capabilities to prevent and respond to threats of violence. An important component to this resilience is integrating all community-based and -owned early warning systems. These systems utilise communities' existing communication and security structures to gather information on early signs of tensions and violence and facilitate a coordinated response with state and national governments. Such monumental challenges will require cooperation and collaboration at all levels and from all segments of society, from community members and leaders to security actors and both state and national-level government officials. The common goal of integrating Infrastructures for Peace provides an

opportunity to foster new dynamics of collaboration and a new social contract between these stakeholders. This will also provide a foundation for future cooperation as attention turns to addressing other challenges that face these affected communities as they begin to recover and rebuild.

Integrating Infrastructures for Peace requires convening state and non-state actors, including civil society actors and traditional institutions that have the capacity to respond to early warning signs and signals, reformulate existing community practices as well as government policies, and advocate for new policies to address the underlying causes of violent conflicts. Every multistakeholder approach comes with challenges and questions, which include how mandates can be properly articulated and streamlined, what legislation is needed to legitimise the responses from the various actors in the Infrastructures for Peace framework, how transitions within the Infrastructures for Peace structure can be managed without altering the equilibrium of the system, and so on. A tested multistakeholder approach that has worked within the context of Northeast Nigeria is the Community Score Card (CSC) approach.[8] Broadly speaking, the CSC is a participatory, rural appraisal tool that helps distinguishable segments of the community jointly identify, analyse, prioritise, and harmonise thoughts on unmet community needs, relative to specific actors who have the wherewithal and capacity to address or render the relevant services expected from the local strategies developed to meet those unmet needs.

THE CSC APPROACH HELPS PARTICIPANTS JOINTLY EXPLORE AND UNEARTH HIDDEN NEEDS THAT ARE THE CORE DRIVERS OF LOCAL CONFLICTS IN AN ENGAGING AND NON-VIOLENT MANNER

Community Score Card Approach: A Veritable Multistakeholder Tool

The CSC approach helps participants jointly explore and unearth hidden needs that are the core drivers of local conflicts in an engaging and non-violent manner. Examples of such needs include material needs (shelter, food, water, clean environment, security, healthcare), social and relationship-based needs (respect, acceptance, appreciation, love, recognition, trust, connection,

REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE

Participants in communal peace talks and dialogue include local community members.

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In the Community Score Card Approach key informant interviews and focus group discussions are held with different stakeholders.

understanding, companionship), and individual needs (integrity, authenticity, meaning, self-worth, reputation, self-agency, autonomy, fun, intimacy, love). A denial or lack of one or a combination of these needs has the potential to ignite conflict.

The CSC is an excellent instrument used in engaging skilled and unskilled, technical and non-technical, learned and unlearned individuals in a typical community townhall setting to diagnose their problems with the sole purpose of finding sustainable local solutions through community action. It takes the community as its unit of analysis. The process involves targeting all actors within the spectrum of a given topical issue. For instance, in holding communal peace talks and dialogue, participants will include traditional institution members, local government officials, local council members, religious leaders, youth leaders, men, and women, among others, who belong to either the demand side (service users) and/or the supply side (service providers) with decision-makers and who jointly analyse issues and underlying service delivery challenges.[9] The issues analysed are rated on a scale of preference and in order of importance on a service user list which informs the service provider's priorities, with practical strategies arrived at as sustainable local solutions.

WITH THIS APPROACH, DATA COLLECTION TOOLS ARE USUALLY TAILORED TO SPECIFIC CATEGORIES OF STAKEHOLDERS AND SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY

CARExpertise states that the CSC 'is an exciting way to increase participation, accountability, and transparency between service users, providers, and decision-makers'.[10]

This approach specifically helps in better understanding and distilling stakeholders' perceptions and opinions about the various types of conflict that exist within their context, critical factors that drive conflict, key stakeholders in the conflict, current initiatives for managing the conflict, challenges faced by mediators, and the need for improved (re)conciliation and mediation. With this approach, data collection tools are usually tailored to specific categories of stakeholders and segments of the community. At each location of consultation, key informant interviews and focus group discussions are held with different stakeholders, namely, traditional community elders, government officials, religious leaders, women's groups, youth groups, security

actors, NSAGs, and so on. Thereafter, findings are validated at a more centralised location with key decision-makers present.

Operationalising the Infrastructures for Peace Framework using the Community Score Card Approach

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies notes that the local foundation of Infrastructures for Peace 'has oriented the framework towards a focus on internal capacities for addressing and resolving conflict, rather than on imposing outside approaches. Peacebuilding initiatives are derived from local practices and customs, and at times, elevated into national structures and agendas to facilitate more strategic and sustainable interventions'.[11]

The CSC approach can be applied in just about any type of consultation if properly facilitated to target the right range of stakeholders in a joint analysis and diagnosis of their community landscape. With this approach comes a proper roadmap that is continuously refined to keep the community vision alive. This approach also helps to capture the often-missing feedback loop in most governmental interactions with grassroots communities. Additionally, the approach encourages a positive attitude towards transformation among participants as they engage in building a future they desire.

For Infrastructures for Peace to thrive in sustaining peace and development, all the various levels of peace mechanisms must interact seamlessly in using stakeholder engagement tools, such as the CSC, to regularly convene and refine 'what works' versus 'what does not work'. This is accomplished in the spirit of joint ownership of processes and accountability, giving adequate visibility to the intricacies of what goes on behind the scenes in the entire spectrum of engagements.

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