The West African coup trap

A qualitative case study of military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea
Abstract

Africa is the continent having the most coups d'état. From 2020 to 2022, there were six coups and three coup attempts on the continent. This study aims to investigate the causes of these coups d'état in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea, four former French colonies in West Africa. A new theoretical framework has been developed to investigate this pattern. Indicators of political instability and economic factors are taken from earlier theories, but additional external impact and climate change factors have been incorporated. The method applied in this study is a comparative case study with few cases, combining theory testing, theory building, and theory consuming. The findings indicate that while GDP per capita has improved, it is still unequally distributed among the populace, with high unemployment among the young often leading to migration in search of opportunities. About a year prior to every coup, there has been an increase in political violence. In all four of the cases under investigation, climate change factors such as climate migration and violence resulting from scarcity are present along with disinformation campaigns by Russia, a strong anti-French sentiment, and public discontent with the way the government operates. Both economic factors and climate change factors are found to be closely connected to governance deficits.

Key Words

Coup d'état, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, External impact, Climate change, Political instability, France, Russia
Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Anders Persson, my supervisor, for his unwavering patience and support throughout the entirety of this project. His guidance has been invaluable, and I cannot overstate the importance of his steadfast mentorship. I am sincerely grateful for the significant time and guidance he has dedicated.
# Table of contents

1. The need for understanding contemporary coups d'état in West Africa  
   1.2 Research Question  
2. Previous Research on French Colonialism and Military Coups d'état in West Africa  
   2.1 A Crisis of Governance  
   2.3 Interdisciplinary Significance  
3. Method and material  
   3.1 Case Selection and Delimitation  
   3.2 Research Design  
   3.2.1 A Hybrid Approach  
   3.3 Material  
   3.4 Validity and Reliability  
4. Constructing a Theoretical Framework  
   4.1 Coup d'état  
   4.2 Theories of military coups d'état  
   4.2.1 Laying the Foundation  
   4.2.2 Military Centrality Theory  
   4.2.3 Economical Causes  
   4.2.4 Structural Causes  
   4.2.5 Triggers  
   4.3 Theoretical Framework: Economic Factors, Political Instability, External Impact, and Climate Change  
   4.4 Operationalization  
   4.4.1 Dimensions and Indicators  
5. Results: Applying the theoretical framework to the four cases  
   5.1 Economic Factors  
   5.2 Political Instability  
   5.3 External Impact  
   5.4 Climate Change  
6. Coups in Africa: What comes next?  
   6.1 Empirical Conclusion  
   6.1.1 Governance and Economy  
   6.1.2 Patterns of Violence  
   6.1.3 Russia and the Wagner Group  
   6.1.4 Climate Governance  
   6.2 Methodological Conclusion  
   6.4 Limitations, and Areas for Further Research  
7. References
List of Figures

Figure 1 - Map of military bases part of Operation Barkhane....................................6

Figure 2 - Number of coups d'état per year in Africa since 1950.......................8

Figure 3 - Coup belt .........................................................9

Figure 4 – GDP per capita in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea, 1990-2021........................................................................................................28

Figure 5– Gini coefficient in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea, 1991-2018........................................................................................................29

Figure 6 – Unemployment rate in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea, 1991-2021........................................................................................................30

Figure 7 – Number of Political Violence Events, 2019-2022.........................31

Figure 8 - Conceptual framework for migration, conflict, and climate ............38

List of Tables

Table 1 – Dimensions and Indicators .................................................................25-26

Table 2 – Coup dates .......................................................................................27

Table 3 – Military coups d'état and disinformation campaigns ....................34

Table 4 – Coups compared to spike in political violence events .................40
## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACLED</td>
<td>Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOI</td>
<td>Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5 Sahel</td>
<td>Joint Forces of the Group of Five (Mauretanien, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Tchad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISGS</td>
<td>Islamic State in the Greater Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNIM</td>
<td>Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINUSMA</td>
<td>United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNJTF</td>
<td>Multinational Joint Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNLA</td>
<td>Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCDP</td>
<td>Uppsala Conflict Data Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNOWAS</td>
<td>United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>The African Union Peace and Security Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The need for understanding contemporary coups d'état in West Africa

“Let me start with a few words about the succession of military coups we have seen in recent months, particularly on the African continent. Many countries face deep-seated governance challenges, but military governments are not the solution. They aggravate problems. They cannot resolve a crisis; they can only make it worse. I urge all countries to move quickly to establish credible democratic institutions and the rule of law.”

- (Guterres, 2023)

Africa has had more coups d'état than any other continent. In fact, since 2020, the continent has seen six coups d'état. Understanding the underlying motives and structures of these coups are crucial not only to understanding why they are occurring but also to understanding why they are occurring at this particular time. To study the trend of coups d'état in former French colonies in West Africa a new theoretical framework will be developed. The first two components are drawn from previous research on military coups, and is political instability and economic problems. The second two components of the theoretical framework will be external impact and climate change aspects since they were both absent from the existing theories on the subject. Next, in order to determine whether the components of the new theoretical framework are legitimate, it will be evaluated on the four cases that are being studied and compared to look for similarities or variations.

Between 2020 and 2022, the continent saw six coups and three coup attempts, a vast increase over the previous two decades (UNDP, 2023, p. 3). This research attempts to fill the gap in the existing literature on the topic by investigating the reasons behind the current wave of coups d'état and by developing a new theoretical framework. The literature currently available on
coup d'état neglects the variety of reasons that lead to political instability in the area. Although many theories mention economic aspects, a more thorough investigation of the economic aspects is required. This includes examining the impact of political instability and economic inequality in conjunction with concerns related to climate change and the possible effect of foreign actors. It could be necessary to do updated research that considers how the geopolitical environment is changing and how major world powers are affecting these countries' political stability. This study will focus on economic factors, political instability, external impact, and climate change which is the basis of the theoretical framework.

The population's dissatisfaction with the government's strategy to combat poverty and the precarious safety situation in West Africa is causing a democratic crisis due to inadequate institutions and inadequate socioeconomic well-being (Espelund, 2022, Espelund, 2023, Mbara and Graham, 2023, pp.101-102). Surveys indicate that most Africans still prefer democracy as their form of government, but public trust in democratic governance has decreased as a result of governments and elected leaders inability to live up to democratic expectations (UNDP, 2023; Afrobarometer Network, 2023, Afrobarometer, 2023b).

It is critical to recognize that there are multiple contributing factors to the instability in the area, including the rise of terrorist organizations, climate change, desertification, population expansion, and poor governance. The Sahara desert, for example, has been growing and spreading southward, encompassing about 554,000 square kilometers in the Sahel, causing small-scale farming to fall apart which is the understructure in most societies in the region (Friedman, 2017, Sköld, 2022). The safety issues in these countries also have roots in historical contexts of slavery, stigmatization of minorities, gender and social inequalities, creating political power imbalances that persist today. Historically, the governments of Burkina Faso,
Niger, and Mali have struggled to hold onto their political authority. Both Mali and Niger have faced Tuareg uprisings, the Tuaregs being a nomad ethnic group, driven by the lack of the groups political and social inclusion (Waugh, 2022, pp. 5-6, Gunnarson, 2020, p.14). In Niger, the motivations behind the uprisings were greater political and economic power over the extraction of natural resources, while in Mali, the motivations were independence (Gunnarson, 2020, p.14). The 2012 Mali uprisings led by the Tuareg-led Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), acted as a trigger for further significant developments that are considered a contributing reason to the nation's coup d'état. The occupation of a large portion of the region by Islamist organizations associated with Al-Qaeda, who fiercely opposed MNLA, led to French military interventions (Waugh, 2022, p. 6, Gunnarson, 2020, p.14). Across previously French-colonized Africa, military coups d'état have become increasingly common in recent years. It is critical to address the lack of action taken against Islamist terrorists in nations such as Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as this has created an atmosphere conducive to military coups d'état. Western military assistance has not been able to stabilize the situation and juntas continuously use this as a justification for the coups d'état (Lupulescu, 2021).

1.2 Research Question

This study aims to investigate factors contributing to military coups d'état in former French colonies in West Africa, specifically Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. It will not involve Sudan, as it is not a former French colony, nor will it include Gabon or Chad, as both are in Central Africa. Research on the topic of military coups d'état in Africa is broad and involves numerous components. The research questions that follow offer distinct perspectives on the subject, and the choice of question will affect how the study turns out (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 37).
- How can economic factors, political instability, external impact, and climate change help explain military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea?

To answer this question, the main research question will therefore be answered by four sub-questions based on the theoretical framework:

- How do variables such as GDP per capita, unemployment rate, and income inequality influence the likelihood of military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea?

- How do political instability variables such as political violence correlate with military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea?

- How does the external impact of Russia, and France affect the upswing of military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea?

- How do the climate migration and vulnerabilities to climate change affect instability in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea?
2. Previous Research on French Colonialism and Military Coups d'etat in West Africa

This chapter will review earlier studies on France and its ties to its former colonies, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. It will then discuss the region's governance crisis.

France has a complicated and extensive relationship with Africa that dates back to the colonial era, despite that, it appears that France is losing ground in Africa, and the population is becoming more and more supportive of a strong anti-colonialist and anti-French sentiment (Lupulescu, 2021).

Considering how long France has dominated the area, one may wonder why this is happening now. The frequency of coups in the area is linked to deficiencies in democratic governance and the government's inability to enact legislation that advances liberty, safety, and progress. French foreign policy protects French interests at the expense of local communities, which has contributed to the region's anti-French attitude (Ngima and Kasambala, 2023).

Furthermore, France maintains close political, economic, and military relations with its former colonies. The presence of France has led to it having a big area of impact, contributing to its position as a global actor in the region. France now has access to critical resources like uranium and oil as well as markets that are advantageous to its businesses (Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020). The relationship between the former French colonial power and the African nations remained solid and even strengthened, as the transition of power following colonization was mostly peaceful. It is common to refer to this connection as "la Françafrique" (Chafer, 2005). The main area of French military action in Africa is Francophone West and Central Africa, and security plays a significant role in French foreign policy in the region. Examples of this interaction include military agreements,
bases, and several military operations (Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020, p. 25).

**Figure 1** Map of military bases part of Operation Barkhane

![Map of military bases part of Operation Barkhane](image)

(Source: Zoubir, 2022)

The French military has been fighting terrorist groups that are active in the Sahel region through Operation Barkhane. Nonetheless, President Emmanuel Macron declared in February 2022 that France was ending its military presence in Mali, and the final French soldiers departed the country in August of the same year (Gunnarson and Körling, p. 26, 2023, Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020, p. 26, Mbara and Graham, 2023 p. 104). There were several explanations for this sudden change. Mali had a strong anti-French sentiment in addition to strengthening ties with Russia and the presence of the Russian Wagner group in the country. French soldiers have been employed through Operation Barkhane in Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina
2.1 A Crisis of Governance

People struggle to decide what matters most in their lives when they have little money, and this has caused both new and old divisions in West African society. An increase in crime and violence has created a gap that neither the regional state nor the international responses have been able to fill (Bøås, 2019). The governments in the Sahel region have failed to demonstrate any huge improvement in terms of development, reduced poverty, or heightened security (Espelund, 2022). It is critical to comprehend the underlying causes of these coups because there is a chance that the African states that have recently suffered coups d'état may be much more vulnerable to similar coups in the future (Singh, 2022, p. 86). The unsettling pattern of military coups d'état in the area, as of August of this year, Gabon is the most recent country to experience one, followed by Niger in July 2023, Burkina Faso in 2022, Tchad, Guinea, and Mali in 2020, makes it a crucial subject to study (Ngima and Kasambala, 2023). There was a reduction in coups d'état after the end of the Cold War, and this reduction has been praised globally. Recent coup events in West Africa tell us that this trend has turned (Mbara and Graham, 2023 p. 92). The concerning trend that has emerged in the former French colonies in West Africa began in Mali in 2020 when Malian colonels ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Nine months later, Assimi Goita, who had been appointed vice president following the first coup d'état, ousted President Bah N'daw in a countercoup. The following year, 2021, Guinean special forces commander Colonel Mamady Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Conde following the President's decision to alter the constitution allowing him to sit for a third term. Burkina Faso saw two coups d'état in 2022. President Roch Kabore was overthrown by the army in January on the grounds that he had failed the people by not stopping Islamist unrest. After a
second coup in September, Paul Henri-Damiba was overthrown by Captain Ibrahim Traoré (AJlabs, 2023, Mbara and Graham, 2023 pp. 91-115, Singh, 2022, pp. 74-75). On July 26 2023 Niger was struck by a coup d'état when President Mohamed Bazoum was overthrown by the military (AJlabs, 2023, Mbara and Graham, 2023 pp. 91-115, Center for Preventive Action, 2023).

**Figure 2.** Number of coups d'état per year in Africa since 1950

![A Renewed Wave of Coups in Africa?](source)

( Source: Fleck, 2023)

2.3 Interdisciplinary Significance

To fill a gap in the literature on military coups d'état in the area as a whole, this study examines Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger from an empirically grounded starting point (Patel and Davidson, 2003, p. 36). To do this, a new framework will be created, and its constituent parts will be evaluated in the chosen research countries. This section of the paper will emphasize the research problem's interdisciplinary significance.
For the object of study to be relevant it needs to be connected to the social debate (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p.31). Lately, the region is referred to by many as having a coup belt as illustrated by the figure below.

**Figure 3** Coup belt

(Source: Ferragamo, 2023)

A subject of study can be interesting in a way that it will contribute to the growth of knowledge of the subject and it can be interesting because it will supply practical benefits for future studies (Esaiasson et al., 2017, pp. 32-33, Patel and Davidson, 2019 p.58). This study is essential in both ways. Increasing our understanding of the situation in West Africa and spreading that understanding will advance our understanding of the subject and may even prove useful for future research. A scientific problem is a question where a knowledge gap can be found, in other words, the area of examination needs further understanding (Bjereld et al., 1999). This study is significant because it will offer an innovative framework for future research on the topic that takes into account external impact and climate change variables.
3. Method and material

The selected methodology, research design, research materials, and study delimitations will all be presented in the upcoming chapter. Furthermore, the validity and reliability will be discussed in the final part of the section.

3.1 Case Selection and Delimitation

It is easy to slip into the trap of choosing examples where specific results are already known, hence selection bias must be taken into account (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 23–24). A researcher may select specific cases because of a desire to support their beliefs more than others or because they are committed to a particular theory (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 51). The research cases will be chosen using a combination of historical and geographic factors to prevent this form of bias.

The cases in this study are military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea and there is a pressing need to identify the underlying causes of the current spike in military coups d'état in West Africa and the Sahel region. Coups have been regarded as a thing of the past in Africa, however, the trend has clearly turned. Some scholars blame this new trend on rising social and economic pressures and weakened popular trust in democratic systems of government (Mbara and Graham, 2023 p. 92), however, Burkina Faso's and Mali's citizens are divided between supporting democracy and authoritarian alternatives. While a majority supports democracy, a significant portion supports the army's takeover due to personal gain. Both countries have a strong faith in the military, but a significant portion still favors democracy over alternative political systems according to the most recent Afrobarometer study (Afrobarometer, 2023, Coulibaly, Logan, and Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). In addition to the widespread dissatisfaction with elected leaders and their inability to provide for the citizens, a significant amount of foreign military personnel has been positioned around the region to address multiple interrelated political, economic, and security challenges. The United Nations
(UN), the European Union (EU), France, and the United States are among these foreign players. Furthermore, to combat the Islamist group Boko Haram, ad hoc security measures such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Joint Forces of the Group of Five (G5 Sahel) have been established (UNDP, 2023, pp. 56-57). The effectiveness of these solutions has been hotly debated in light of the ongoing growth and dissemination of security vulnerabilities. The Wagner Group has operations in the area, which has increased the complexity of the security risks there. Mali's cooperation with the Wagner Group is seen as a display of anti-French sentiment, exacerbated by competition for the main external power (UNDP, 2023, p.57).

Many studies have been conducted on the topic of military coups d'état, but they all overlook crucial elements. This study is significant because it will offer an innovative framework for future research on the topic that takes into account external impact and climate change variables. Furthermore, military coups d'état are multifaceted events with origins from multiple factors and the need for more research on the subject is crucial. Data from a new report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that there is a connection between increased coup risk and continuing insecurity in the region. The UNDP report highlights factors such as slow development, unequal monetary authority, poverty, inequality, manipulated constitutional terms, low participation rates, governance deficiencies, and increased military spending as driving regional coups (UNDP, 2023, p. 3). This study will not include countries outside West Africa nor countries that are not former French colonies, nor will the research include factors such as party systems. When operationalized, the study's timescale will prevent it from covering every facet of every indication, necessitating some degree of research narrowing.
3.2 Research Design
This study will be a qualitative comparative case study with few countries under study making it possible to employ less abstract concepts that are rooted in the particular situations under examination (Landman, 2003, p. 24). It is case-oriented since the countries are the units of study. This study will use a combination of most similar systems design (MSSD) and most different systems design (MDSD) to provide a comprehensive understanding while considering both similarities and differences. Finding patterns and similarities among the cases is the objective, which makes MSSD a good option. West African nations that were formerly French colonies have comparable historical, cultural, and economic backgrounds, although this does not cancel out the existence of unique characteristics and the possibility of some differences making a combination of both systems suitable (Landman, 2003, pp. 29-34). This study is a case study because the research questions are structured as how and why-type questions (Yin, 2018, p.234). It will combine elements from theory-testing, theory-consuming, and theory-development to give a more nuanced insight into the subject and contribute to existing theories. The study is explanatory since it answers questions of why and how (Yin, 2018, p.10). The theoretical framework is developed deductively to fill a theoretical gap about military coups d'état and a list of potential theoretical variables is developed early in the theory creation process (George and Bennett, 2005, pp. 239-240). When using a deductive theory, the researcher generates one or more hypotheses based on theoretical considerations and prior knowledge about the topic or theory, which are then put to an empirical test, in this case, four indicators that are translated into research questions. The theory and the hypotheses that have been deducted from it then guide the collection of data (Bryman, 2011, p. 47).
3.2.1 A Hybrid Approach

A theory testing study involves the researcher testing one or more theories against empirical data using specific hypotheses. The theory is either strengthened or weakened by the conclusions that can be made. It is also possible to find that one theory works better than another. The theory is at the core of a theory-testing case study and it is important to be very selective and deliberate about the cases chosen to test the theory. In a theory-consuming study on the other hand a specific case serves as the focal point. The researcher aims to explain what occurred in this particular example using explanatory factors and already existing theories (Esaiasson et al. 2017, pp. 40-41). Theory testing and theory-consuming studies are fairly similar since they both have explanatory ambitions and the theory is in place from the start (Esaiasson et al. 2017 p. 89). In a theory-developing study, the empirical analysis is thought to result in new explanations for the phenomena under study. The goal here is to create a new theory or to refine existing ones (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 42). Achieving high conceptual validity and performing theory-developing studies are two advantages of the case study method (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 19).

In this paper, a hybrid approach is going to be used. Existing theories on military coups d'état are going to be examined thoroughly to establish a foundation for the study. Based on the findings and gaps identified in the theories a new theoretical framework is going to be constructed, with recommended revisions and additions. Then the new theoretical framework will be tested against the specific cases of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea. The new theoretical framework aims to add to the body of knowledge regarding military coups d'état by proposing additional explanatory factors and to see if prior studies on military coups have overlooked if external influences and climate change factors can have an impact on military coups among the countries (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 112).
3.3 Material

This essay examines four distinct indicators of military coups d'état in four former French colonies: Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali. The material that is used in this study is a combination of primary sources and secondary sources. Materials from earlier studies on military coups d'état by Robert W. Jackman, Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofers, John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole, Taeko Hiroi and Sawa Omori, Alper H. Yagci, T. Y. Wang, and Naunihal Singh will be gathered for the theoretical framework. It is crucial to invest time and energy in gathering research information. The majority of the data used in the study came from documents. The documents used in the data collection of this study are Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reports and datasets, UNDPs Soldiers and Citizens, different reports from Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI), The Center of Preventive Actions Global Conflict Tracker, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) country data. Documentation is regarded as stable and has often gone through many reviews. It frequently includes the precise names, citations, and information on a phenomenon or event. It is crucial to understand, though, that documentation can be biased and that access to some materials may be purposefully restricted. Documentation can be several different things but for this study reports, formal studies, and articles are mostly used (Yin, 2018, pp. 114-115). Since the information gathered from documentation can be biased it is important to look at a lot of different sources and evaluate the information thoroughly. The material in this study will also include archival records such as public use files, maps, charts, and survey data (Yin, 2018, pp. 117-118). The significance of assessing the information remains unchanged, regardless of the amount of data acquired (Yin, 2018, pp. 117-118, Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 226).
Throughout the entire study, it is imperative to remain conscious about bias. There will always be some bias from a researcher who has congenital privileges and who was raised in a Western democracy. This is recognized, and information will be acquired from reliable sources in addition to current theories and methods, objectivity is also essential because it increases validity (Esaiasson et al. 2017 p. 64).

3.4 Validity and Reliability
A research design's quality can be assessed using specific logical tests; reliability, construct validity, internal validity, and external validity. The first test is construct validity and this can according to Yin (2018) be quite challenging. The task is to identify correct operational measures for the concepts under study and subjective judgments should be used to collect data. This can be accomplished in two steps, first, describe the topic, the causes of military coups d'état in this case, in terms of certain concepts, and then connect those concepts to the study's initial goals. Finding operational measures that align with the concepts is the second phase. These operational indicators will be taken from the new theoretical framework in this study (Yin, 2018, pp. 42-44). According to Esaiasson et al (2017), there are two forms of validity, concept validity and result validity. Accurate result validity is produced by combining strong concept validity with high reliability, in other words, the researcher can assess what is intended to be measured when there are no systemic or nonsystemic mistakes. For a study to have high validity, concept validity, and reliability need to be assured. A high degree of concept validity requires coherence between the operational indicators and the theoretical definition (Esaiasson et al. 2017, pp. 58-59). This study aims to prevent errors in theoretical notions by first translating the dimensions of causes of military coups d'état into indicators, which are subsequently operationalized through an operational chart where each indicator is translated into measurable operationalizations. Examining a study's external
validity involves determining whether or not the results are generalizable (Yin, 2018, pp. 42-47). Research should be able to make broad generalizations about a subject's general patterns or recurring connections (Esiassions et al., 2017, p. 28). Though some study components may be able to be generalized, theory-consuming studies do not aim to generalize their findings (Esiassions et al., 2017, pp. 89–90). The case study technique gives the study great conceptual validity by allowing the researcher to identify and measure the indicators that most closely match and represent the theoretical concepts under study (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 19). It is vital to operationalize the theoretical concepts by translating them into indicators. Weak concept validity occurs when there is a discrepancy between the theoretical concepts and the empirical indications. The research will repeatedly highlight the same structural issue throughout the study if the concept validity is insufficient (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 59).
4. Constructing a Theoretical Framework

This section of the paper will review previous research on coups d'état to build a new theoretical framework that includes components that previous research neglected. To give a thorough review of the ideas behind military coups d'état and their contribution to our understanding of the events, it will first provide a brief description of coups d'état before presenting the theories chronologically.

4.1 Coup d'état

This paper defines a coup d'état as an unlawful attempt to overthrow an incumbent by a military organization or other elite group. Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne (2011) compared the definitions of coups provided by fourteen different scholars. To summarize their findings, they found that most coups involve the threat or use of violence as a tactic, that the regime, chief executive, or government is the target of the coup, and that military personnel, mercenaries, or political elites carry out the coup (Powell and Thyne, 2011, pp. 250-252). In this study the perpetrators are the military juntas, however, it is important to recall that the military juntas can be acting under the influence of civilian members of the government or foreign actors.

An additional important point to which Powell and Thyne's (2011) analysis makes a significant contribution is that a coup d'état cannot exist unless the methods used to oust the government were carried out illegally (Powell and Thyne, 2011, pp. 250-252). Singh (2022) describes a coup attempt in three different ways. The first one is that coup attempts are like battles, to be thought of as a miniature invasion of a country performed by its military. The second is that a coup attempt can be compared with referendums on the continued rule of the incumbent, conducted by the own military (Singh, 2022, p. 15). The final and third explanation is that one could view a coup as a sort of military chess match or a coordination game. An officer will consider the risks and expenses of taking a side, if the incumbent is
unjustified, there will be a justification for their removal, if the challenger is on the losing side and a risk of escalating the conflict exists, it will not be worth the risk. Singh (2022) argues that the military will back the contenders they believe have the strongest backing (Singh, 2022, pp. 21-22).

4.2 Theories of military coups d'état

4.2.1 Laying the Foundation

This section will begin with an analysis of Robert Jackman's (1978) theory, determining whether or not the characteristics that Jackman identifies as contributing to coups d'état, can be applied to the study of military coups d'état in West Africa today. Robert Jackman's theory might feel outdated because of its age, however, multiple new theories are built upon his theory making it relevant to consider in the analysis (Yagci, 2017, Londregan and Poole, 1990, p. 152, Barka and Ncube, 2019). The general factors identified by Robert Jackman (1978) as coup determinants are mass participation, party systems, social mobilization, and cultural pluralism. The ability of the government to satisfy the demands and expectations that are brought about by social mobilization can be destabilizing. Coups d'état may result if the government is unable to live up to these increased expectations. Apart from social mobilization, political instability is significantly influenced by cultural heterogeneity. For instance, when France condemned the transitional government in Mali the transitional government called it inappropriate, and even evidence that France was still acting in a colonial manner there. The transitional government mobilized the populace and garnered their support by using the conflict with France as an opportunity. France has been the target of harsh criticism, which has strengthened the regime's hold on the populace (Gunnarson and Körling, 2023, p. 62). A state is more susceptible to instability if a dominant ethnic group exists. Another crucial factor to consider when examining the instability of a government that results in a coup d'état is the structure of the party system in addition to widespread
political engagement. Both increased political engagement and multipartyism may increase societal divisions and cause instability (Jackman, 1978 pp. 1262-1264, Johnson, Slater, and McGowan, 1983, pp. 622-624). Prior to the coups de état, all of the countries under study had multi-party systems. However, this does not imply competitive party politics in any of the nations or democracies, and it is better to think of it as the existence of several political parties rather than a party system (Adejumobi, 2007, pp. 25-26). Burkina Faso has been considered Partly Free since 1992-2022 according to the Freedom House Freedom in the World Report. In 2022 the ranking changed to Not Free. Guinea has been considered Partly Free from 1993 and is still considered Partly Free, Mali was ranked Partly Free between 2013-2019 and is since then ranked Not Free. Niger has been ranked Partly Free since 1999 (Freedom House, 2023).

Given that the theory is 45 years old there is a significant chance that it may overlook important elements and Jackman's theory is contested by many scholars and multipartyism can in fact have the opposite effect on a coup d'état (Hiroi and Omori, 2013, p.44). A theory this old is probably going to ignore or fail to account for components of climate change and how social media can contribute to a variety of issues, including political violence, outside influence, and social mobilization. Climate change and social media will therefore be included in the new theoretical framework. Social media as one of the supporting factors and climate change as a primary factor.

4.2.2 Military Centrality Theory
T.Y. Wang (1998) raises the military centrality theory's argument that civilian authorities would have little to no influence over society in a country where the military is dominating society. Because of this, military leaders would carry out coups d'état with ease to overthrow civilian government. Additionally, transfers of weapons can increase the military's influence in politics. Workers with education in the area are necessary for weapon
systems to operate and survive. The transfer of a weapon system necessitates the development of a new organizational structure, and there is a greater chance that the armed forces will modernize as an institution within society. As a result, the military begins to have a more powerful role in society than civilian organizations. The perception that military commanders can do tasks more effectively than the government heightens the danger of a coup (Wang, 1998, pp. 660-661). Furthermore, a declining economy is linked with military coups. The reason for this according to Wang (1998), can be that the population holds the government accountable for the economy of the state, and if the economy is poor, the incumbent is perceived as incompetent, yet another reason for the military to disdaining the government and strengthening the motivation to interfere (Wang, 1998, pp. 661-662). In addition, social mobilization, ethnic dominance, the duration of military administration, the country's history as a French colony, and past coup incidents all contribute to the explanation of coups, specifically in Africa. Wang (1998) defines social mobilization as the process through which prevailing social, economic, and psychological norms are undermined and replaced by fresh forces.

4.2.3 Economical Causes
Londregan and Poole's (1990) theory states that poverty is the one thing all coups d'état have in common. According to their research, there is a strong correlation between the rate of economic growth and the likelihood of a coup d'état overthrowing a government, and coups d'état are more likely to happen among the poorest countries rather than among the richest (Londregan and Poole, 1990, pp. 177-178). On the other hand, coups d'état can happen under any kind of system, and no leader is safe from the threat or occurrence of a coup d'état. In young democracies like Thailand in 2006 and Honduras in 2009, successful coups have occurred (Hiroi and Omori, 2013). On the other hand, according to many scholars both the income level, which is a
modernity component, and the rate of economic growth, which is a modernization factor, are important for understanding coups d'état (Londregan and Poole, 1990, p. 178, Yagci, 2017). The economy has a significant impact. The economy and coup d'état’s are closely related since a halt in economic growth erodes public support for the government and is practically a requirement for coups to occur. Higher levels of income per capita lead to fewer coups d'état (Yagci, 2017).

4.2.4 Structural Causes
Belkin och Schofer (2003) focus on structural causes of coups d'état and have identified nine solely structural causes, however, since six of the causes were not able to be measured on a large-n basis they were left out of their study (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 600-601). The six causes that they exclude are colonial heritage, economic development and welfare, military size, decline in export, military officer's class affiliation, and the political institution's ability to channel participation (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 603-604). The impact of recent coups, regime legitimacy, and civil society were identified as the three structural reasons for coups d'état that were measurable on a large-n basis (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 605). In a state where there is a strong civil society and nonstate organizations that the people value, that is when they provide resources, a sense of purpose, and ways to deal with day-to-day issues, the probability of coups d'état falls. In a country without functioning institutions such as trade unions, political parties, or civil society organizations, it is relatively easy to carry out a coup (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 605). The second identified cause is regime legitimacy which Belkin and Schofer (2003) clarify as the understanding among the population, the elite, and organizations about the state's right to impose laws. If the government does not perform effectively the risk of it losing its legitimacy in the eyes of the population and the military increase. The relevance of recent coups d'état in a state is the third aspect of coup risk.
It is suggested that the various strategies for overthrowing a regime have symbolic significance and will, as a result, increase the likelihood of coups occurring in the same nation. Coup d'état tends to undermine civilian institutions that serve as a barrier to other coups, hence a coup d'état can have a cascading impact (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 608, Singh, 2022, p. 78). On the other side, there is little chance that a coup d’état will spread to neighboring countries. Singh (2022) asserts that coups do not spread across borders. Because the coups d'état in West Africa have occurred in nations that have a history of military control and coups d'état, there is no need to go for inspiration or instruction elsewhere (Singh, 2022, p. 75). The theory of Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofers (2003) identifies coup risks and the factors that lead to coups d'état (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, p. 598). They differentiate between triggers of coups and coup risk and mean that triggers are not the starting point of risk and cannot by themselves lead to a coup. Structural causes imply a gradual change and they show a tendency to be more deeply fixed in the political system whilst triggering causes of coups tend to be volatile and do not lead to coups without the structural causes (Belkin and Schofer, 2003, pp. 598-599).

4.2.5 Triggers
Examining the underlying structures of a coup d'état is essential, but for a more comprehensive understanding, it is desirable to consider triggers for a coup d'état as suggested by Hiroi and Omori's (2013) theory. Their focus is on three specific coup triggers, macroeconomic deterioration, social instability, and a regime transitional period. High inflation, negative income growth, and balance of payments crises increase the motivation for ousting an incumbent (Hiroi and Omori, 2013, pp. 47-48). Social disturbances such as strikes, rioting, and protests can be signs of an attempted coup (Hiroi and Omori, 2013, pp. 47-48, Yagci, 2017). The third and last trigger factor identified is transitional regimes and rapidly changing regimes are more prone to a coup d'état than a stable regime which is an explanation for why...
countercoups happen. Only nine months had passed since the first coup in Mali in 2020 when a countercoup occurred (Hiroi and Omori, 2013, pp. 48-49, Ajjubs, 2023, Mbara and Graham, 2023 pp. 91-115, Singh, 2022, pp. 74-75). Numerous academics have also discovered that coups d'état are less common in democracies but more common in military governments, where they also have a higher chance of success (Yagci, 2017). The party system is also said to play a part in the likelihood of coups d'état. As mentioned earlier, multipartyism may increase societal divisions and cause instability (Yagci, 2017, Jackman, 1978, pp. 1262-1264, Johnson, Slater, and McGowan, 1983, pp. 622-624).

4.3 Theoretical Framework: Economic Factors, Political Instability, External Impact, and Climate Change
The upswing in military spending in Africa in the 1970s in combination with extensive corruption inside the military and an increase in social inequality supplied a solid ground for military coups. The military has had the ideal opportunity to remove an incumbent when the government has been incapable of creating and implementing public policy, in combination with other political and economic shortcomings such as slow economic growth, widespread corruption, and the lack of formally recognized democratic institutions (Barka and Ncube, 2019). Similar claims are made by Houle (2016) regarding the breeding of coups by social and class inequalities. Both direct and indirect consequences of class inequality are seen in coups d'état. The military junta, as the recruiters, have reduced opportunity costs when inequality rises. According to this notion, inequality creates possibilities and motivations for revolt. Additionally, militaries in unequal countries are more likely to be stronger, and heads of state are more inclined to deploy the military to counter challenges from the populace (Houle, 2016).

Several existing theories attribute coups to factors related to political instability, including political party systems, political engagement,
modernization, social mobilization, and economic deficiencies such as low income levels and a decline in economic growth. The proposed theoretical framework will prioritize these fundamental variables. However, a notable gap in the current literature is the limited consideration given to external impacts and climate change. Consequently, this new theoretical framework aims to address this gap by incorporating these often overlooked elements.

This research focuses on dissecting recent coups d'état in the former French colonies Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, examining the interaction of the following factors within the theoretical framework:

- Economic factors
- Political instability
- External impact
- Climate change

The first two components, political instability and economic problems, were drawn from previous theories on military coups d'état after closely examining the concepts in the theories and comparing with information on the coups d'état in the countries. External impact and climate change aspects were found to be absent from the existing theories on the subject. By incorporating external impact and climate change into the theoretical framework, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics that contribute to political unrest in the region and military coups d'état. This approach aims to extend past existing gaps in theoretical explanations and offer a nuanced perspective on the multifaceted nature of coups d'état in West Africa.

4.4 Operationalization
To put it simply, to operationalize anything is to make it measurable. It is necessary to precisely specify the theoretical foundation to create unique
Breaking down the theoretical framework into four quantifiable aspects of military coups d'état simplifies the examination of the research aim. As seen below, these characteristics are subsequently converted into quantifiable indicators. This paper will analyze Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger in light of the four indicators to see whether they have a connection with the recent trend of military coups d'état in the countries. The goal is to determine whether the factors are contributing to coups d'état in former French colonies in West Africa or not. To answer the research question, four sub-questions based on the theoretical framework have been constructed. The study will require a detailed operationalization of the dimensions and indicators of the theoretical framework to respond to these sub-questions.

### 4.4.1 Dimensions and Indicators

**Table 1** Dimensions and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic factors</td>
<td>- GDP per capita</td>
<td>- GDP per capita between 1990-2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Income inequality</td>
<td>- Income inequality Gini Coefficient between 1991-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Unemployment rate</td>
<td>- Unemployment rate between 1991-2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Instability</td>
<td>- Political violence</td>
<td>- Incidents of political violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social mobilization</td>
<td>- Consider the most important strikes, and protests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| External impact | - Foreign interference | - Military assistance from foreign actors  
- Presence of foreign actors and counter-terrorism efforts |
| Climate change | - Climate migration  
- Resource scarcity | - Climate migration and its impact on political unrest  
- How resource scarcity contributes to political turmoil |
5. Results: Applying the theoretical framework to the four cases

In this section, the results of the study will be presented starting with the first operationalization of each indicator. To provide even more clarity, a table with the coup dates for each country will be displayed below.

**Table 2** Coup dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Coup date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>18 August 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>5 September 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>23-24 January 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>26 July 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21 May 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 September 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lindén, 2023)

5.1 Economic Factors

Burkina Faso experienced steady economic development between 1990 and 2013. The perception of this expansion among the general public in Burkina Faso is that it was exclusive and that they did not benefit from the remarkable achievement of the economy. Burkina Faso faces numerous issues today related to security and development, made worse by severe food insecurity and unstable political conditions. This unrest results from several things, including the unsatisfactory 2021–2022 harvest, COVID-19-related interruptions to global supply chains, the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the price of food and fertilizer, and an increase in terrorist activities (International Monetary Fund African, 2023). It is estimated that Niger's GDP growth has accelerated significantly in the past year due to the agriculture sector's recovery from the drought in 2021 (IMF, 2023). Mali's economy has faced numerous difficulties since 2022, yet even in the face of
significant inflation in that year, it managed to remain resilient. From 3.1 percent in 2021 to 3.7 percent in 2022. Mali has also experienced the economic fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with startling increases in food and energy costs (IMF, 2023b). Guinea's robust mining output has also contributed to the country's overall stability in GDP per capita. Due to the price shock brought on by inflation in 2022, food insecurity turned into a serious food crisis (IMF, 2023a).

**Figure 4 GDP per capita in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, 1990-2021**

(Source: OurWorldInData, 2023)
Figure 5 Gini coefficient in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea, 1991-2018

Income inequality: Gini coefficient, 1991 to 2018

The Gini coefficient measures inequality on a scale from 0 to 1. Higher values indicate higher inequality. Depending on the country and year, the data relates to income measured after taxes and benefits, or to consumption, per capita.

Data source: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform (2022)
Note: Income and consumption estimates are available separately in this Data Explorer.

(Source: OurWorldInData, 2023)

In Burkina Faso, more than 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and the country ranks 184th out of 191 countries in the UNDP HDI report (The World Bank, 2016a). 40 percent of Niger's GDP comes from agriculture, and by 2023, 44.1 percent of the country's population is predicted to live in extreme poverty. This is a result of growing inflation and negative per capita growth, which will increase the number of people living in extreme poverty (The World Bank, 2017a). The pandemic's effects plus the security situation in Mali led to a rise in extreme poverty in 2021. In 2022, there was an even greater growth in extreme poverty, with 90 percent of the nation's poor concentrated in the southern countryside (The World Bank, 2016b). Arable land, energy prospects, and natural resources provide Guinea with a large portion of its budget. Since the agriculture industry employs the majority of the workforce and provides income for 57 percent of
rural households, it plays a significant role in reducing poverty (The World Bank, 2017b).

**Figure 6 Unemployment rate in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea, 1991-2021**

![Unemployment rate chart](image)

(Source: OurWorldInData, 2023)

Even with steady economic growth over the past two decades unemployment remains a major challenge for a lot of West African countries. In Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger, self-employment is widespread. 85 percent in Burkina Faso, 87 percent in Guinea, and 90 percent in Niger (Makanga and Msafiri, 2020, pp. 1-6). According to Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2016/2018, 2011/2013, and 2014/2015, the public believed that the government handled unemployment poorly, particularly in Guinea, where 90 percent of respondents thought the government handled unemployment poorly. Unemployment was also regarded as the most important issue that their government should address (Makanga and Msafiri, 2020, p. 9). In the 2016–2018 survey, 62 percent of people in Burkina Faso were unemployed,
compared to 60 percent in Niger, 46 percent in Mali, and 48 percent in Guinea (Makanga and Msafiri, 2020, p. 4). Since the majority of individuals in West African nations are employed in informal sectors and are not included in official unemployment figures (AUC/OECD, 2018, p. 198), it may be more difficult to discern the true trend from data sets like Figure 6. Young people are especially hit by unemployment and are more prone to seek jobs in the informal sector as demonstrated in Mali where 94 percent of the workers are employed in the informal sector. Young, educated people frequently leave the area in search of employment, causing a brain drain in the area (AUC/OECD, 2018, pp. 198-199).

5.2 Political Instability

**Figure 7** Number of Political Violence Events, 2019-2022

![Political Violence Events Chart](image)

(Source: ACLED, 2019)

The Sahel region has seen years of conflict. While government troops and community-based militias also support lethal attacks, the majority of the bloodshed is attributed by the international community to Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimi (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Mali has been replaced as a conflict hotspot by Burkina Faso, which had a doubling of organized political violent incidents in 2021 compared to
the previous year. JNIM is the main driver of the increasing violence and has increased its activity across the country (ACLED, 2022). With conflicts between government forces and extremist organizations, rebel groups, and local militias becoming increasingly frequent and brutal the increase primarily affects border and rural areas, but cross-border conflicts also occur. Strongmen in the community, religious authorities, and state authorities usually use these groups as their private armies to settle disputes over resource access or to reinforce their power. These conflicts are especially affecting Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. The Islamist group JNIM is one prominent transnational actor conducting attacks in all three countries. There have been violent incidents both in and around the outskirts of the cities. These three nations have one thing in common, they are all dealing with significant jihadist insurgencies, which means that their patterns of political violence are comparable. In 2012, militant groups fought for control of territory in Mali, with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the MNLA making rapid advancements. These kinds of incidents, however, have stopped when restraints are placed on areas that defy Jihadist organizations' authority, taking the place of actual city control as a means of subduing the civilian populace and gaining access to useful resources (OECD, 2023, pp. 19-21). Organized violence increased in Burkina Faso by nearly 80 percent, from circa 1500 fatalities in 2021 to close to 2600 in 2022. The violence increased rapidly even in Mali, with circa 1500 fatalities in 2020 to 3600 fatalities in 2022, the increase is connected to both state-based violence, non-state violence, and one-sided violence (one-sided violence is the use of armed force by the government or by formally organized groups against civilians). In terms of violence, Niger stayed relatively steady from 2021 and 2022, the amount of one-sided violence even declined. Nonetheless, state-based violence intensified in line with JNIMs' heightened activities in regions neighboring Burkina Faso (UCDP, 2022). Mali scores four out of four points on the Conflict Severity Index developed by ACLED,
while Burkina Faso scores three and Niger scores two. The four indicators of conflict severity are deadliness, danger, diffusion, and fragmentation (ACLED, 2021). Guinea went through a period of political unrest that included disputed elections accompanying violence. President Alpha Condé ran for a third term in October 2020, sparking protests during which security personnel are said to have killed at least 12 people. Condé was declared the winner by the electoral commission, but Cellou Dalein Diallo, the opposition candidate, challenged the results, claiming fraud and urging demonstrations (Roth, 2020).

5.3 External Impact
Two of the coup plotters in Mali are alleged to have attended a training program at the Higher Military College in Moscow just a few days before the coup, these allegations have been refuted by Russian State Duma member Oleg Morozov. Russia has friendly connections with Mali’s transitional government and stands to gain geopolitically from the country's political change. Furthermore, Russia and Mali reached a military cooperation deal in 2019, strengthening Russia's connections with Malian military leaders. These military leaders then backed the coup (Ramani, 2020). Both the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso have referenced Russia. Russia is reentering Africa to further its geopolitical objectives and economic interests (Hedenskog, 2019, pp. 34-38, Singh, 2022, p. 84, Mensah and Aning, 2022). Ever since Vladimir Putin took office, efforts have been made to form alliances with African nations. Russia has interests in weaponry exports and natural resource imports in the region and the amount of weapons exported to African nations increased significantly in the 2000s (Hedenskog, 2019, pp. 34-38, Mbara and Graham, 2023 p. 104, Russell and Pichon, 2019). Moscow has entered into military cooperation agreements with Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger, these four nations are becoming more and more attractive to Russian businesses and Russia provides them with counterterrorism
training (Bonnier and Hedenskog, 2020. p. 59). Russia's ambitions in terms of influence extend beyond the extraction of natural resources. Russia has entered Mali and created a military presence in West African and Sahelian states as a proxy, as seen with the Wagner Group, which can be regarded as a proxy group by Russia (Mensah and Aning, 2022). Disinformation campaigns connected to Prigozhin, owner of the Concord Group and the Wagner Group, have been observed in Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso with strong pro-Russian content (Lindén, 2023).

**Table 3** Military coups d'état and disinformation campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>August 18th</td>
<td>Social media began to distribute coordinated pro-Russian material in early 2020. Following the coup, there were messages applauding Russia and waving Russian flags.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>May 21st</td>
<td>A network of Facebook sites supporting Russia collected support to postpone democratic elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>September 5th</td>
<td>Operating several websites that mimic regional news sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>January 23rd</td>
<td>Social media networks saw the rise of pro-Russian propaganda. Following the first coup, there was a rise in Wagner Group-related Facebook pages. Following the coup, Russian flags have been raised in the capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>September 30th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Lindén, 2023, Bond, 2023)

The Russian flag has become a symbol of France's alleged influence in the countries. The military presence of France has primarily been concentrated in West and Central Africa, and security has played a major role in France's Africapolitics. They have established several military interventions, permanent military bases, and military agreements of cooperation throughout
West Africa (Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020, p. 25). Launched in 2013, Operation Barkhane was a counterterrorism operation in the Sahel region that involved border control and counterterrorism measures in collaboration with G5 Sahel, a group of five former French colonies that included Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali (Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020, p. 27). The French government also uses culture, or diplomatie culturelle, as an instrument in foreign policy. The objective of fostering France's long-term political and economic relations is served by the dissemination of the French language and culture (Gasinska and Gunnarson, 2020, p. 28). In 2022 President Macron withdrew the military Operation Barkhane from Mali after the relations between France and Mali collapsed (Gunnarson and Körling, 2023, p. 4). The relationship between France and Niger is at an all-time low after the coup d'état in Niger caused France to withdraw its last troops from the country. Young people all over West Africa have animosity for France which the coup makers have taken advantage of in their quest for power. The population blames France for involvement in government deficits (Melly, 2023, UNDP, 2023, pp. 57-58 ). The Guinean population is discontent with the role of French colonialism exploiting the Guineans through international mining companies and counterterrorism initiatives (Schmidt, 2021), in Niger a similar narrative can be seen with coup makers blaming France for nepotism and corruption. France has been blamed for acting in a colonial manner in Mali and the junta has used anti-French sentiment to mobilize the population (Gunnarson and Körling, 2023, p. 62), and the same story is seen in Burkina Faso (Espelund, 2023).

5.4 Climate Change
Climate change factors can have both direct and indirect effects on local, national, and regional security (Tarif, 2022, p.3). The rising intensity of natural resource use exacerbates environmental deterioration and water availability, while population growth modifies land usage (Tarif, 2022, pp.
3-4). Climate change can have an impact on those who depend on agriculture for their income, which raises the possibility of violent conflict because poorer living conditions fuel social, political, and economic unrest by highlighting the marginalization of impacted groups (Tarif, 2022, p. 6). One cause of climate-induced violence is scarcity-induced violence or ecoviolence. Life depends on freshwater resources, and when those resources are scarce, people may turn to violence in an attempt to survive (Landis et al., 2017). Water shortage has caused pasture and water resources in Burkina Faso to be limited and that in turn has forced cattle herders to rely on crop farming instead of migration. Pastoralists in Niger tried to lessen the impact of the drought by farming, while farming groups altered their means of subsistence by buying animals. Both Niger and Burkina Faso have increased their consumption of natural resources which has escalated their competition risking provoking conflict between farmers and herders (Tarif, 2022, pp. 7-8). Water challenges aggravate conflict and this is especially evident in G5 Sahel. Due to the Sahel region's heavy reliance on agriculture, which in turn depends heavily on water, both the shortage of water and the restrictions imposed by conflict on access to water sources create a conflict trap (World Bank, 2021, p. 13). Lack of water can cause climate migration, strain local resources, and cause conflict between farmers and herders when pastoralist routes are rerouted into agricultural areas. These factors lower public trust in the government because they limit economic opportunities and provide justification for violent protests of dissatisfaction (World Bank, 2021, pp. 13-14). On a local level farmers and herders compete for land, biomass, and water, and on national and regional levels the conflict can arise from tension around the management of transboundary water resources (OECD, 2022, pp. 6-7, UNOWAS, 2018, p. 20, World Bank, 2021, p. 21).

Governance deficits and low state control together with non-resilient natural environments contribute to the growth of armed organizations and increase
for make a living from agriculture and livestock making it easier to recruit people to these armed organizations. Armed groups may also utilize natural resources as weapons by limiting access to land or water (OECD, 2022, pp. 6-7). Although there has not been a lot of violent confrontation between farmers and pastoralists in Guinea, there is rising concern about how climate change may affect violence, particularly when it comes to water supply (OECD, 2022, p. 31). In Niger, conflicts over land rights and access to natural resources, as well as animal damage to crops, are frequent causes of violence between farmers and pastoralists (OECD, 2022, p. 65). Niger is particularly susceptible to the consequences of global warming. The economy of the nation is based on rain-fed agriculture, and one of the primary causes of the nation's ongoing food insecurity and conflict is climate change. The battle for limited resources is becoming more intense, which is the main reason for the rise in violence brought on by climate change (IMF, 2023). As Figure 8 describes, climate change and poor governing over natural resources can worsen conflict and instability caused by competition over scarce resources. Both climate change and climate-induced conflict can generate migration and displacement and both can contribute to conflict (Abel et al., 2019, pp. 241-242, Bendandi, 2020, pp. 220-221).
Figure 8 Conceptual framework for migration, conflict, and climate

(Source: Abel et al., 2019)

Guinea is particularly susceptible to changes in the environment, such as land degradation, soil salinization, and coastline erosion. Rising sea levels in the area cause fishermen to abandon their houses and goods. Climate change is also causing migration in Niger, as individuals are being driven to leave their homes in search of employment elsewhere (Bendandi, 2020, p. 322). Climate change has impacted the productive profits in Mali as rainfall has led to low flooding of the Niger River. This has reduced the realm of cultivable land and agricultural production making pastoralists increasingly vulnerable leading to reductions in herd sizes. Conflict over arable land and water resources is nothing new in Mali however it is increased by environmental and demographic pressures (Bøås, 2019, p. 4).
6. Coups in Africa: What comes next?

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors contributing to military coups d'état in former French colonies in West Africa, specifically Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger. The following question serves as the foundation for the thesis analysis:

- How can economic factors, political instability, external impact, and climate change help explain military coups d'état in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea?

6.1 Empirical Conclusion

6.1.1 Governance and Economy

The factor that seems to have the least substantial support in this analysis is the GDP per capita of the economic factors, which illustrates a fairly stable curve. All four countries show a positive economic trend with a stable GDP per capita or even an increase. Although the GDP per capita could not be directly linked to the events, the economic growth seems to be poorly distributed and linked to bad governance which the Gini Coefficient shows. Burkina Faso ranks 184th out of 191 countries in the UNDP HDI report, with over 40% of the population below the poverty line. By 2023, 44.1 percent of the population is predicted to live in extreme poverty in Niger. The pandemic and security situation in Mali have exacerbated extreme poverty, with 90 percent concentrated in the southern countryside.

Unemployment is high among all four countries in the study, with numbers varying from 48 percent to 62 percent of the population being unemployed in 2018. Unemployment mostly affects the young population who seeks employment in the informal sector instead or migrating to find jobs.

6.1.2 Patterns of Violence

There was a surge in violence linked to jihadist insurgencies in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, particularly from JNIM. Al Qaeda, AQIM, Ansar Dine, and
MNLA were also encountered in Mali. There was one-sided, non-state, and state-based violence in all three of the countries. Figure 7 clearly shows how low Guinea is throughout all violent incidents, nonetheless, violent demonstrations and a spike in violence coincided with the 2020 election. Prior to their coup d'état, there was an upsurge in violent incidents in all four countries. As shown in Table 4, violence escalated around a year before each coup in every country included in the analysis.

**Table 4** Coup compared to spike in political violence events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Guinea</th>
<th>Niger</th>
<th>Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coup</td>
<td>2020 &amp; 2021</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence increased</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: ACLED, 2019, Lindén, 2023)

**6.1.3 Russia and the Wagner Group**

All four of the countries under consideration have signed military cooperation agreements with Russia, and Russian disinformation tactics have been found in each of them. The Wagner Group is also present in all four and all four countries share a similar anti-French sentiment which has been exacerbated by the coup makers. French troops have been deployed from each of the countries. The foreign interference in all four countries shares a similar pattern and is connected to the coups.

**6.1.4 Climate Governance**

Climate change factors were found in each country under study with slightly varying trends and could all be connected to increased violence. However, what was also found is that climate change alone is not the driver, but in addition to insufficient governance of these climate change vulnerabilities violence occurs. Governance and climate vulnerability go hand in hand since the effects of climate change can worsen already existing inequalities for
specific groups (Tarif, 2022, p.3, Aly and Landry, 2022, p. 21). How this climate change is governed plays an important role in climate change and violent conflict, dysfunctional strategies can lead to seeking illegal income alternatives like cattle rustling, kidnapping, and trafficking that benefit armed groups and criminal organizations (Tarif, 2022, pp. 7-8, OECD, 2022, pp. 46-47).

6.2 Methodological Conclusion
Control is given by employing a comparative approach and comparing a small number of countries, particularly when using MSSD, MDSD, or both. This allowed for the application of variables and concepts that were more attuned to the complexities of military coups d'état. Instead of finding a single causal explanation, the methodology that has been chosen allows the factors of the economy, political violence, foreign meddling, and climate change to be identified. This displays a configuration of diverse explanatory variables (Landman, 2003, p. 228). Based on the generalizations in the data, it is possible to make predictions about likely outcomes in other nations that are not included in this research. By using a comparative method this study has been able to test hypotheses on why military coups d'état in the four countries have occurred (Landman, 2003, p. 4). This study's methodology has also made it possible to develop a new theoretical framework that incorporates elements that have been overlooked in previous studies. The framework can help guide future research on the topic of military coups d'état.

6.4 Limitations, and Areas for Further Research
It would be beneficial to include both China and the United States as actors conducting foreign meddling in the nations and what role regional response has in the matter. Additional investigation into the matter is needed. Sierra Leone experienced a coup attempt on November 26, 2023 (Jones, 2023),
which emphasizes the necessity to look into this African coup trap even more. Russia's use of disinformation campaigns to influence the coup makers has revealed a pattern. Although it can be difficult to prove exactly what effect these disinformation campaigns have the pattern detected is undeniable. Further research into how various actors, particularly Russia, influence violence and instigate coups via social media platforms may significantly contribute to our comprehension of the profound influence that disinformation can exert over events.

The integration of political instability and economic issues has proven to be a strong foundation for comprehending the socio-political landscape leading to coups d'état. To gain the whole picture, economic aspects must be examined using a combination of hard and soft data. Future research will benefit from the theoretical framework constructed in this study, which takes into account aspects related to climate change and external interference that are frequently missed in previous theories. These elements are coup d'état initiators and conflict generators as demonstrated in Figure 8 and Table 3. In order to prevent or even coup proof, this study's use of the new theoretical framework has revealed the critical necessity for improved governance in the region. Since democracy is still the preferred form of government for the people living in these countries, the priority must be to overcome socioeconomic obstacles and win the public's trust in civilian leadership. In order to reduce the likelihood of future coups d'état, a more equal political and economic climate as well as the creation of a new social contract based on trust between the people and their government are required.
7. References


Bendandi, B. (2020). Migration induced by climate change and environmental degradation in the Central Mediterranean Route. [online] Available at:


Guterres, A. (2023). UN / GUTERRES PRESS ENCOUNTER.


