



THE 2023 NIGER MILITARY COUP D'ÉTAT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON NIGER - NIGERIA RELATIONS

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Abstract

Nigeria and Niger have maintained a longstanding relationship, owing to their shared borders connections and cultural history. Nonetheless, intermittent tensions have occasionally troubled the relations. One recent instance that is seen as a source of strain on this relationship is the military coup in Niger, which occurred on July 26, 2023. The coup resulted in the removal of a democratically elected president, garnering attention from the global community, most notably from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria, regarded as a bastion of ECOWAS, plays a pivotal role in this organization. Consequently, the decision made by Nigeria has raised apprehensions regarding the relationship between Niger Republic and Nigeria. Given the shared border and the longstanding socioeconomic and political ties between these two nations, the study is designed to investigate the impact of the coup on the relationship between Niger and Nigeria. A qualitative analysis undertaken in this study revealed that the coup, predominantly fueled by internal contradictions within Niger, has engendered social, economic, and political tensions between Niger and Nigeria. Consequently, this study asserts that military coups are a manifestation of inadequate governance, emphasizing the necessity of safeguarding the will of the people.

Keywords; Military Coup, Socioeconomic Relations, Niger, Nigeria, Political Tension

Introduction

The first military coup in Africa occurred in Egypt in 1952 and since then the wind of military coups has been blowing across the continent, with the four decades between 1960 and 2000 being the 'golden decades' of military coups. Each of the four decades witnessed at least 40 coup attempts (Barka, & Ncube, 2012). In recent times, coups have occurred in Burkina Faso, and Mali including Niger Republic. Generally, coups have many different root causes, including weak institutions, political unrest, economic hardships, corruption, and ethnic conflicts. These coups pose a threat to regional stability and democracy.

Niger Republic, a West Africa country, has experienced multiple military coups since gaining independence from France. Military coups in Niger republic have been characterized by a cycle of instability that serves as a threat to democratic governance in the country. The first military coup in

Niger occurred in 1974, when Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché ousted President Hamani Diori. Since then, the country has witnessed several other coups and attempted coups, reflecting underlying political instability and struggles for power within its borders (Gali *et al*, 2023). Other military coups in the country included 1996 Coup that saw the overthrow of President Mahamane Ousmane by Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, 1999 Coup, which led to the assassination of Maïnassara, Daouda and Malam Wanké took power. Also, the attempt by President Mamadou Tandja to extend his term through constitutional changes led to 2010 Coup (Gali *et al*, 2023).

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2010 Coup. The most recent coup in 2023 in the republic was led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, and removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power. The coup leaders cited corruption, economic mismanagement, and security concerns as their reasons for the takeover (Ceesay 2023).

Problem Statement

The most recent coup in 2023 in the republic was led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, and removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power. The coup leaders cited corruption, economic mismanagement, and security concerns as their reasons for the takeover (Ceesay 2023). The coup has not only shaped the internal dynamics of Niger but also had significant implications for its relations with neighboring countries, particularly in the context of Nigeria-Niger relations. Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa and a regional power, has a vested interest in stability in its neighboring countries. Instability in Niger, whether political or security-related, can have ripple effects on Nigeria, affecting issues such as trade and security cooperation.

The coup threatens bilateral engagements, hinder cooperation on security and economic issues, and create uncertainties in diplomatic relations. Moreover, the socio-economic and political instability resulting from military coups in Niger can exacerbate security and economic challenges along the Nigeria-Niger border (Anka and Gusau, 2023). Furthermore, the coup d'état in Niger can hamper efforts toward economic cooperation and development between Nigeria and Niger. It is against this background, the study explored the impact of the 2023 Niger military coups Niger-Nigeria relations.

Research Question

- i. What are the immediate factors that caused the 2023 military coup in Niger Republic?
- ii. How does the coup impact on Niger/Nigeria relations?

Theoretical Framework

Socioeconomic Development Theory

The study adopted a socioeconomic development theory. The socioeconomic development theory

provides a useful framework for understanding the potential link between a country's level of development and its susceptibility to military coups, and Samuel P. Huntington is one of the proponent of theory (Grundler, 2020; Acemoglu, *et al*, 2008). The theory posits that the level of economic and social development in a country influences the likelihood of military coup in politics (Grundler, 2020). According to the theory, less developed countries with weaker institutions and socioeconomic instability are more prone to military coups and interventions.

The prime assumptions of this theory is that economic growth and development create wealth, reduce poverty, and provide resources for better governance and stronger institutions, which in turn reduce the incentives for military intervention. The theory further assumed that developed countries tend to have stronger, more resilient political institutions that can manage conflicts and crises without military involvement and argued that less develop countries are vulnerable to social disintegration characterized by ethnic, religious, and class divisions that can attract military coups.

However, critics argue that the relationship between socioeconomic development and military intervention is not straightforward. There are examples of developed countries experiencing coups and less developed countries maintaining political stability. Furthermore, the theory may overemphasize economic factors while neglecting political and historical contexts that also play crucial roles in determining the likelihood of military intervention (Kang 1987). The theory, according to critics, overlooks the role of external factors, such as foreign governments and international organizations, in either supporting or opposing military interventions.

The socioeconomic development theory is still relevant because military coups are more likely to occur in countries with lower levels of economic and social development. Most countries that have experienced military coups have political and socioeconomic problems such as ethnic conflict, armed factions, insurgent attacks, terrorist manifestations, and political deadlocks over resource and power sharing. For example, Niger Republic is one of the world's poorest countries, with a low Human Development Index (HDI). High levels of poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality create

dissatisfaction among the populace and military (Barka & Ncube, 2012). Political institutions in Niger are often weak, underdeveloped, and plagued by corruption. These institutions struggle to manage economic resources effectively and provide stable governance.

Methodology

Yin (2014) suggested that a research design “is the logical sequence of the study that connects empirical data to a study’s initial question and, ultimately, to its conclusions. For Marshall and Rossman (2006), in qualitative research, primacy is placed on the context, setting and the eliciting of deeper understanding of lived reality of the research participants. Specifically, the research shall make use of historical and descriptive research designs. The selected designs place emphasis on the use of qualitative data for its primary sources, critical selection of facts and their interpretation with secondary sources of information. The study’s instrument utilized online search engines databases such as Google Scholar, Academia, Elsevier JSTOR, ResearchNet including the library catalogues and archives of Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba.

Discussion of Findings

Overview of Military Coup D’état

Coup d’état is a French word, which literally means a blow, or stroke, concerning the state. In politics however, it means a sudden and decisive action, especially one affecting a change of government illegally or by force (Toyin, 2015). In other words, a coup d’état, as given in this definition, is characterized by suddenness, decisiveness, illegality, and force. Madunagu (2008) described coup d’état as a violent reformation of state policy and or sudden measure of state often involving force or threat of force. The group involved in the exercise of the force is usually small that can be military or any other group. Therefore, military coup d’état is a sudden (lasting from a few hours to at least one week), often violent overthrow of a government by a small group of military, police, or security forces (Ihonybere, 1996). It results in the illegal replacement of the existing government personnel or constitutional relationships, and may

radically alter the state’s fundamental social and economic policies.

In Africa, the history of military coup d’état is traced to the newly independent nations, which had the deem to adopt the political culture and institutions of their former colonial masters, and their elites whom were supposed to superintendent such democratic ethos however, became the champions of individual self and ethnic or religion identity (Diamond 1981; Ceesay, 2023). It was therefore not surprising that the new African political elites, just like their colonial predecessors, had opted to use state power for personal gains. They engaged in primitive accumulation and cornering of the privileges of office instead of transforming and developing the society, also there was infighting among the political elite, ethnic nationalities, religious groups and even within the armies (Barka & Ncube, 2012). With this scenario, it was therefore not surprising that not long after independence the various African states lurched from one crisis to another, leading to military coups d’état.

Thus, by the time the first military coup occurred in Egypt in 1952, Africans had just been learning the rubrics of the new system. The Egyptian coup inspired several other coups against democratic governments on the continent, starting with Sudan in 1958, Ethiopia in 1960, Zaire (Kinshasa) in 1960, Togo in 1963, Congo (Brazzaville) in 1963, Benin (Dahomey) in 1963, Gabon in 1964, Algeria in 1965, Burundi in 1965, Central African Republic in 1966, Burkina Faso (Upper Volta) in 1966, Ghana in 1966, Nigeria in 1966, Sierra Leone in 1967, Mali in 1968, Libya in 1969, Somalia in 1969, among others (Eshiet, 2022; Barka & Ncube, 2012). In Africa, more than 200 military coups have been staged since the post-independence era of 1960s, with 45% of them being successful and resulting in a change in power at the top (Acho & Tacham, 2023; Eshiet, 2022).

Studies of coups d’état in Africa reveal a myriad of factors influencing the occurrence of military coups. Scholars have categories four broad factors as the prime causes of military coups; the factors include social, economic, political, and military factors. The social factors are manifestation of societal features, which are frequently discussed by scholars in the area of military intervention, include social mobilization, coup experience and cultural pluralism (Acho, and Tacham, 2023). The economic

factors that trigger military coups include economic underdevelopment, deterioration, and dependence. For instance, Finer (1962) argued that economic development, especially industrialization, diminishes the likelihood of a military coup because it increases technical complexity that sustains civilian government. The political factors that determine occurrence of coups entail political participation, political parties, political turmoil, and internal war, while the military factors include military corporate interest, military dominance, and foreign troops (Thompson, 1973; Nordlinger, 1977; Perlmutter, 1977).

Immediate Causes of 2023 Niger Military Coup D'état

Findings within this study indicates that the military coup in Niger (July 26–28, 2023) was carried out by a group of officers led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani who removed President Mohamed Bazoum, elected in 2021, from power. The Tchiani-led coup plotters in Niger have advanced several reasons for their actions to unconstitutionally oust the government of Bazoum. Primary among the issues they raised is insecurity and a lack of economic growth for the people of Niger. The Niger soldiers purported themselves to be the saviors of Niger from what they describe as a bad state of socio-economic development dragging the state of Niger through episodes of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. It is largely on the above conditions that General Tchiani and his abettors justify their actions for the need to forcefully replace Bazoum and his government (Ajala, 2023; Aksar & Balima, 2023).

The study also shows that the military corporate interest was threatened by the civilian government (Muhammadou Bazoum's administration). Investigation had also indicated that the president was in the process of renewing parts of the military leadership – whether by retiring generals or transferring them abroad, as in the case of Chief of General Staff Salifou Modi, who was sent to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador in March and is now regarded as the junta's number two. Therefore the presidential guard began an ad-hoc revolt by the presidential guard, driven by parochial interests and

was however only able to become a successful overthrow due to the united backing of the military and the massive support of the population (Tschörner, 2023).

Moreover, the study indicated that the brutality of insurgent groups in Niger has been characterized by the coup plotters as a situation that calls for urgent intervention. These insurgent groups include the Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates, Boko Haram, and other groups which have over the years led to the continuous instability of Niger, leading to a lot of discomfort in the country and led to the displacement of many of its inhabitants either within or to the neighboring countries (Thurston, 2024; Ajala, 2023). The coup plotters argued that there is need for a robust security apparatus, which Bazoum government is unable to offer. Furthermore, the study also found out ethnic rivalry has been charged forward as speculation for one of the reasons for the military takeover in Niger. Bazoum is a descendant of the Arab minority ethnic group of Niger, and his origin and legitimacy as a Nigerien had for a long time remained a big question. The topic of ethnic disparity is a major issue in many African conflicts, especially in cases where the minority rules over the majority ethnic groups, the possibility of the minority downplaying the majority ethnic groups in terms of position allocation, access to opportunities, inclusion, and equal treatment in state matters is indeed high. This can lead to the creation of factions that will revolt against the minority rulers in a quest to restore their majority importance (Ajala, 2023; Melly, 2023).

Impact of the 2023 Niger Military Coup on Niger - Nigeria Relationship

The study has found out that the 2023 military coup in Niger Republic would worsen the insecurity along the Niger-Nigeria border, affecting efforts to combat terrorism and insurgency in the region. Both countries share challenges with Boko Haram and other militant groups, and political instability in Niger could exacerbate these issues (Thurston, 2024; Doukhan, 2023). The coup has disrupted the long-standing cooperation between the two nations, which is critical for addressing cross-border security challenges posed by groups like Boko Haram and other militant factions.

Additionally, findings of the study showed that Nigeria's condemnation of the coup and refusal to recognize the military regime strain diplomatic rift between the two countries (Attu et al, 2024). During the coup, Nigeria's actions, such as closing its border with Niger and cutting off electricity supplies, ultimately disrupting trade and economic activities that rely heavily on cross-border commerce with Niger (Obasi, 2023). More so, the coup appeared to jeopardize the ongoing and future infrastructure projects, such as the Kano-Maradi railway. The coup is a threat to the bilateral agreement such as Nigeria and Niger Joint commission for corporation (NNJCC). More importantly, The Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, a \$13 billion project aimed at transporting natural gas from Nigeria through Niger to Europe, has been halted due to the coup. This project was expected to enhance energy cooperation between Nigeria and Niger, providing significant economic benefits to both nations. The instability caused by the coup could delay or even derail this strategic project, affecting energy supplies and economic growth in the region (Obasi, 2023). The uncertainty regarding the stability and recognition of Niger's government has made it difficult for international financiers to commit to these projects, potentially delaying or derailing them. Furthermore, the coup can lead to political instability, which in turn result to an influx of refugees into Nigeria, putting additional pressure on Nigeria's resources and humanitarian efforts. This influx of refugees into Nigeria places additional strain on its resources and humanitarian efforts.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the military coup in Niger has a grave consequence on the Niger - Nigeria relations. More or less, both countries stand to be affected greatly from the aftermath of the

coup because of its strategic border location and the economic relationship between the two countries. The coup is a threat to the bilateral agreement such as Nigeria and Niger Joint commission for corporation (NNJCC). The coup also appears to delay Gas Trans - Sahara Project, which will supply Nigerian gas to most African and European Countries. Again, Nigeria sanctioned Niger republic, thus affecting the volume of trade between the two countries. The study is further designed to examine the factors which gave rise to the 2023 Niger military coup in the first place. After a careful analysis, the findings gathered from the study showed a greater role of weak economic systems and political institutions of Niger Republic, terrorism and insurgent, ethnic rivalries as well poor governance was widespread during civilian rules.

Recommendation

The following broad recommendations are therefore proposed as laying the foundations for a politically stable and prosperous future

- i. To provide sustained levels of economic development and prosperity. This will entail developing basic infrastructure (transportation, power, ICT, and water and sanitation); diversifying the economy; building productive capacities; reforming trade policies for increased income-generating opportunities; and reforming the financial system for increased access to means of production and export.
- ii. To establish and ensure a form of democratic government that is based on the empowerment of ordinary citizens, with a clear separation between the three poles of government (executive, legislature, and judiciary), political pluralism, accountability and transparency, and respect for human rights.

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