

The Chronology of Military Coup d'états and Regimes in Burkina Faso: 1980-2015

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Abstract

Burkina Faso is one of the few West African countries that had a coups-ridden history. Six years after independence, the country's first military coup in 1966 led off to numerous subsequent coups. The country had popular military officials who end up toppling one another to become head of state. The coups were very shortish in nature, close-intervals from one another with one exception. Most of these coups were unpopular in nature, not very welcomed by the populace though Thomas Sankara's 1983 coup is deemed to be off this mark. These coups hampered the country in its quest to democratization. This landlocked country has never changed a sitting head of state via a ballot box apart from 2015 when Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected into office. This article looks into the chronology of these coups from 1980 to 2015, brief background of the plotters as to what prompted them into military takeovers and the motives associated with these coups.

Keywords

Military, Coup d'état, Regime, Burkina Faso, Africa

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Makale geliş tarihi : 01.12.2017
Makale kabul tarihi : 28.03.2018

Introduction

Regime change in Burkina Faso has always been a result of Military Coups before 1980 up to 2015. From independence in 1960 to 2015, Burkina Faso has not experienced a power transfer via the ballot box-election. The country has the highest number of military coups and rule since independence than any other African country-Nigeria, Benin and Ghana-on the top of the list. It is one of the leading African countries that has been prone to Military Coup since independence. This has starved the country of a fair and lasting democracy. Despite the neighboring countries working towards democratization, the pace and space for democratization and civilian rule in Burkina Faso was slow and limited. The shadow of military coup chases Burkina Faso since after its first coup in 1966 engineered by Sangoule Lamizana.¹ The frequency of coups in this West African country has devastated the feeding pillars of a country's development and the denial of civil rule.

Burkina Faso is one of the 16 landlocked countries in Africa.² It shares border with six countries: Mali to the north, Niger to the east, Benin to the southeast, Togo and Ghana to the south, and Cote d'Ivoire to the southwest. It gained independence on 5th May 1960 from the French. Maurice Yameogo, elected in 1960 and 1965, was the country's first president. He was toppled due to popular uprising against him, in coup led by Lt. Col. Sangoule Lamizana.³ Formerly called Upper Volta, the country was renamed by the then President Thomas Sankara in 1984 to Burkina Faso meaning the "Land of the Upright Men"⁴, in Mossi and Dyula, the country's two most widely spoken indigenous languages. Ouagadougou is the capital city as well as the center of administrative and commercial center of Burkina Faso. The inhabitants of the country are known as Burkinabè. The dominant ethnic groups are Mossi and Fulani but they share the land with many other ethnicities such as the Lobe,

¹ Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 134.

² UN-OHRLS, *Landlocked Developing Countries: Things to KNOW, Things to Do 2016*, New York, UN-OHRLS, 2016, pp. 2.

³ Chukwunyere Kamalu, *The Little African History Book: Black Africa from the Origins of Humanity to the Assassination of Lumumba and the turn of the 20th Century*, London, Orisa Press, 2011, pp. 173.

⁴ Daniel Dee Ziankahn Jr., *The Impact of Military Coup D'etat on West Africa's Socio-Economic and Political Development*, Monrovia, University College, 2001, pp. 79.

Gourounsi, Yarse, Samo, Dogon, and Mande.⁵ The country covers a total land area of 274,200 sq. km with an estimated substantial population of 19,512,533.⁶

Burkina Faso has a total number of 7 coups making it lead the pact of military coups in Africa. It possess an unrivaled 31 years of military rule compared to any African State, after independence. Burkina Faso has a total of 7 successful coups and a handful of failed plots.⁷ There were four successful coups in seven years in the 1980s, most of them followed popular demonstrations. The 2015 mass demonstration against ended Blaise Compaoré's twenty-seven years rule since coming into power via a coup in 1987.

What are military coups and regimes?

Before proceeding deeper, however, it is imperative to explicitly state what is meant by military coup or regime –terms which are widely used and are potentially confusing, meaning many different things to different people. In defining military coup d'état, Thomson puts it as “a sudden illegal displacement of government in which [a small] members of the security forces play a prominent role”.⁸ The word coup d'état is French for “stroke of the state” or “blow to the government”.⁹ Coup, in other words, must be performed by a small members of security forces, precisely by the military in a swift and unexpected manner lasting for few hours or days.

The motives of coups, in most occasions, are to unseat the personnel and change the policies of the government which they overthrow. However, it differs from regime changes instigated by democratic processes and in contrast to mass revolution or external aggression.¹⁰ During the coup, certain members of the ruling class, against which the coup is plotted, are arrested, detained or otherwise exiled. As McGowan puts, military coup is 'an event in which existing

⁵ On the Moré (Mossi) and Djoula (Fulani) linguistic translations of 'Burkina Faso', see Pierre Englebert, *Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa*, Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996, pp1, pp. 58.

⁶ CIA, The World Fact Book: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uv.html>

⁷ Patrick J. McGowan, “African Military coups d'état, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Sep., 2003, pp. 339-370.

⁸ Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, pp. 134.

⁹ Valéry Besong, *Coup d'états in Africa: The Emergence, Prevalence and Eradication*, California, Stanford University, 2005, pp. 2.

¹⁰ Besong, “*Coup d'états in Africa: The Emergence, Prevalence and Eradication*”, pp. 2.

political regime is suddenly and illegally displaced by the action of relatively small elite groups in which the military, security and/or police forces of the state play a role'.¹¹ The plotters, in addition, seize physical control of important government offices, means of communication, and the physical infrastructure, such as streets and power plants-*'symbols of the state'*.¹²

The number of military coups that had hit Burkina Faso from 1980 to 2015 was as a result of salient series of factors. The encroachment on the military's corporate interests is easily the most important interventionist motive¹³. The complexity of these factors led to several 'coup event'¹⁴, as Claude E. Welch puts it, will be examined in this study in the case of Burkina Faso. The coup event includes successful coup, fail coup and coup plot, where a state's military, security, or police forces were involved.¹⁵

In his book, *The Man on Horseback: the role of the military in politics*, S. E. Finer looks into the circumstances of military intervention in politics. Finer indicates that the military possess vastly superior organization, skills and the possession of arms.¹⁶ This can be used into their advantage especially when their interests are threatened. This paves way for the military centrality theory in which the civil leaders has little or no control over the military. Finer, however, deciphers that developing and developed countries military intervention is unlikely for the later because of their intricate administration structure.

Immediately after the ousting the government, the military installs what is referred to as the military regime. This regime, in most cases, if not all, comprises of the top stratum of military that engineered the military takeover. Heywood summarized military regime as a regime in which "the leading posts in the government are filled on the basis of the person's position within the military chain of command"¹⁷ The military overthrow with the aim of changing personnel and policies. Thus, they bring in those that coup plotters deemed

¹¹ Patrick J. McGowan, "African Military coups d'état, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep., 2003), pp. 339-370.

¹² Ibid., pp. 2.

¹³ Eric A Nordlinger, "Soldiers in politics: military coups and governments" Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J pp. 23.

¹⁴ Claude E. Welch, "Soldier and State in Africa" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov., 1967), pp. 305-322.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 305-322.

¹⁶ Finer, Samuel, "The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics" London, Pall Mall Press, 2002, pp. 35.

¹⁷ Andrew Heywood, "Politics" Palgrave, 4th revised edition, 2013, pp. 281.

willing to help in change process. This regime is therefore supported, mainly, by the military itself, military elites.

Unlike other regimes that survives on ideological lines, the military regime, as Heywood noted survive through the exercise, above all, of military power and systematic repression.¹⁸ The military, as the states source of coercion, is use as an agent to propagate and elongate the coup's blueprint and the regime. In this way, as Heywood observed, "normal political and constitutional arrangements are usually suspended, and institutions through which opposition can be expressed, such as elected assemblies and a free press, are either weakened or abolished".¹⁹

Coups in Burkina Faso from 1980-2015

Chronologically, the following were trends of coup in Burkina Faso from 1980-2015.²⁰ There were other number of coups that occurred there, however, for the purpose of the years under review for this article work, I looked at military coups from 1980-2015.

- 1980–Nov 25th: Saye Zerbo overthrows Sangoulé Lamizana;
- 1982–Nov 7th: Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo overthrows Saye Zerbo;
- 1983–Aug 4th: Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré overthrow Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo;
- 1987–Oct 15th: Blaise Compaoré overthrows Thomas Sankara;
- 2015 – Sep 16 Acting President Kafando faces down coup attempt led by General Gilbert Diendéré of the presidential guard allies of Blaise Compaore.

Military coups have long been part of Burkina Faso's history. The country has taken its longest break from coup d'état in 1987. This was the year Blaise Compaoré overthrew Thomas Sankara and ruled the country for twenty-seven years –1987-2014 –when mass popular protest forced him to resign. Since then, coups have been less frequent until in the 2015 foiled coup led by forces loyal

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 281.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 281.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 281.

to Blaise Compaoré, who is in exile in the neighboring Ivory Coast. I will try to explain why it has been frequent before 1987 and less frequent after 1987.

There are numerous recorded factors that entices the military to be involved in politics. The military, in most cases, justifies their intervention as a result of the ineptitude leadership of ousted ruler. Reasons beyond or lower than this, however, could also be advanced. Samuel Decalo puts it in summary that “the army may move into the political arena when its corporate...interests are threatened”.²¹ The interests could be on financial commitments-salaries and incentives, tenure of office (professional future) inter alia threats against integrity of the army and the corruption levied against the ousted regime. These are the most widely cited charge of officer cliques moving against their civilian counterparts.²²

Harvest of Military coups and regimes in Burkina Faso

I. The coup d'état and regime of Saye Zerbo

The 1980 military coup in Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta, was led by Saye Zerbo (1932-2013). Zerbo's regime is one of the short-lived military regime in the country's rich military intervention history. As a colonel in collaboration with Sankara and Campoare, he overthrew Lamizana. The 25th November 1980 coup, referred to as the "colonel's coup",²³ summarized Lamizana's fourteen year military regime of Sangoule Lamizana and become the third Head of State of Burkina Faso. Zerbo served in different portfolios in the army and once served as the Foreign Minister. His predecessor, Lamizana was accused of lavish and an immeasurable life style at the expense of the nation; in addition to Lamizana's style of single party rule. Zerbo's coup against Lamizana, however, was bloodless and successful as well as welcome news for the disgruntled populace.

Zerbo, like any other coup leader, suspended the constitution and engineered Military Committee of Recovery for National Progress (*Comité*

²¹ Samuel Decalo, “Military Coups and Military Regimes in Africa” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Mar., 1973, pp. 105-127.

²² Ibid., pp. 110.

²³ Daniel Miles McFarland and Lawrence Rupley, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1998, pp 90.

Militaire de Redressement pour le Progrès National; CMPRN) as the supreme governmental authority in the State. It consisted of 31 junta members, including Sankara (who served as Secretary of State for Information), Campoare and Henri Zongo who later resigned as a result of ideological differences and the Zerbo's repressive policies.²⁴ His regime faced several blows including the strike of school teachers and labor unions and surviving a National Assembly no confidence vote by a 33-24 margin.²⁵ Zerbo grew more autocratic and ordered an end to all marches and demonstrations.²⁶ Victoria Brittain described him as a tough nationalist with no ideas for social change.²⁷

One of the many reforms introduced by Zerbo was, as in May 1981, the announcement of compulsory military service.²⁸ This was greeted with mass demonstration by trade unions. The trade unions were suspended, however, it was unsuccessful to halt the protest. Three of the four Voltaïque trade unions, in an attempt to further raise their concerns, met in Bobo-Dioulasso and warned the government against taking away the rights of unions.²⁹ The resistance from the trade unions among others paralyzed Zerbo's regime and enticed another revolutionary Military coup under two years.

Zerbo's regime which had some qualities of a *guardian coup*, as the regime came in to rescue the state from Lamizana's regime mismanagement, felt on its knees. Zerbo's regime, instead, was characterized by conflict between trade unions and the government³⁰ as a result of the increased dissatisfaction with the oppressive conditions of the country. In the words of Englebert, "soldiers saw themselves [as] capable of correcting the policies of other soldiers".³¹ This sets ground for another grand military coup that installed Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo as the president of Burkina Faso.

²⁴ Michel Prairie, Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987, New York, Pathfinder Press, 2007, pp. 20.

²⁵ Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, pp. 90.

²⁶ Ibid., p 90.

²⁷ Victoria Brittain, *Introduction to Sankara & Burkina Faso*, pp. 39.

²⁸ Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, pp. 90.

²⁹ Ibid., p 90.

³⁰ Kamalu, *The Little African History Book: Black Africa from the Origins of Humanity to the Assassination of Lumumba and the turn of the 20th Century*, pp. 173.

³¹ Pierre Englebert, *Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa*, pp. 54.

II. The coup d'état and regime of Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo

The continuous citizenry dissatisfaction and civil unrest during Zerbo's regime propelled another coup in Burkina Faso. The coup that ousted Saye Zerbo was led by Col. Gabriel Yoryan Somé on the 7th November, 1982 constituting noncommissioned army officers. Prominent among the plotters that formed Council of Popular Salvation (Conseil de Salut du Peuple (CSP)), was Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo who was later appointed as the fourth Head of State of Burkina Faso.³² Major Dr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo who was born on June 30, 1941 ruled Burkina Faso from 8 November 1982 to 4 August 1983.

The regime of Jean-Baptiste began with a glim of hope and rapid transformation. On 27 May, for instance, he promised a future return to civilian government and release of all political prisoners. The explanations advanced by Ouédraogo and other junior officers, including Sankara, was to cleanse and renew the derailed political and economic policies of the former regime. They stated that there 'must be a change towards a new type of constitutional government necessary to clean up the political mess; condemn...embezzlement [of] public funds'. The coup, as Sankara (collaborator in the coup and prime minister) puts it that the regime was determined 'to reform Voltaic society, to clean it up, and to purify it'. Council of Popular Salvation announced that it wished to 'recreate a new man, whose face was resolutely turned towards the future'.³³

In contrast to his promise of transition to civilian regime and new constitution and assertions of salvaging the nation from the mismanagement of Zerbo, however, the regime's repressive policies increased. He and CSP continued to ban political parties and organizations. His reign was marred by suspension of political and constitutional arrangements, and institutions through which opposition can be expressed, such as elected assemblies and a free press, were seriously stifled. His regime fell short of the populace mass expectation on economic reform and political feelings that had been pent up for years. As a result, it agitated feelings among the army, trade unions and students which hindered Ouédraogo regimes.

The reign of Ouédraogo was marred into different factions especially in the army. One consists of Ouédraogo's surrogates and the others consisted of

³² Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, pp. 92.

³³ Elliott P. Skinner, "Sankara and the Burkinabe Revolution: Charisma and Power, Local and External Dimensions" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Sep., 1988, pp. 441.

the 'young socialist firebrand' headed by revolutionist Thomas Sankara. The power struggle and difference in ideologies between the conservative and western-oriented Ouédraogo and radical Sankara imbued with intense nationalism and pan-Africanism³⁴ split the army into factions. This had ensued bitter rivalry that led to Sankara's expulsion as Prime Minister in 1982 and his subsequent detention.

The support and inspired admiration for Sankara among the army,³⁵ led by Capt. Blaise Compaore, seized and engineered insurgent military barrack in Po demanding the release of his comrade. They resented, as shown in the factional split of the, the arrest of Thomas Sankara. The subsequent efforts and shrewd resistance of pro-Sankara soldiers to release Sankara, in addition to popular uprising, paved way for yet another harvest of military coup that ousted the conservative military regime of Ouédraogo August 4, 1983.

III. The coup d'état and regime of Thomas Sankara

Burkina Faso's fourth successive military coup was led by Captain Thomas Sankara in a popular uprising in which became one of the most profound revolution in Africa's history. Sankara, a son to an assistant police officer, was born in December 1949 in Yako. He bagged his high school education and entered the Kidiogo military school in Kambionse. In addition, he got some military training in Madagascar and late 1970s took training as a paratrooper in France. The Burkina Faso border conflict with Mali in 1974-5, which he later denounced as "useless and unjust", catapulted Sankara to prominence as a lieutenant in Upper Volta's army.³⁶

Studies and travels abroad, concomitant with the realities on the ground, imbued left-wing political ideologies in him. Sankara was appointed Secretary of State for Information in Saye Zerbo's regime, however, later resigned. His difference in political ideologies positioned him at odds with the conservatives including Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, whose regime he backed to power in a 'truly radical coup' that overthrew President Saye Zerbo. However, he was later on dismissed as the prime minister in Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo regime. On 4 August, 1983, consequent of his arrest, a military insurgent march from Po

³⁴ Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Military Coups in West Africa Since the Sixties*, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2001, pp. 19.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 19.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 20.

military base to the capital of Ouagadougou led by Blaise Compaore, engineered the overthrow of the regime of Jean-Baptiste in popular uprising. This coup installed Sankara as the president of the new Conseil National de la Révolution (National Council of the Revolution (CNR)).³⁷

The coup, in Sankara's words, is a "democratic and popular revolution" geared toward elevating the masses. In his first speech, Sankara called for immediate formation of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) –to spread the message and implementation of the revolution's goals. In 1984, as part of his revolutionary moves, he renamed the country from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso—the "Land of the Upright Men". He joined with the peasant, workers and young people to carry out deep-going economic and social measures that curtailed the rights and prerogatives of the aristocracy and wealthy merchants³⁸. His government funded public works to build roads, schools, and houses. He also established revolutionary courts to try former leaders and high officials accused of corruption.³⁹ He introduced massive and spectacular reforms in education, health, social, agriculture and environmental sectors.

As a country hit by coup upon coup, citizens become wary of Sankara's policies. What Sankara continued to ignore, in the words of Skinner, was the growing skepticism about the efficacy of his policies and actions.⁴⁰ In May 1984, an alleged coup erupted and the alleged plotters were tried and executed in June the same year. The increase in his different political ideologies and fracturing of the CNR paved a palace coup on October 15, 1987 against Sankara and his subsequent assassination with other 12 civilian and soldiers. The coup marked the fifth military coup in Burkina Faso. It was led by Sankara's close aide, Blaise Compaore and other military officers including Jean-Baptiste Lingani and Henri Zongo. Thomas Sankara, after his assassination, was accused of his betrayal of the noble objectives of the democratic and popular revolution in a radio broadcast. Sankara's death ended one phase of the Burkinabe revolution⁴¹ and opened up Burkina Faso yet to

³⁷ Prairie, *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987*, pp. 20.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 21.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 21.

⁴⁰ Elliott P. Skinner, "Sankara and the Burkinabe Revolution: Charisma and Power, Local and External Dimensions" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Sep., 1988, pp. 450.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 454.

another military coup. The coup installed one of Africa's longest Military regime, the Compaoré-led Popular Front which dissolved the CNR.⁴²

IV. The coup d'état and regime of Blaise Compaoré

Blaise Compaoré, born February 3, 1951, has the longest serving military regime after his brutal coup that assassinated his comrade, Thomas Sankara in October 15, 1987. Blaise Compaoré had attended military trainings in Cameroon and Morocco, a military academy and paracommando training respectively. It was in Morocco that he met his onetime close ally, Thomas Sankara. The duo had established close contacts from there and became brothers-in-arms and friends up to Sankara's assassination, engineered by Blaise. Blaise Compaoré had held several military positions beginning in 1978 where he served as commander in paracommando regiment. He headed the military base in Po, a base that he used to launch the freeing of Sankara after his arrest and the subsequent coup of Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo regime in 1983. This coup installed Compaoré's ally, Sankara, as the Head of State and Compaoré as Minister of State and Minister of Justice.⁴³

The relationship between Blaise and Sankara, a close aide, however, had turned bitter after the duo had a different view in shaping the August Revolution. According to Compaoré's later explanation: 'One faction (Blaise, Lingani and Zongo) held that democratic debate was the absolutely best means for advancing the August revolution, while the other (Sankara) upheld bureaucratization, militarization, and the assertion of personal power'.⁴⁴ The ensued bitter rivalry, swift over putting the August revolution on track, led to the palace coup and the subsequent infamous assassination of Sankara and other 12 officials. The coup was masterminded by Blaise Compaoré-led Popular Front, including Jean-Baptiste Lingani and Minister Henri Zongo, installing Compaoré as the Head of State. The two, however, were executed by Compaoré in 1989 for plotting against him.⁴⁵

⁴² Lawrence Rupley, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, pp. 108.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 96.

⁴⁴ Elliott P. Skinner, *Sankara and the Burkinabe Revolution: Charisma and Power, Local and External Dimensions*, pp. 450.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Rupley, *Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso*, pp. 110.

Blaise was able to maintain a regime that was semi-authoritarian regime, combining democratization with repression, to ensure political stability⁴⁶ in a country that has a rich history of military coups and counter-coups. Blaise had been the center of action in his 27 years as the head of state with little room for the oppositions—there were few alternatives for democratic succession.⁴⁷

The expectations of the populace, as in the preceding regimes, were always flared up. The trade unions, students and other sectors of the country yearned for deep democratic changes that will enhance the development of Burkina Faso. Compaoré ordered a constitutional review committee set up to draft a constitution that entails multi-party system and 7-year term. The draft constitution was adopted in a referendum in 1991 enhancing several newly formed and legalized political parties. In 1992, the country also held its first parliamentary election, under leveled ground, Compaoré's Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire/Mouvement du Travail (ODP/MT) achieved a two-thirds majority.⁴⁸

Internationally, Blaise Compaoré's muddled past, as regard to his ascent to power, was such that his name was for a long while associated with political banditry and mercenary politics.⁴⁹ His regime, as in case of his support to rebels and fueling conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, survived on devious dealings beyond Burkina Faso.⁵⁰ Compaoré, however, has earned himself, despite all the accusation—troublemaker, as a Chief-Mediator-Diplomat in quelling conflicts in African sub-region. He helped reaching deals and settling conflicts, for instance, in Northern Mali, he was instrumental in freeing Westerners held hostage by militant groups beginning in 2003⁵¹ and the Ivorian Crisis. His role as a mediator, however, remains a puzzle to large number of commentators.

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, Brussels, International Crisis Group, 2013, pp. I.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. I.

⁴⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, *Burkina Faso Country Report* Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, pp. 3.

⁴⁹ Amy Niang, "Blaise Compaoré in the Resolution of the Ivorian Conflict: From Belligerent to Mediator-In-Chief" New York, *Social Science Research Council*, 2016, pp. 5.

⁵⁰ See United Nations, *Summary Report along with Observations by the Chairman on the Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds (31 July and 1 August 2000)*, UN S/2000/1150, New York, United Nations, 2000.

⁵¹ Amy Niang, *Blaise Compaoré in the Resolution of the Ivorian Conflict: From Belligerent to Mediator-In-Chief*, pp. 5.

However, repeated promises of change, as a tool used by all the previous regimes, have never been fulfilled, and this has led to loss of confidence and broken relations between the state and its citizens as well as a loss of authority at all levels of the administration. Consequently, public distrust sparked violent protests in the first half of 2011 that involved various segments of the society, including rank-and-file soldiers in several cities. The strong-man of Burkina Faso, after 27 years in power, was finally forced to resign on 31 October 2014 after a widespread popular protest ignited by his push to amend the Constitution to allow him further stay in power. The underlying socioeconomic problems and constellation of several factors which Compaoré's regime failed to alter flared up the protest and his subsequent resignation and retreat into exile in Ivory Coast. As a result, an interim government led by Michel Kafando, former foreign minister and ambassador to the UN and, was set up to lead the country to constitutional order and elections.

V. The coup d'état and regime of Gilbert Diendéré

The trend of Burkina Faso's military coup continued in 2015. The last military coup –seven days coup –that befell in Burkina Faso was masterminded by Gilbert Diendéré on 16 September 2015. General Diendéré, head of the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP)-an army unit established by Blaise Compaore, took advantage of the weak interim government led by Michel Kafando to dissolve the transitional government. General Gilbert Diendéré is an aide to Blaise Compaore. The regiment arrested key figures of the interim regime and demanded changes in exclusionary electoral laws that barred Compaore's enablers from seeking office in the country's elections. Diendéré justified the coup as an “action to prevent the disruption of Burkina Faso due to the insecurity looming during pre-elections”.⁵² The coup derailed the supposed elections to be held in October 2015, however, it took place in November and Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected into office.

The September 2015 military coup in Burkina Faso, compared to previous military coups, was one of the most unpopular and short-lived military coups in the country's history. The plotters were greeted with further popular coup denouncing the coup. The regular army, in addition, threatened Diendéré and

⁵² “The rise and fall of Burkina Faso's coup: what you need to know” The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/24/burkina-faso-coup-rise-and-fall-of-what-you-need-to-know>, (Sep. 24, 2015).

RSP that they were willing to act against the elite presidential guard.⁵³ The international community, African Union, ECOWAS, UN and France, exerted pressure on the coup leaders to cede power and allow the transitional government to continue. Negotiations fostered by ECOWAS enhanced the restoration of the transitional government and Kafando was reinstalled as the interim leader on 24 September. The 2015 coup was another clear proof that the Burkinabe Military is reluctant to distance itself from being involved in the country's politics which has been hit by numerous military coups since independence. The popular uprising, however, vehemently denying Diendéré-led coup suggests that power in Burkina Faso is steadily shifting away from the army to civilians.⁵⁴

Why did Burkina Faso experience multiple military coups and rule?

In his analysis, Thomson states that the military as the custodian and managers of state violence and which is expected to remain subservient to political leaders, chooses to turn this violence on the state and capture the political power itself. The military in Burkina Faso, entrusted as states custodian of violence, instead uses this in reverse to instigate military coups, countercoups and instead install themselves as political leaders. This has been the norm of the Burkinabe army since independence thus intervening in the politics of the state. The frequency of military intervention in politics has starved Burkina Faso on her long road to democratization-the military's neutrality is blurred and needlelike.

The Burkinabe military had banked on numerous opportunities to launch military coup that installed military regimes with similar or different drives-revolutionary, autocratic and many that defy categorization.⁵⁵ To categorize the military coups that took place in Burkina Faso, Alex Thomson typology of coup d'état will be facilitative here. First is the '*guardian coup*'. In guardian coup, writes Thomson, is where the military intervenes in order to rescue the state from civilian mismanagement. Saye Zerbo's coup in 1980 with its

⁵³ "How the people of Burkina Faso foiled a military coup" *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/25/burkina-faso-foiled-military-coup>, (Sep. 25, 2015).

⁵⁴ "Why Burkina Faso's coup failed" *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21670491-power-shifting-military-civilians-burkina-faso-why-burkina-fasos-coup-failed>, (Oct. 2, 2015)

⁵⁵ Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, pp. 138.

characteristics, possibly, can be associated with the guardian typology coup. The coup was staged to rescue the state from Lamizana's regime mismanagement and lavish life style that siphons states resources.

Second is the '*Veto coups*'. In veto coups, the military intervenes in a state politics when the interest of the military and their allies are threatened by ruling regime or other social changes. Most of the coups that were staged in Burkina Faso can be comfortably placed under this coup typology. The military officers have always been suspicious of the other thus making them feel threatened by the other soldiers. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, Thomas Sankara, Blaise Compaoré and General Gilbert Diendéré coup after the transitional regime were all categorized as veto coup because they staged coup because their interests were threatened. For instance, the coup that installed Thomas Sankara as Head of State was staged in response to the arrest of Sankara. Thomas Sankara's arrest was a threat to Blaise Compaoré and other soldiers involved in the coup- they could not stand idly while their ally was arrested. By the same token, Blaise Compaoré, Ligani and Zongo felt threaten by the ideals of Thomas Sankara thus his subsequent overthrow and assassination.

'*Breakthrough coup*' made final of the Thomson's typology of military coup. In this, the military embarks on coup to oust a long term autocratic regime with the motive of overhauling and revamping the entire politics of the state in new direction. In this way, breakthrough coups are revolutionary geared towards introducing policies and ideas to put the state in a pedestal that it has lost due to the draconian past regime. Saye Zerbo's 1980 and Thomas Sankara's 1983 coups well fitted into the breakthrough coup typology. Zerbo's coup marked a total break away from the long serving regime of Laminzana. Zerbo's coup was greeted with praise by the Burkinabe populace as it ended Lamizana's style of single party rule in Burkina Faso. Thomas Sankara's 1983 coup outstanding revolutionary style made it suited in this typology. His reign, referred to as Africa's most successful revolutionary, was able to catapult Burkina Faso to a well revered nation.

Conclusion

The recurrence of military coups in Burkina Faso's history especially in the 1980s has devastated the feeding pillars of the country's democracy, development and undermined civilian rule. Instead, soldiers-turned-civilians became the head of state and other vital institutions of the country. The

military in Burkina Faso, taking from their numerous involvement in politics, made the country a stage for recurring coups and military regimes. Consequently, the country has experienced an unprecedented high frequency of military coups in the history of Africa alongside Nigeria and Benin.

The main purpose of the Military, or any function the Military may possess has frequently been dramatically eroded through its politicization and personal ambitions of those in power. Various heads of state have used the military as means to achieve political ends. For instance, Blaise Compaoré's longevity in power in a country with a volatized and polarized military as Burkina Faso is a clear manifestation of his maneuvering skills of the country's armed forces.

These military interventions in Burkina Faso's political space, with all the acclaimed motives they used to back their plots, all fell short of the populace expectations in social changes. However, the Sankara coup, regarded as one of Africa's most successful revolutionary coup, is deemed as an outstanding one in terms of magnificent social changes it brought. In Burkina Faso, military coups which were used presumably to effect positive social, economic and political changes, brought little tangible results yet they became endemic to the country's politics.

The coups deprived the country of an institutionalized political culture, induced economic hardship and social division. Such an environment paved way for the military take overs which further weakened the civil societies, political parties, legislature and the judicial organ of the state. In the absence of strong institutions, the military came to power. In the final analysis, for the country to avoid the recurrence of military coups, anytime in the future, the civil societies, political parties, legislature, the judicial organ of the state and other institutions of the state need to be strengthened.

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