

Military Intervention in Niger Republic: A Form of African Resistance to Françafrique and French Paternalism

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Abstract

The study examined the link between military intervention in Niger and resistance to France's neo-colonial influence in the region. The recent recurrence of military coups has significantly impacted regional security in West Africa, leading to the suspension of numerous security arrangements and bilateral relations between affected countries and regional economic blocs such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Scholars have analyzed the causes of these coups from various perspectives, with bad governance, poverty, and the failure of Nigerien politicians to embrace the democratic process being dominant themes in academic discourse. This research, however, views the repeated occurrence of coups in Niger as a form of military and national resistance against neo-colonial influence, particularly that exerted by France and its Western allies. Adopting a systematic review approach and grounded in Marxist theory on post-colonial Africa, the study identifies key drivers of military coups, including France's interference in Niger's political, internal, and military affairs. The study concludes that military coups in Africa can be understood as a form of resistance against neo-colonialism and the lingering effects of colonial domination. The study recommends that the United Nations, in collaboration with the African Union and ECOWAS, should support Niger in achieving true political and economic independence from French control.

Introduction

The resurgence of military takeovers of civilian governments in many Sahel states is surprising yet not entirely unexpected, given the persistent socio-political upheavals in these regions. Africa has historically witnessed more coups and military interventions than any other continent, both in the 20th and 21st centuries (Falola, 2022). These interventions began predominantly in the aftermath of independence during the 1960s. To date, the continent has experienced over 200 coups, including both successful and failed attempts. Africa is described as a continent prone to

frequent coups, with approximately 41 countries having experienced either successful or failed military takeovers after their independence (Barka & Ncube, 2012). West Africa has historically been the epicenter of military coups on the continent (Suleiman, 2021). More still, Falola (2022) highlights that the resurgence of coups in West Africa is a direct consequence of the region's failure to strengthen and deepen democratic governance. This failure is evidenced by widespread governance deficits, including systemic corruption, the absence of free, fair, and credible elections, and escalating security challenges. These issues have eroded public confidence in democratic institutions, further exacerbating political instability.

On the morning of July 26, 2023, Niger's presidential guard blocked President Mohamed Bazoum from leaving his residence. Initially, the presidential office described the situation on social media as an act of defiance by the elite military unit. However, by the end of the day, the incident had escalated into a full-fledged coup. A group of ten senior military officers appeared on national television, introducing themselves as the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP). They announced the government's overthrow, attributing their actions to the worsening security situation in the country and ineffective economic and social governance (Tschoerner, 2023).

The exact catalyst for the coup remains uncertain, but both local and international analysts agree that Brigadier General Abdourahamane Tiani played a central role in orchestrating it (Idrissa, 2023). Some reports suggest that Tiani was about to be dismissed from his role as head of the presidential guard, while others indicate that financial disputes between Tiani and Bazoum over the guard's budget may have fueled tensions. Additionally, President Bazoum was reportedly reshuffling the military leadership, which involved retiring some generals or assigning them diplomatic roles abroad. One notable case was Chief of General Staff Salifou Modi, who had been appointed as Niger's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in March 2023. Now regarded as the junta's second-in-command, Modi's reassignment further raises speculation about the military's dissatisfaction. Another unresolved question is the possible role of former President Mahamadou Issoufou, given his close ties with Tiani, his ambiguous stance during and after the coup, and his son's involvement in the country's booming oil sector, which Bazoum reportedly sought to reform (Guichaoua & Wilén, 2023).

The support of the defense and security forces for the coup leaders was aimed at preventing bloodshed, according to Chief of Staff Abdou Sidikou Issa. However, tensions between Bazoum and the military had been simmering for some time, particularly regarding how to address Niger's security challenges (Gilles, 2023).

Despite the widespread belief that coups result from bad leadership, corruption, tenure elongation, and illegal constitutional amendments to remain in power, the notion of military resistance to neo-colonialism and France's dominance over Niger Republic's political and economic landscape has not been thoroughly explored. Additionally, economic factors, such as the desire to maintain control over uranium exploration and production—on which France and Europe rely for over 25%

of their energy needs—have been under-examined in recent studies. That said, uranium politics have been leveraged by coup plotters as a tool of legitimization, whereby licenses are denied to foreign governments that refuse to recognize the new regime. At the same time, neo-colonial powers have used the pretext of providing security to ensure that uranium resources do not fall into the hands of terrorists in the region. The argument that France's influence has played a role in Niger's recurring military coups is based on three key factors. First, uranium politics, as France heavily relies on Niger's uranium resources. Second, neo-colonialism, reflecting France's continued economic and political control over its former colony. Third, uncoordinated military operations, with Niger's military accusing France of conducting unilateral military interventions without their approval (Aoife & Sandor, 2023).

Public support for coups in West Africa, particularly in Niger, has led experts to continually evaluate the general perception and implications of military takeovers in the region. In many instances, citizens have celebrated the military's return to power, viewing it as a corrective measure against poor governance. This study, therefore, examines the phenomenon of coups as a form of African resistance to *Françafrique* and French paternalism, focusing on the willingness of citizens to legitimize coup plotters and the broader implications for governance in the region

Literature Review

Since the resurgence of military coups in Africa, scholars have attempted to understand politics, implications of military coups in West Africa especially in the Sahel. In *African Coups in the COVID-19 Era: A Current History*, De Barros et al. (2023) employ a qualitative research design to explore the resurgence of military coups during the COVID-19 period. Between August 2020 and November 2022, eleven coups and attempted coups were recorded. The study observes that the affected states share a history of political instability, exacerbated by insecurity and economic recession during the pandemic. In *Term Limit Evasions and Coups in Africa: Two Sides of the Same Coin*, Adewale (2023) utilizes a systematic analysis to examine coups in Africa from 2020 to 2023. The study highlights that term limit evasions and sham elections are key drivers of coups in West Africa. Adewale argues that strengthening democratic processes and ensuring periodic elections are essential to addressing this trend. Also, A study on *Parties, Coups, and Authoritarian Rule: Patterns of Political Change in Tropical Africa* employs an exploratory research design to investigate recurring coups on the continent. The research attributes coups to authoritarian governance, systemic corruption, and widespread economic hardship. Bjarnesen and Lanzano (2022), in *Burkina Faso's One-Week Coup and Its Implications for Free and Fair Elections*, analyze how repeated military coups impact elections in Burkina Faso. They identify the failure to conduct credible elections as a critical factor in military interventions. Similarly, the *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (2022), in *Understanding Burkina Faso's Latest Coup*, adopts a systematic review and document analysis approach. It finds that election exclusion, economic hardship, mistreatment of the military, and

poor security management—leaving large territories under insurgent control—are major contributors to coups in Burkina Faso.

Omotola (2011), in *Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa: What Implications for Democratic Consolidation*, examines factors behind coups. The study argues that misrule, misplaced military priorities, and the erosion of constitutional order are pivotal drivers of military interventions in politics. Odigbo et al. (2023), in *Democracy's Discontent and the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa*, utilize documentary data and apply frustration-aggression theory to explain how democratic failures contribute to military coups. The study emphasizes that poor governance, personalization of state institutions, and the absence of democratic dividends have led to discontent and rebellion across several African states. It recommends institutionalizing governance to curb the resurgence of coups.

The study identifies a literary gap in the role of France in the economic and political control of post-colonial Africa. Decades of poor democratic experiences have fueled discontent and rebellion, as evidenced by recent coups in Sudan, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, and failed coups in Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. These cases underline the urgent need for governance reforms to stabilize Africa's political landscape.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Marxism theory of post-colonial state. The Marxist theory of post-colonial states offers a critical perspective on the socio-economic and political structures that emerged in formerly colonized nations. Rooted in Marxist principles, this theory analyzes the interplay between class struggle, the global capitalist system, and the legacy of colonialism in shaping the post-colonial state. According to Marxist scholars, the post-colonial state inherits socio-economic structures that perpetuate inequality. Colonialism established a dual economy, dividing societies into a small elite aligned with global capitalism and a vast majority of impoverished workers and peasants (Rodney, 1972). This economic legacy persists in post-colonial states, where the ruling class often mirrors the colonial power's exploitative practices. A significant aspect of the Marxist theory is the concept of dependency, where post-colonial states remain economically reliant on former colonial powers or Western capitalist economies. This dependency undermines genuine sovereignty and reinforces a neo-colonial relationship, as argued by scholars like Andre Gunder Frank (1966). The global capitalist system continues to exploit the resources and labor of post-colonial states, relegating them to a peripheral role in the global economy. The post-colonial state, according to Marxist theorists, functions as an instrument for the ruling elite to maintain their dominance. Alavi (1972) describes the post-colonial state as a "bureaucratic bourgeoisie," which lacks an independent economic base and relies on state power to secure its class interests. This state structure often suppresses grassroots movements and labor struggles to maintain the status quo.

The Marxist framework emphasizes that the contradictions between the ruling class and the marginalized masses drive social and political instability in post-colonial states. These contradictions manifest in various forms, including labor strikes, peasant uprisings, and demands for equitable resource distribution (Fanon, 1963). The inability of the post-colonial state to resolve these contradictions perpetuates cycles of unrest and underdevelopment. Marxists argue that post-colonial states experience uneven development due to their integration into the global capitalist system. Resources are extracted to benefit the global core, while the periphery remains underdeveloped. Samir Amin's (1974) theory of unequal exchange highlights how the economic structures of post-colonial states are designed to serve the interests of global capitalism rather than their populations.

The Marxist theory of post-colonial states provides a critical framework for understanding the reasons for coups in Africa. By analyzing the socio-economic and political conditions of post-colonial African states through this lens, we can identify structural and systemic factors that contribute to the recurrence of military interventions in politics. The colonial period in Africa entrenched a hierarchical class structure that benefited a small elite while marginalizing the majority. Upon independence, this elite—often aligned with global capitalist interests—maintained control of the state apparatus. Marxist scholars argue that this perpetuation of colonial-era inequalities alienated the masses, creating widespread dissatisfaction and a breeding ground for instability (Rodney, 1972). The inability of the post-colonial elite to address the needs of the majority led to grievances that the military often exploited to justify coups. Military leaders claimed to represent the disenfranchised, stepping in to address corruption, inequality, and poor governance perpetuated by the ruling class.

Post-colonial African states often found themselves trapped in a neo-colonial relationship with former colonial powers and international financial institutions. These external actors influenced domestic policies, prioritizing resource extraction and capital accumulation for the benefit of the global capitalist system (Amin, 1974). The economic dependency of African states often resulted in austerity measures, economic crises, and widespread poverty. This weakened the legitimacy of civilian governments, making them vulnerable to military interventions. Coups were frequently framed as a response to economic mismanagement and foreign domination.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design is a methodological approach that seeks to explore and understand complex social phenomena by examining the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of individuals or groups (Soratto, Pires, & Friese, 2019). It is widely applied in disciplines such as social sciences, psychology, and anthropology, where capturing subjective meanings and lived experiences is crucial. Rather than focusing solely on numerical data, qualitative research emphasizes depth and context, offering insights into human behaviors, beliefs, and societal dynamics that quantitative methods may overlook (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

For this study, a qualitative research design is particularly suited as it enables an in-depth exploration of the political, historical, and socio-economic dimensions of military intervention in Niger within the broader framework of Françafrique and French paternalism. By employing interpretive analysis, the research aims to uncover the motivations, narratives, and implications of military intervention as a form of African resistance (Corner, Murray, & Brett, 2019). Adopting a constructivist paradigm, this study examines how key actors—including military leaders, political elites, and civil society—perceive and construct resistance to French influence.

The research will analyze historical records, treaties, military agreements, government statements, and policy documents related to French-Nigerien relations. Additionally, speeches, news articles, and social media discourse will be examined to identify dominant narratives surrounding the intervention, providing a comprehensive understanding of how military action is framed within the broader struggle for sovereignty and self-determination.

Content analysis was utilized to examine and interpret the data collected. This method involves systematically identifying and analyzing relevant information related to the study's focus, allowing for the drawing of meaningful inferences and conclusions.

Socio-Political Hardship and Resurgence of Military Coup in Africa

A systematic analysis of African states that have recently experienced military coups, such as Burkina Faso, highlights specific characteristics inherent in their political systems that contribute to these upheavals. Key factors include unconstitutional tenure elongation, widespread corruption, gross economic and institutional mismanagement, electoral fraud, and the politicization of insecurity. These issues undermine democratic governance, erode public trust, and create conditions conducive to military intervention.

Table 1: Summary of Causes of Military Coup in Africa

The table below shows that most military coups in Africa are linked to the above.

S/N	ORIGIN OF THE COUP	DATE	Leader	Effects	CAUSES
1	Mali	August 19th, 2020 (first coup); May 24th 2021(second coup)	Asimi Goita is the leader of both coups	Removal of President Ibrahim Keita	Electoral malpractice (parliamentary elections), growing insecurity in the country, corruption.
2	Guinea	2021	Col. Mamady Doumbaya	overthrowing of the civilian rule of President Alpha Conde	Corruption and mismanagement of resources
3	Niger	2021& 2023	General Abdourahamane Tiani	The government of Mohammed Bazoum was ousted	Corruption and bad leadership
4	Guinea Bissau	2022	Not known	President Umaro Embaló was the target of this coup and criticized by the coup plotters for his failing leadership	Insecurity, bad governance, citizens' discontent, youth unemployment, etc

5	Burkina Faso	2022	Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba	Removal of the president	Terrorism and insecurity
6	Burkina Faso	2022	Captain Ibrahim Traoré	Removal of Paul-Henri as junta	Terrorism and insecurity

Source: Author Compilation, 2025

Many African constitutions impose tenure limits for executive offices, excluding legislative positions. However, tenure elongation is often achieved through flawed elections and fraudulent constitutional amendments. This issue has been a recurring trigger for conflicts across the continent. While conflicts are a natural aspect of human relationships, Oche (2006) argued that in Africa, their prevalence has taken on the characteristics of a plague, significantly hindering development. Available records show that tenure extension was central to crises in countries like the Gambia under Yahya Jammeh and Côte d'Ivoire under Laurent Gbagbo, leading to gross human rights violations, mass displacement, and loss of lives.

Currently, approximately 70% of United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa involve conflicts tied to term extensions. The impact has been particularly devastating in regions like Somalia, Darfur in Sudan, and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to Abiodun et al. (2018), such conflicts result in widespread destruction of property, forced displacement, and political instability.

Although most African states that have experienced recent coups are nominally democratic with constitutionally approved tenure limits, the practical implementation of governance often diverges. Power is heavily concentrated in the executive branch, undermining the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances. Judicial systems often serve as tools to legitimize flawed electoral processes, eroding trust among aggrieved political actors and discouraging democratic resilience. Recent trends in tenure elongation and nepotistic succession further compound this issue.

Corruption among political officeholders is another significant factor fueling military coups in Africa. Coups are often justified by military leaders as a response to corruption and economic instability. However, McBride (2004) and Collier and Hoeffler (2007) argue that these justifications are often self-serving, with coup leaders seeking to exploit public resources much like their civilian predecessors. Scholars like Coleman and Brice (1962) and Luckham (2001) note that the socio-economic complexities of African societies, including ethnic loyalties within the

military, contribute to the persistence of coups. This ethnic or tribal allegiance often supersedes national interests, further destabilizing governance structures (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

The role of corruption as a catalyst for military intervention is evident in countries like Niger and Burkina Faso. Transparency International has reported widespread corruption and high inflation in Niger before its recent coup. State resources were concentrated in the hands of a few individuals close to the president (Al Jazeera, 2022). Despite being rich in uranium—a resource in high international demand—the revenue from its exploitation has had minimal impact on the country's GDP or citizens' standard of living (Chilaka, 2022). Foreign interference further exacerbates systemic corruption. In Niger, for example, Western powers benefit from uranium mining, yet the country remains impoverished. Similarly, Burkina Faso's sovereignty has been undermined by external influences, contributing to political instability and eventual military intervention.

Francafrrique and French Paternalism and Military Coups in Africa

Post-independence, France adopted a paternalistic approach toward its former colonies, fostering a dependency that has persisted in various forms. This relationship is encapsulated in the concept of *pré-carré*, referring to France's "backyard" or privileged sphere of influence in Africa (Bach, 2011). A significant element of this influence is the CFA franc, a currency tied to the French treasury, which effectively limits the economic sovereignty of member states. By maintaining control over monetary policy, France ensures its economic interests in the region, often at the expense of the development goals of African nations (Englebert, 2009).

This economic dependency intertwines with governance and political stability. Local resources, such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products, are frequently exploited to serve French interests, reinforcing a cycle of reliance and underdevelopment. These practices often hinder the ability of African nations to achieve sustainable economic and political autonomy (Gabas & Hugon, 2001). As a result, this dynamic not only undermines economic independence but also weakens democratic institutions and governance frameworks in the region.

Also, the term *Françafrique* describes the complex political, economic, and cultural relationships between France and its former African colonies. Although originating during the colonial era, the concept has evolved into a form of neocolonialism, wherein France continues to exert substantial influence over these nations (Smith, 2003). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, France established a vast empire in Africa, implementing systems designed to prioritize French interests, often at the expense of local governance and development needs (Akindès, 2010). One prominent mechanism of control was the introduction of the CFA franc, which served as a tool of economic dominance. This currency tied the economies of member nations to the French economy, significantly limiting their financial autonomy (Gabas & Hugon, 2001). While the decolonization wave of the 1960s led to the political independence of many African countries, the relationship

with France did not diminish. Instead, it transformed, with economic arrangements like the continued use of the CFA franc symbolizing France's ongoing influence (Englebert, 2009).

Concerns about the CFA franc monetary zone and France's role in it have persisted for decades, but tensions have recently escalated. In 2017, the NGO SOS Pan-Africa organized protests against the CFA franc in various African and European cities, advocating for greater economic sovereignty (Sylla, 2019). The organization later declared a boycott of French goods as a symbol of pan-African resistance. That same year, a video of Franco-Beninese activist Kemi Seba burning a 5,000 CFA franc banknote caused significant media uproar, amplifying the anti-CFA sentiment. Boris Aké, another activist, stated, "We must do all it takes to ensure that the CFA is abolished forever" (Sy, 2018).

Initially, the CFA franc was introduced to ensure monetary stability in regions weakened by systematic French exploitation. Pegging the West and Central African CFA francs to the French currency—first the French franc and later the euro—helped maintain lower inflation rates compared to non-CFA countries in Africa (Nubukpo et al., 2016). However, this stability came at a cost: member states faced fiscal restraint and limited macroeconomic options. A key requirement of the CFA system was that colonies deposit 50% of their foreign currency reserves in the French Treasury, along with an additional 20% for financial liabilities. As a result, member states retained only 30% of their reserves within their borders (Sylla, 2019).

Over time, the economic trade-offs of the CFA monetary zone became evident. While the system initially reduced inflation, it also constrained economic growth and slowed poverty reduction. In the 1980s and early 1990s, CFA economies stagnated due to the artificially high exchange rate. To address this, the French government, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and member states collaborated to devalue the CFA franc by 50%. Beginning January 1, 1994, 100 CFA francs equaled one French franc. This devaluation boosted exports and strengthened the agricultural, logging, and textile industries, helping member countries regain footing in the global economy (Sy, 2018).

Despite these short-term benefits, the devaluation exposed deeper systemic flaws. Decision-makers, located outside the affected regions, did not experience the resulting inflation, fear, or economic distress. The prioritization of exports over imports disproportionately affected local populations. Mohamad Keita, who grew up in Mali and Senegal, recounted how his parents, including a father employed by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), feared the hardships that followed. The devaluation underscored the inability of these regions to improve living standards while under foreign economic control (Nubukpo et al., 2016).

Table 2: Summary of France Neo-Colonial Strategy

S/N	NEO-COLONIAL TOOL	CONTEXT	IMPLICATION
1	Language	The 20 African countries colonized by Francis adopted French as their official and educational language	Language is an important aspect of cultural identity. The adoption of French as an official language impacted negatively on other indigenous languages and eroded rich cultural identities.
2	Payment of Colonial Debts	France made the former colonies pay for infrastructural development during colonialism. Such infrastructure like railway, airports etc attracted colonial debts.	The colonial debts put most formal colonies into serious debts and affected their full participation into the global system. The debts, interest and rates are determined by France.
3	Control of National Reserve	Highly liquid assets, like foreign currencies, gold, and government securities, held	The control of the national reserve gives France a remote controller of the economies and monetary rates of the former colonies. The countries do not know the quantity of foreign reserves kept by the French Treasury. France today maintains approximately \$500 billion in African countries' money in its treasury, with barely 15% accessible to African countries. They even have to pay interest to withdraw more than 15%
4	Right to use Natural Resources	France retained the first right to use and buy natural resources discovered in its territory	France retained the right to buy, mine and explore natural resources in the former colonies. The Uranium deposit in Niger Republic is mined by France

		and to purchase them from former colonies.	and the method of payment determined by France.
5	France Companies are given preference in Government Contracts	Strategic infrastructure and government contracts are awarded to French companies.	France owns all significant economic assets in colonies like water, power, telephone, transportation, ports, and major banks. The domination of critical sectors is inimical for development of indigenous companies and infrastructure. It is another decoy of keeping formal colonies in debts.
6	Control of Military Industrial Complex and Training of Military	France asserts exclusive rights to provide military equipment and training to African military commanders through scholarships, grants, and "defence agreements" linked to the Colonial Pact. Additionally, it holds legal authority to station soldiers on African bases and intervene militarily in these countries.	The military is the pride of every nation and a symbol of actual sovereignty and strength. The control of the military by Francis signifies an extended sovereignty of France over its former colonies.
7	Use of Colonial Currency	The former French colonies are obligated to use the colonial currency FCFA, commonly known as the CFA franc	This practice not only depletes the wealth of African nations but also contributes an astounding

			\$500 billion annually to the French treasury.
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Adapted and Improved from (Iwaliaye, 2023)

Resources Control and Rise of Franch Resentments

Niger ranks as the third-largest producer of uranium globally, with an annual output exceeding 3,000 tonnes. However, despite its significant uranium deposits, the country remains the world's poorest, according to the UN Development Programme's 2006 Human Development Index (Reliefweb (2007)). Life expectancy in Niger is only 45 years, 71% of adults are illiterate, and 60% of the population lives on less than \$1 per day.

The politics of controlling uranium production in Niger have given rise to several issues and served as a pretext for both foreign military operations, interventions, and military coups in the country. The desire to control and access uranium production has been used to justify foreign military presence in Niger (Freeman, 2024). Both France and the United States maintain military bases there. Uranium has attracted foreign military and financial support, as seen in the U.S. providing military training to Nigerien officers and past participation in U.S. military equipment programs. The region has also become part of the broader U.S. war on terror.

Another key factor is that in most military coups that have occurred in Niger, coup leaders have justified their actions by claiming to restore the power to determine the use of uranium to the Nigerien people. It is a common argument among coup plotters and their supporters that Niger supplies about 24 percent of the EU's uranium requirements and that its resources are crucial to meeting global demand. Yet, Niger's economic and social indicators depict widespread impoverishment, highlighting the paradox of resource wealth alongside persistent economic hardship (Tifa, 2025).

The *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* (MNJ), or the Niger Movement for Justice, rebel group has justified targeting military outposts and foreign mining companies, resulting in the deaths of at least 45 soldiers and the kidnapping of a Chinese uranium worker, who was later released unharmed. The group claims to be fighting for Niger's full sovereignty over uranium production. The struggle for resource control and the general improvement of living standards have also been central to these political dynamics.

A 2005 investigation by Sherpa, an international network of lawyers promoting corporate social responsibility, found that workers in Niger's uranium mines were not informed of health risks, were not provided with basic protective measures, and were not always treated when they developed lung cancer. Long-term inhalation exposure to radon, a gas formed by the breakdown of uranium, has been linked to the onset of lung cancer. Another French NGO, CRIIRAD,

discovered that water, soil, and metal scraps from areas where Niger's two uranium mines are located were contaminated with dangerously high levels of radioactivity (Benton & Dale. (2018)).

Despite the aforementioned contention by the military to rid Niger of foreign control over uranium, (Ayee et al, 2011) argued that the military's failure to renew or revoke France's mining license stems from frustration over France's refusal to recognize the military government. It suffices to say that uranium was used both as a means to legitimize the coup before the people and to gain acceptance or legitimacy from foreign powers.

Other scholars have objected, arguing that Nigeriens have an inherent right to control their national resources. However, this fundamental right should not be manipulated to ensure the political survival of an increasingly oppressive coup regime, which has aligned itself with Russia—another self-serving imperial power, undoubtedly eager to exploit Niger's uranium reserves and other resources for its own benefit (Bird & Bird, 2020).

Despite the ongoing debate and scholarly opinions surrounding this issue, it is crucial to recognize that since Niger declared independence from France in 1960, true economic independence from France has remained an unfulfilled dream. Taking advantage of trade agreements that date back to the pre-independence era, France has extracted uranium from Niger with the highest possible profit margins, leaving the Nigerien people with little more than crumbs for over five decades. At times, according to Nigerien officials, French companies have even failed to pay the agreed-upon fees for uranium exports.

For many Nigeriens, France's dominance in the uranium industry epitomizes the broader issue of neo-colonialism. Although uranium exports generate substantial revenue, much of this wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a small elite, often aligned with French interests, while the majority of the population sees little benefit (Africa Intelligence, 2023). This inequitable distribution of wealth has fueled social unrest and featured prominently in the rhetoric of military coup leaders. These leaders frequently promise to renegotiate mining contracts to secure a more equitable share of the profits for Niger (Schwikowski, 2023).

The uranium sector has become a flashpoint in Niger's relationship with France. Successive governments, both civilian and military, have sought to assert greater control over the industry. However, these efforts often encounter resistance due to the significant influence French companies wield over Niger's economy (Le Nevé, 2023). Despite repeated commitments to reform the sector and ensure a fairer distribution of wealth, little tangible progress has been made. As a result, Niger remains heavily reliant on foreign companies for the extraction and sale of its most valuable resource. This ongoing dynamic continues to reinforce perceptions that French influence is a major impediment to Niger's sovereignty and development (Sinafrica News, 2024).

Coups As Resistances to Frances Neo-Colonialism in Africa

The recent military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have capitalized on widespread public opposition to French neo-colonial influence, selectively addressing anti-French sentiments. For instance, in Mali, French lost its status as an official language in July 2023 and was instead declared a “working language” (Associated Press, 2023). Similarly, Niger’s junta revoked military cooperation agreements with France, mandating the departure of the 1,000–1,500 French troops stationed in the country. After coups in Mali and Burkina Faso, French troops were expelled, with some relocating to Niger. However, U.S. troops continue to maintain a presence in Niger, and mining concessions in these countries remain active (Africa Intelligence, 2023).

In August 2023, Mali’s transitional government adopted a new mining law that, if approved by the president, would increase the state's share in all mining ventures from 20% to 35% and ban the export of unrefined lithium to promote local processing (Africa Intelligence, 2023). Niger’s junta also announced plans to halt uranium exports, though it remains unclear how this will be implemented. French company Orano (formerly Areva), which has long extracted uranium from Niger for France’s nuclear power plants, claimed that the political crisis would not immediately impact its supply chain (Schwikowski, 2023). Despite the anti-colonial rhetoric, neo-colonialist and imperialist structures of exploitation and domination persist, as do capitalist models of extractivism.

France’s response to these developments has been swift and severe. It suspended all development aid and budget support to Niger and Burkina Faso in July and August 2023 and to Mali in November 2022 (Le Nevé, 2023). The impact has been far-reaching; for example, Malian, Nigerien, and Burkinabè students who had already secured visas and grants to study in France were informed that their grants had been revoked. French arts and culture unions also reported directives to suspend all cultural cooperation with these countries (Africanews, 2023).

The growing opposition to France’s neo-colonial influence is part of a broader trend but should not be viewed as the direct cause of recent coups. Nor are these coups indicative of a broader pivot toward Russia, despite geopolitical framings in Western media. Instead, they highlight the entrenched role of national armies in African politics since formal decolonization. Coups often stem from internal frustrations, cleavages, and power struggles within the military. For instance, Niger’s July 2023 coup was initiated by the presidential guard after President Mohamed Bazoum proposed its reorganization. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, dissatisfaction within the lower ranks of the army about the lack of progress in combating jihadist groups played a central role in the January and September 2022 coups (Kandeh, 2004).

While military coups are the most visible form of resistance to French influence in Niger, they are not the sole avenues for opposition. Civil society organizations, student movements, and grassroots political groups have been instrumental in pushing back against French dominance. These groups frequently lead protests, strikes, and other forms of civil disobedience aimed at challenging both

the government's alignment with France and the broader system of economic exploitation that underpins the relationship (Maluleke & Bennett, 2022).

One prominent example of this resistance is Niger's student movement, which has a long history of activism against French neo-colonialism. Students have organized numerous protests and strikes against government policies perceived as serving French interests. Their activism has brought critical attention to issues such as uranium mining, resource exploitation, and insufficient investment in education and social services (Avoulete, 2022). The role of these student movements has been pivotal in highlighting the social and economic inequalities linked to French involvement in Niger's economy. Additionally, Niger's intellectual and cultural elites have significantly contributed to the discourse on French influence. Through literature, art, and public commentary, they have critiqued the legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This cultural resistance has provided a platform for articulating a vision of a more autonomous and sovereign Niger, free from the constraints of foreign domination. Such forms of cultural expression offer alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing the ongoing challenges of dependency and exploitation (Sinafrica News, 2024).

Furthermore, these coups underscore questions about the legitimacy of elected governments. While international actors emphasize the importance of elections, the structural challenges within these states complicate democratic processes. Systems rife with clientelism, insecurity, and restricted political competition mean that elections are often not viewed as legitimate or practical by the population (Zeilig & Sylla, 2023). For many citizens, the legitimacy of a government is assessed not through elections but by tangible improvements in daily life, such as access to basic necessities, security, and economic opportunities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent years, there has been a notable pushback against the concept of *Françafrique*, as African nations increasingly assert their sovereignty and seek to redefine their relationships with France. This shift is reflected in efforts to reclaim greater control over economic policies, particularly through the reconsideration of the CFA franc and its implications for economic autonomy. Additionally, many African nations are actively pursuing diversified international partnerships to reduce reliance on France and expand their geopolitical alliances. These evolving dynamics highlight the enduring yet contested legacy of *Françafrique*, which continues to shape the political and economic trajectories of these countries.

Based on findings regarding the causes of military coups in Africa, the following recommendations are proposed: African leaders should uphold the principles of constitutionalism and refrain from amending constitutions for the purpose of extending their tenure in office. Regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), along with the broader international community, should work to curtail France's economic control in its former colonies, promoting greater economic sovereignty. The military should strictly adhere

to its constitutional roles, focusing on the protection of the state and its institutions rather than intervening in political governance or overthrowing legitimate authorities. Elections should be free, fair, transparent, and widely recognized as the only legitimate means of effecting constitutional changes in government. The international community should refuse to back or recognize any government that seizes power through a military coup, thereby discouraging such unconstitutional actions.

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