

DEMOCRATIC DEFICITS AND THIRD WAVE OF COUP D'ETAT IN THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

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Abstract

Democracy in principles and practice, guarantees popular participation and robust representation of the peoples' interests and will because the majority opinion, at any time, represents the peoples' opinions. However, since the late 1950s and early 1960s when West African states achieved political independence, the opposite seems to be the case. Insecurity in the form of intra-state insurgencies and cross-border terrorism has continued to ravage most states in the region. Multifaceted factors such as climate change, religious extremism, and quest to annex new territories have contributed to rendering these democracies ineffective in protecting the lives and properties of citizens. Roles of compradors and stooges of imperialists that are installed as political leaders have even compounded the poor social and economic realities of the citizenry. Hence, renewed political consciousness and the intellectual push to achieve renascent Africa have spurred young revolutionary military officers to revert to coup d'états in order to achieve renewed hope amongst the populace. Thus, it is pertinent to focus on whether the western style democracy has failed in bringing about social and economic development in West African states. Basically, this study seeks to examine; (a) the factors behind the third wave of coups in West African states; and (b) the failure of Western-style democracy in West Africa. This study relies on the Marxian theory of post-colonial state. The study adopts the ex post facto research design. Data were generated through documentary method, and analyzed through the content analysis and logical deduction.

Keywords: Coup d'état, Democracy, Democratic Governance, Insecurity, State.

Introduction

Niger is a former French colony located in West Africa which gain(ed) independence from France on 3 August 1960 (Kemence 2012, p.55). It is a land-locked country covering 1,267,000 km² and bordering Mali, Algeria, Libya, Chad, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria-with extensive regional interdependencies through migration and trade in agricultural products and livestock. While the north of the country is categorized as Saharan desert, the majority of the country is located in the semi-arid Sahel. Over 80 per cent of the about 16 million inhabitants live in rural areas, primarily engaged in subsistence farming (rain-fed extensive agriculture) and/or pastoral livestock herding (Government of Niger, 2009). Geographically, the republic of Niger is located in a strategically central position where it is influenced politically, economically, and socially by developments in cultures such as that of the Arabs from countries like Libya, Algeria and Chad, also there are influences from the majority Hausa culture, and many other cultures of minority ethnic groups within and around the country. The population make-up of Niger also plays key role in the social and political developments in the country since independence. The population in majority is Hausa, followed by the Arab population, there are also other ethnic and tribal groups such as the Tuareg, Toubou, Fulani, Gurma, etc. For a better understanding of the plurality of Niger's population, Kemence (2012, p.44) asserts that;

The population of Niger is very diverse with more than 10 different ethnic groups. The dominant ethnic group is Hausa with 56 percent, followed by the Djerma (21 percent),

Touaregs (10 percent), Peuls (9 percent) and many other small ethnic groups such as Songhai, Arab-Berber, and Kanuri. Niger is 90 percent Muslim and 20 percent Christian and other indigenous religions.

This has played major roles in determining social, political and economic policies and programmes that have been pursued in the Republic of Niger with mostly negative impacts on the polity. Within Niger itself, there have been internal struggles for the control of political power between the Northern Arab-influenced population and the majority Hausa population in the south. As a way of examining the likely causes of the struggles and the resultant terrorist activities and coup d'états, one may have to consider the timing, frequency, and the direction of the acts of unconstitutional change of governments in the country since its achievement of independence. First, a critical review needs to be done on the relationship pattern between and amongst the different ethnic groups in the country. This would most likely unravel the reasons for instability, insecurity, and the struggle for political power in the republic of Niger. Second, critical examination needs to be made on the state of relationship between Niger and its erstwhile colonial master-France. The above scenarios in the Republic of Niger have resulted to some form of trajectory which has affected, and at some point, determined the social, economic and political developments in the country. One of these is the incessant occurrence of military coup d'états in the country which on one hand signifies the internal struggle for the control of political power in the state, on one hand, and the manifestation of democratic deficit in its governance. From the 1960s, just after attainment of independence, to the 1980s, and down to more than two decades after the turn of the century, coups have become like a remarkable feature of governance in the republic of Niger. It has to be stated clearly that the incidence of coups however, is not exclusive to Niger, in fact most countries in West Africa have experienced it at one time or the other excepting just about two out of the fifteen states in the subregion. In fact, to convey a clearer picture of the state of affair concerning coups in West Africa, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2023, p.4) notes that;

The spate of recent coups in Africa is showing no sign of abating. Coups in Africa are back in the news and on Africa's security agenda. Since 2020, in just three years, 13 (*thirteen*) coup attempts took place in Africa, eight of them successful in seizing power in Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

This, among other indications, points to the fact that the western-style democracy bequeathed to these states by their erstwhile colonial masters has neither taken root nor consolidated in these countries, even after more than six decades of political independence. The experiences of states in Africa, and especially in West Africa in the 1990s when there was a wave of democratic transitions in many states have proven to be akin to what played out in Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold war. And just like those experiences, the democratic transitions in West Africa have never yielded the expected benefits. Instead, they have fallen one after the other into either dictatorships or military rule (Hussein, n.d).

Basically, many of them, rather than develop and be entrenched in these states, democratic culture and principles are failing, or have failed in states such as Guinea, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Even in some West African states such as Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, democratic culture, principles, and practices are rather receding and declining, giving way to near dictatorships and manifesting features of one-party states with repressive disposition towards opposition, free majority participation, and popular opinions. Recent developments in Niger have exposed some struggle between dictatorships and people-oriented democracy. Just two years after Bazoum was sworn in on April 2, 2021 after a successful election, the democratic experiment was thwarted once again. That is actually what has been on display in West African states even those that are still 'experimenting' though, for a long time with democracy. Many of those have passed the threshold of being referred to as fledgling democracies

because they have practiced it for more than six decades and are supposed to have consolidated. But what they lack regrettably are strong democratic institutions which are the backbones of any society. Again, in many states in West Africa the manifestations of internal realities which are outcomes of inter-group relations do have enormous effects on developments.

As a corollary to the negative socio-political and economic relationships in Niger, the perceptions of the people of Niger and their reactions as regards such relationship must be put into perspective in order to fully grasp the causal factors therein. Also, there are the issues of increasing insecurity in the Sahel; impacts of climate change; the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; food security and livelihoods crises; and worsening humanitarian crises. This study, therefore, focuses on democratic deficits in the Republic of Niger and the resultant re-emergence of coup d'état in the state while examining the causal factors of the development.

Research Design

This study adopts the descriptive research design which relies on correlational processes in order to arrive at conclusions. Descriptive research majorly aims to unravel and discover the main elements of a phenomenon Anikpo (1986) in social relationships. Hence, the descriptive design is ideal for this research which is on democratic deficits and third wave of coup d'état in the Republic of Niger.

Conceptual Elucidation: Democracy

There is no consensus amongst scholars on the conceptualization of democracy as a phenomenon, but there are conceptualizations that have garnered widespread acclaim over the years as means of understanding what democracy entails. Falade (2014) enumerated the morphological makeup of the term democracy. The work notes that democracy is a combination of two Greek words: 'demos' (people) and 'kratos' (to rule). Hence, literally the term means "rule by the people." Basically, it is quite easy to understand it when Former American President Abraham Lincoln is attributed to describing democracy as "the government of the people by the people and for the people".

From the above definition, it becomes very clear that any political, social or administrative arrangement that discounts or neglects the peoples' inputs, criticisms and participation, cannot be said to be democratic. Though, not all political arrangements where the masses participate are democratic in nature, for example in climes where the peoples' participations are controlled, or where the press and pressure groups are suppressed, that form of democracy automatically falls short of what democracy stands for. Democracy can also be seen as a system of government which entails healthy competition between parties for an all-effective position of governance. The process is supposed to be devoid of violence for an all-encompassing level of political involvement in the selection of leaders through the conduct of periodic free and fair elections. However, the bottom line is that the peoples' fundamental human rights are to be protected, and popular political participation are to be guaranteed (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, 1989). Ajayi (1998) notes that democracy offers the masses opportunity to freely choose their leaders from amongst several options presented by political parties through periodic elections. These representatives are required to protect the interest of the populace and to govern without fear or favour. Furthermore, democracy ensures that the rule of law remains the bedrock of all actions in the polity. By so doing, the leaders become answerable to the masses (electorate). The voices of the masses must matter and must be respected at all times (Ajayi, 1998). From the submissions above, one can comfortably infer that, democracy is essentially people-centered because it ultimately promotes citizens' participation not only in the electoral process but also in the entire process of governance. In fact, in a democracy, the main objective of governance is satisfaction of the peoples' interest. Every other personal or group interest have to come in after the interests of the masses. However, whenever and wherever the masses themselves tend

to show that they prefer military regimes to democratic administrations, it becomes a 'red flag' which must be critically studied with the view to discovering the factors responsible.

Democratic Governance

In order to grasp the full meaning of the phenomenon, let the term 'governance' be conceptualized. Governance is the “manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for *the overall development*” (World Bank, 2005). In essence there are atmospheres and environments that promote peoples' participation in the governance of their state. That environment must be created by those who wield political power in a state. It relates to the processes of granting the public power and the use to which such power is put, which ideally, should be for the service of the people (Imobighe, 2013, p.244). The concept of governance gained recent entry into political discourse and was popularized by the World Bank's intervention in the debate on the African crises in the 1980s, whereas the idea of democracy had existed since the Greek city state of Athens and came to be popularized subsequently by the theory of representative democracy. Ibeanu and Egwu, (2007) further explained that the formal, institutional and procedural elements of democracy can exist without effective governance in the sense that it does not necessarily guarantee that public officials produced by electoral process will be subjected to the norms of transparency, accountability and the rule of law.

Having explained what governance stands for, there is also the concept of good governance which is synonymous with democratic governance in one sense. And that common ground is when considering their joint outcome which is all round development for all people of the state. In the view of Elaigwu (2014, p.244) good governance “deals with how those who have the authority of the state make efforts to achieve the goals or the ends of the state—the maintenance of law and order, the provision of welfare for its citizens, and the pursuits of national interest in the global arena”. According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2011), “Democratic governance is a system of government where institutions function according to democratic process and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions”. This is talking about synergy in operations of government business. Also, the United Nations Missions (UNMIT, 2005) states that:

A state which identifies with the culture of democratic government is one which welcomes a wide scope of political participation embracing a pluralistic system of political parties, a vibrant civil society and media, integrating women and minorities in all levels of government, protecting right and dignity of children and involves integrated approach to sustainable governance for and by all the people (UNMIT, 2005).

Stressing further on the phenomenon, Ibeanu and Egwu, (2007, p. 19) notes that “democratic governance in practice, is not only expected to promote the core values of democracy, it is also about deepening democracy in such a way that state institutions and political parties are accountable to the citizens.” In essence, therefore, accountability and probity become hallmarks in a democracy though there are other aspects which are also very vital. The topographical outlay of Niger and its unique position on the African continent exposes it to different vagaries that other states in the West African subregion do not experience when it comes to external influences in connection to insurgency and terrorism.

Fig 1.0 Map of Niger



Source: <https://www.google.com/search>

Figure 1.0 shows the map of Niger (Political) indicating the major towns and cities, the road and rail networks, and the international boundaries between it and its neighboring countries. In a state like Niger where the central sphere of political influence is majorly distanced from the larger part of the country, there is likelihood of groups taking up arms with the view to carving out and controlling their own separate sphere. Also, the manner in which leaders are recruited plays a major role on developments in general. If the leaders are elected in free, fair and credible elections, then the full benefits of democracy would trickle down to the masses, and state institutions would naturally evolve and consolidate for further development of people-oriented governance for all inhabitants.

In a polity where these principles are allowed to fully run their course without disruption, there is bound to evolve, not only democracy for the people but also good governance which guarantees all the rights and liberties of citizens and non-citizens regardless of color, creed, and ethnic backgrounds. The foregoing can exist even in Niger where there are multiple ethnic, religious, and tribal cleavages.

Insecurity

There have been scholarly works on insecurity, some of these are as follows; (Akpotor and Oromareghake, 2013; Adagba, Ugwu and Eme, 2012; Onu, 2013; and Ezeani and Chilaka, 2013) while it is understandable that insecurity simply means the state at which a human, a group, community, or a state begins to feel vulnerable to any form of threat, contemporary literature on the concept would be very useful to this study.

A state, community, or any human society could be said to be insecure when human rights, economic opportunities and the sanctity of human lives are constantly violated with little or no effort on the part of the government to nip it in the bud (Ezeani & Chilaka, 2013). For example, in a country like Nigeria which has multiplicity of ethno-religious, tribal and linguistic groups in all the six geopolitical zones of the country, any act of threat against any group or set of groups by either the government or other groups could be said to cause or constitute a state of insecurity. Ezeani and Chilaka (2013, p.208) went further to assert that insecurity could be seen as "...reduced capacity and capability of the government to safeguard and protect the country, property and persons, etc..." It could be against domestic or external threat depending on which that arises at any given time.

Akpotor and Oromareghake (2013, p.72) rather viewed insecurity from the pinhole of the qualities and conditions that characterize it, as they advance that "insecurity is the condition or quality of being insecure; want of safety; danger; hazard; as, the insecurity of a building liable to fire; insecurity of a debt..." When a building, for example, becomes insecure it implies that the lives of the humans that occupy the said structure also exposed to danger, and hence become insecure too. On their own part, Adagba, Ugwu and Eme (2012, p.80) refer to insecurity as "the breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic and political that have contributed to recurring conflicts..." Here, it does not really matter the nature of the source of the threat, whether it fans the ember of a recurring conflict or starts up a new one, it still constitutes a state of insecurity.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Marxian theory of post-colonial state. This theory is majorly linked to Hamza Alavi in 1972 when he carried out a political study of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The following scholars; Saul (1974); Miliband (1977); Ake (1981 & 1996); Ekekwe (1986); and Ibeanu (1987) have also carried out studies on the theory. The term post-colonial literally means a particular way of discourse about the economy at a time in history especially when political independence must have been achieved (Ake, 1981, p.88). Milliband (1973) cited in Saul (1974, p.351) notes that:

the state in the post-colonial society directly appropriates a very large part of the economic surplus and deploys it in bureaucratically directed economic activity

the main objective of the ruling class as the firmly have a hold on the state apparatus is their personal gains and those of their cronies (Ake, 1985; Ibeanu, 1998). Lack of autonomy in post-colonial states ensures that total independence is not achieved, hence exposing the state to internal struggle between classes for control of the state (Ugwueze, 2014). The capitalist interests are not pursued separately on its own, they are vehemently catered for along with the interests of a small hegemonic class in the society. This class is made up of political, industrial, military, and social elite who continually hold the masses down through policies which majorly serve their narrow interests. The overarching characteristic of post-colonial states which is lack of autonomy within and between the arms of government perpetuate the failure of administrations or government's inability to settle conflicts which may be political in nature especially electoral conflicts and litigations. While the reason for this might be located elsewhere, the roles of multinationals with those of their local allies tend to subvert the policies and thwart the efforts toward social and economic development.

The Nigerian economy is majorly dependent on external dynamics and the outcome of that is that citizens, both military and civilian, desire to capture power by any means, and retain same at all costs regardless of its effects on the welfare of the masses (Ibeanu, 1998).

Application of the Theory

Leaders in African states and those in the Republic of Niger have had the quest to bring about social and economic development of their different states. However, the western-style democracy with which they are bequeathed places them in a fix and restrains them from achieving their quest, especially when the state is primarily a raw material provider to their erstwhile colonial masters. States that operate rentier economies are basically far-flung political appendages of those that direct their affairs not from within but from without.

There is excessive value attached to political offices and political leaders in Africa. This makes the quest for political power so enormous that it leads to official wastages once individuals are elected into political offices (Ake, 1985).

Excessive official corruption leads to social and economic underdevelopment, hence the masses of each country try to make do with any option that is available. Post-colonial states manifest the following characteristics; disarticulation, monopolistic tendencies, dependence, and narrow resources (Ake, 1985). One of the main tools with which external forces strangle post-colonial states economically is unsolicited financial assistance. They come in form of aids and loans with cut-throat conditions attached. Invariably, when considered critically, one discovers that those characteristics of post-colonial states are the main reasons why the government in Niger perform so abysmally, and it represents why there is now a third wave of military incursion into the politics of the republic of Niger.

As a post-colonial state, Niger's internal dynamics are largely determined externally, making it difficult for people-oriented policies and programmes to be implemented. Authorities within the country maintain strong relations with capitalists whose transactions they finance through corruption in all sphere of national life. The state runs a rentier economy, and to maintain the status quo, enormous pressure is brought to bear on electoral processes. At the end of the day, there is violence before, during, and after elections in the state.

The main characteristic of the western style democracy is that the three main arms of government are structured to function as checks on each other in order to prevent dictatorship or, what may be referred to as a 'one party state'. The executive arm of government which wields the powers to practicalize the dictates of the constitution must seek approval for such powers from the legislature. Also, the judiciary which is referred to as 'the last hope of the common man' interprets the dictates of the constitution without fear or favor, and by so doing, could grant redress to any individual or group who may have suffered injustice in the hands of either the legislature, the executive, or any other individual or group. The parliament actually moderates the state of cordiality or otherwise of the relationship between individuals and groups within a polity (Stapenhurst, Johnston., & Pelizzo, 2006). Hence, it is as a result of the foregoing that we chose the post-colonial state as our theoretical framework.

Literature Review

This study adopts a thematic review of the literature, based on the following themes which emanate from the pertinent question that the study seeks to provide answers to:

1. The ECOWAS and Coup d'état in West Africa
2. Factors responsible for democratic deficit and coups in the Republic of Niger
3. Factors that Militate Against ECOWAS Military Intervention in Niger

The ECOWAS and Coup d'état in West Africa

A coup literally means a sudden and unconstitutional change of hands in administration and among the people who control political power in any polity. It has different ways through which it can be carried out and maintained, normally for the interest of those at the helm of affairs. For better understanding, a coup can also be seen as captured by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation thus;

A coup d'état or coup represents a sudden and often violent or illegal seizure of political power or government control by a group of individuals, typically within the military or other influential factions of a country. Coups are typically characterized by a centralized and organized effort, often involving the military, with the goal of seizing power and replacing the government.

In most instances, once a coup is successfully executed, it leads to the suspension of the state's constitution so that the coup leaders could conveniently rule without the legislative arm of government, but with a 'caged' and ineffective judiciary. A coup d'état is not only executed by the military, there are also civilian and political coups. However, a coup that has a combination of the military and the civilian participants is referred to as hybrid coup.

Though the Economic Community of West African States, by its statutes and principles, stand against any form of unconstitutional change of government or sudden and illegal incursion into politics in the subregion. Yet there have been a number of such changes over the years even in Nigeria which houses its subregional body's secretariat. The questions that beg for answers now includes; why has there been incessant unconstitutional changes to elected governments in the republic of Niger? Again, why has, the ECOWASs' stand against unconstitutional changes of government, not deterred the troops of member states from such incursions and in Niger in particular? That is on the part of ECOWAS as a body, but also answers need to be sought on why there have been developments that indicate democratic deficit in West Africa in general, and Niger in particular?

Motivations that give rise to coups can equally be different, these may include; struggles for the control of political power; economic and social pressures; ideological and religious differences; and ethnic or tribal differences. Some of the primary reasons for political unrest in the republic of Niger has been squabbles between the Arab-Berber nomads and the indigenous black farmers, also disagreements between the Djerma-Songhai and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups for the control of one sphere of influence or the other (Mwakikagile 2001, 125).

Factors responsible for democratic deficit and coups in the Republic of Niger

There are differing factors that are responsible for declining democratic principles and practice (democratic deficit) in the Republic of Niger, and by extension influence the new wave of military coups in the country. These are enumerated under but, not in any particular order, as follows;

1. Inter-ethnic struggle for political power

As far as the political issues of the Tuareg nomads are concerned, they remain diplomatically and economically marginalized right up to 2024, and are not being represented in Niger's central government. They are perhaps not represented in the decision-making process of Adoption Resource Exchange of Virginia (AREVA) as well (Elischer, 2013). Again, many of the political and military elites belong to the Hausa ethnic group in the southeast of the country, including coup leader Abdourahamane Tchiani, who took power in July under the pretext of restoring security and stability in Niamey.

Based on the criteria of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), the Tuareg should be considered as Tribal people. This implies that they have the right “to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources they possess” (UNDRIP 2007, p.10) and that they have the right to “conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands and resources” (UNDRIP 2007, p.10) according to Article 26:2 and Article 29:1 of the United Nation

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It seems that up until 2023 this declaration has not been materialized considering the demands for greater autonomy of their homeland including their uranium resources. The lack of power of the Tuareg escalated in diverse conflicts against the Central government and AREVA (Krings, 1995; Komlavi-Hahonou, 2009).

2. *Food crises and Hunger*

Food production in Niger is generally low and the country remains dependent on food imports from neighboring countries, in particular Nigeria, Benin and Mali. For instance, close to 40 per cent of grains are being imported. Niger also part-takes in the regional livestock trade of West-Africa, with extensive herd transports across borders. The dependence on imported foods renders the majority of the population highly susceptible to periods with inflation in food prices, such as during the 2005 and 2010 food crises. In 2009, over half of the total population suffered from chronic malnutrition, reflective of not only periodic hunger but equally what has been termed an ongoing 'structural food crisis' in the Sahel (Sahel Working Group, 2011; SEE, 2010; de Jode, 2010). The UNDP ranks Niger at 186th place out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index and in 2011 5 million people were at 'high risk' to food insecurity (close to 33% of the population) (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2012).

3. *Depleting revenue from minerals export*

The government of Niger is also complaining frequently that they want a fairer deal for the poor African country. President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger said "It's not acceptable, I have asked to re-equilibrate the terms of the deal between AREVA and Niger." (Fortin, 2013). Nigerien officials hope to increase Niamey's share of uranium profits so that they make up at least 20 percent instead of the current 5 percent of the annual national budget (Fortin, 2013). In this way, the Niger government able to provide a larger share of the revenues to the Tuareg (IRIN, 2007).

4. *Low level of Infrastructural development*

While a prized natural resource like uranium is practically exploited for next to nothing by French multinationals in Niger in order to provide electricity back home in France, (with export values totaling over 348 million Euros in 2010 alone (INS-Niger, 2012). According to the British Geological Survey, Niger is the world's fourth largest producer of uranium, with the World Nuclear Association (2010) reporting an annual production from Niger of 4,351 tonnes. Niger itself is in near total darkness without enough energy to light up homes and power the few industries there are. Electric energy is just one of the necessities needed in Niger. Highlighting the inadequacy of electricity generation and distribution in Niger, the European Parliamentary Research Service-EPRS (2023, p.4) notes that "On 1 August, in line with the ECOWAS decision to sanction Niger after the coup, Nigeria cut its electricity supply-representing 70 % of Niger's consumption." This indicates that Niger is not even able to generate a quarter of electricity needed for their own consumption. However, there is also need for improvement and provision of other critical infrastructure which guarantees social and economic development. Such infrastructure as modern health care facilities for treatment of citizens affected by effects of exposure to radioactive materials in uranium mines.

5. *The Influence of France*

France and Niger also signed a defense agreement, one that allowed France to intervene in Niger is the head of the state requested it. In return, France got permission to have a garrison located in Niamey. In addition, France kept most of its governmental officials in Niger to help run the new country. It was very fortunate for Hamani that the French troops were placed in Niamey because he was forced to call on them

during his first term in office. Given how Hamani came to power it was not surprising that he faced a military uprising during his first term. Late in 1963, one of the military companies stationed in Niamey rebelled after discovering its commander was being transferred. The uprising was put down with help from the French forces stationed in Niamey. Politically, the action had no ramifications for France or Niger except for the fact that France once again had intervened in one of its former colonies. Less than a month later France intervened in Niger again, this time to quell a border dispute between Niger and Dahomey⁵⁷. This was to be the last French intervention in Niger, but not the last instance of instability in Niger. In the presidential election of 1965, Diori Hamani ran unopposed and won theIn 1956, the French Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique (CEA) began exploring Niger for uranium. This task was taken over by COGEMA when the fuel company was created. The first commercial mining was in 1970 by the Société des Mines de l'Air (SOMAIR) group and occurred in the Arlit area of Niger.

6. *Environmental impact of mining activities*

The environmental issues are linked to the extensive use of groundwater for uranium mining activities. The decreasing water supply can be observed in the deteriorating flora in the area. Amoustapha Alhacen of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Aghir in' Man observed that “the wildlife has disappeared in the last decades. The plant life around the village is gone too. This may indeed be a desert country but even the desert has some trees. So, the legacy for us is enduring pollution.” (Greenpeace 2009, p.2). The extensive use of groundwater threatens the pastoral life of the Tuareg, both for the people and the livestock (Greenpeace, 2010). The depletion of water resources is one of the reasons for the emergence and intensity of resistance to uranium mining by Tuareg nomads (Keenan, 2008).

7. *Effects of Insurgency/Terrorism in the North*

Though Niger entered into defence agreement with France, but the full deployment of French troops to Niger a little more than a decade ago was as a result of persistent forays of terrorist groups into Niger from the Northern end of the country. As a result of that the French initiated military operations not only in Niger, but also in Chad and Mali. It is certain that the French troops had played preventive and mitigating roles against the Tuareg insurgents. Hence, there is also the apprehension that their withdrawal could result to re-occupation of the liberated regions by the insurgents as was recorded in Mali when the French left the country.

8. *Inequitable distribution of Resources and other positions of authority*

The economic issues are related to the unequal distribution of the revenues between the Tuareg and the government plus AREVA according to the Tuareg nomads and by the unequal distribution of revenues between the government and AREVA according to president Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger. The Tuareg nomads continue to struggle for a larger share of uranium revenues for the local population (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2013a). According to Article 18 of the peace agreement, signed by the central government and the Tuareg in the 1995, the central government must transfer a share of national resources generated by industrial mining to local governments (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1995). Moktar Roman, spokesman of the Tuareg rebels, believes that most of the money goes to the government and foreign countries while the north is still being drained of resources (IRIN, 2007). This perception is shared with other Tuareg rebels. For this reason and environmental – and political reasons they repeatedly declared that northern Niger is 'a war zone' and attacked the SOMAIR and Compagnie minière d'Akoka (COMINAK) mines (Keenan, 2008; World Nuclear News, 2013).

9. *Health impacts of Uranium Mining*

The health issues are caused by high radiation levels in the uranium mines themselves, radiation due to waste material piles (this remaining ore contains too-low uranium concentration to be worth processing and are uncovered with protected layers of clean sand), scrap metals from the uranium mines sold on local markets in Arlit and Akokan, contamination of the water from the wells (the radioactive gas radon) and in asphalted roads for which waste materials from the mines are used (Mark, 2011; Greenpeace, 2009; 12, Greenpeace 2010).

10. *The outcomes of the France-Niger Defence pact*

The French/Niger defense pact which necessitated the stationing of French troops in Niger had begun to be counter-productive, to the extent that Nigeriens called for their total disengagement. The Channels news online of 23rd December 2023 reports that:

The last French troops withdrew from Niger on Friday (22nd December, 2023), in the latest blow to more than a decade of French anti-jihadist operations in West Africa Sahel region.

Also, the simple fact that a sovereign state is used as a military outpost of another state, actually exposes it to unnecessary interventions into its internal affairs by the occupying force. Again, such foreign troops might even constitute agents of espionage in sensitive mission worthy of high-level secrecy. Studying the effects of foreign troops on the likelihood of coups, Kemence, (2012, p. 33) notes that “the effect of foreign military establishment on the likelihood of military coups is crucial particularly in weak states such as those in West Africa.” Hence, this adds to the enabling environment for military coups in Niger.

11. *Scramble for Niger's natural resources by the West*

A number of other European, North American and South East Asian countries have been angling to displace France and become the major benefactor of Niger's natural resources export trade. The channels online reports that;

The French exit (*from Niger*) leaves just hundreds of US military personnel and a number of Italian and German troops remaining in the country.

Just in the Republic of Niger, there are stationed hundreds of troops of four global super powers. This form of interest, of course, can never be for nothing. There are definitely, vested interests which go beyond what that which meets the eyes. It is definitely a scramble for its natural resource.

12. *Impacts of drought and desertification*

The Sahel region has seen repeated and lasting droughts (long-lasting monsoonal rainfall deficit) and experienced one of the world's largest rates of population growth, of close to 1.5 per cent per year in the 1950s to about 3 per cent per year in the 1990s. These occurrences can only result to unachieved dreams, unrest, up-surge in crime rates, and terrorism.

13. *Economic deterioration in Niger*

There is a situation of economic deterioration in Niger, with government debt increasing from \$6 billion to \$9 billion between 2020 and 2023. Niger was also placed at the bottom of the list of countries on the Human Development Index (out of 189 countries). More than half the population has fallen below the poverty line while the security situation in neighbouring countries has deteriorated further, for example in Mali and Burkina Faso.

14. *Poor Leadership*

One of the factors that encourage coups in West African countries is bad leadership. What transpires in Niger is akin to what happens in Nigeria. In Nigeria it is bad leadership due to enormous corruption as a result of huge wealth which is not managed properly. And in Niger it is accruing from uranium and other minerals exports that feeds corruption and bad leadership. Leaders in Niger are more concerned about their personal welfare than those of the masses who go through harsh social and economic conditions. Such developments as these makes the masses to develop dislike for the western-style democracy which promises so much to the people, but delivers so little when it comes to dividends. Much more than that is the fact that the people in leadership positions tend to be untouchable when it comes to holding them responsible for their actions.

15. *Suspected Threat to existing balance of power in Niger*

Former President Bazoum had intended to rearrange the old political balance with the mantra "purification" of the system. This very effort of his somehow spread fears and suspicion of undue tilting of the political balance considering that Bazoum is from the minority Arab Ould Suleiman tribe.

Bazoum's plan to order more recruits into the Nigerien army created the impression that he wants to 'build new centre of influence within the political structure of Niger.

16. *Suspicion of Continuation of Issoufou's Rule*

There were misconceptions as to the emergence of now deposed President Bazoum with the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism. He had the disadvantage of coming from a minority Arab tribe of Ould Sulieman, a development which political actors in Niger saw as riding on the wave of Former President Issoufou's agreement, support and approval aimed at a possible continuation of rulership.

17. *Impact of International Competition over the Sahel*

The return of coups to the Sahel region and to more parts of Africa-after everyone thought that they were a thing of the past-is evidence of the centrality of Africa to the raging international conflict between an old western camp (France) that presents itself as better than all others, and a new camp (China-Russia) that presents itself as a viable alternative, with all that it promises in terms of partnerships, development, and prosperity. Developments in Niger after the coup have caused unease in the relationship between US and France. While the US displayed the 'watch the development' approach and preferred diplomatic solution to the problem, France initially threatened military action, but later sided with the ECOWAS in its initial quest for military intervention. (Politico, August 18, 2023).

At the height of French agitation against the coup, the American administration dispatched Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland to hold talks with leaders of the Military Council. The talks ended with the US declaring its preference for a diplomatic solution, which dampened the prospects for a military intervention.³⁶ These were the first indications that the White House was not concerned about changes in Niger. Russia, on the other hand, appears to be the most prominent winner in Niger (The Atlantic, August 8, 2023).³⁷ The course of events is in the interests of Russia, which has been waging a soft, and sometimes harsh, war against France regarding the re-sharing of influence in the African continent.

18. *Wide expanse of ungoverned areas/spaces*

Niger has been a place where almost all European and American powers have military bases and training centers. For instance, Niger hosts two American, and three French bases. It also hosts training

centres for Italy, Canada, and Germany respectively. This is majorly due to its geographical location and vast country which appeals to many extremist groups in the Sahara Desert. The country's geographic location between the Sahel and North and West Africa places it at the forefront of a dual struggle against extremist groups active in the Sahara Desert and Russian influence in more than one country (Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, and others).

19. France's economic policies and negative image

France remains the country most negatively affected by what has happened in Niger. Niamey is the fourth capital it has lost to a military coup over the last four years in West Africa, where an unprecedented wave of popular hostility is spreading against everything French. This coincides with a time of a serious economic recession in France that has culminated in energy conservation policies after frequent power outages. The irony is that uranium mining in Niger, which represents seven percent of global production, contributes to lighting one out of every three electric lamps in France, while darkness engulfs large parts of Niger's cities and villages (The World Bank in Niger).

20. The Emergence of Russia and China as International Players in the Sahel

For years, Russia has been working to expand its influence in the region, using the rhetoric of political realism and the language of interests.³⁸ Moscow, which aspires to contribute to the formation of a new world order, is exploiting the growing wave of discontent and tension against the West's failed security and development policies on the continent.

Russia has gained a strong presence in several regions of Africa, starting in the Central African Republic and moving to Libya in the north, and is currently working to strengthen its influence in the Sahel region with its geopolitical status as a depository of mineral resources. After Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, Niger's turn has come to join those moving away from France and the United States. The coup leaders may not necessarily express their bias toward Russia, but the removal of two major French allies from government (Issoufou and Bazoum) is a victory for Moscow, which has adopted a policy of non-interference in domestic affairs while providing assistance in arms, security, and food (SIPRI, 2023).³⁹

China, Russia's ally, is applying the same approach, as it is the largest foreign investor in Africa. It was the first to break into the region through its successful investment in extracting Sudanese oil at the end of the twentieth century. This was an incentive that pushed it to penetrate Chad and Niger until it came to control the oil market in the Sahel region.

ECOWAS and Management of Unconstitutional Change of Governments

The economic community (ECOWAS) which actually started out as a rallying point for the formulation, articulation, and implementation of policies and programmes for the economic integration and development of member states in West Africa, have mediated in many political issues in the region in the past. In fact, some political matters would have worsened if not for the intervention of ECOWAS. Examples of such outbreak of violence as a result of political developments include ECOWAS interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s which was spearheaded by Nigeria under the leadership of former Head of State, Sani Abacha. Though, it had played those roles which assisted in averting total breakdown of law and order, or debacles of the scale of genocides, but within its own statutes are regulations which spell out its main functions and forbids the incursion or intervention into the political developments of a member state. For instance, the ECOWAS 1975 protocol of non-aggression wherein article 1 states that;

Member States shall, in their relations with one another, refrain from the threat or use of force or

aggression or from employing any other means inconsistent with the Charters of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity against the territorial integrity of political independence of other Member States.

Also, according to Gowon (1984) article 2 of the ECOWAS protocol of non-aggression states that;

Each Member State shall refrain from committing, encouraging or condoning acts of subversion, hostility or aggression against the territorial integrity or political independence of the other member States.

However, ECOWAS itself as a body had played pivotal roles, though through direct military intervention, in order to restore elected administrations, or to restore peace in some community states which ended up assisting the body in bringing a situation of the scale existential threat in some states to peaceful settlement or resolution. But even after considering all these, the situation in Niger presented a very peculiar and extraordinary scenario that has made it very difficult to continue in the earlier established tradition. The complexities thrown up by the political development in Niger has created doubt in the minds of people and even some community member states on whether the body could be able to diffuse the tension without further damaging the tensed-up relations as a result of earlier coups in Brkina Faso and Mali. The lack of unity and trust among member states contributed immensely to thwarting the body's earlier planned military intervention in Niger.

Factors that Militate Against ECOWAS Military Intervention in Niger

There are certain factors that stand in the way of the plans by the ECOWAS to embark on military intervention in the political situation in the Republic of Niger. Some of these factors are as follows;

1. Sense of invincibility/Combat readiness

The Nigerien armed forces have fought insurgency and terrorism over the years, this has made them battle-ready and somehow more sophisticated than most armies in West Africa. The confidence level of the Nigerien soldiers is on the high at the moment having garnered experience on the battle field for a long time. Hence, Bilquin and Pichon(2023, p.4). notes that “Nigerien forces are skilled and better equipped than other ECOWAS armies, which could justify General Tchiani's words that such an intervention would not be 'a walk in the park.'” In addition, the Nigerien military have the believe that they can withstand (with the help of Burkina Faso and Mali) any military onslaught by ECOWAS into their territory.

2. Violation of ECOWAS Regulations

Being a member of the ECOWAS, the prospect of military intervention into its internal affairs (Niger), though could be carried out, but would ultimately be in violation of the regulations of the same body. Such interventions could be declared illegal if contested in a regional or global court which have the power or jurisdiction over states in the international community. This is because according to the statutes of the body, it is not to interfere in the internal affairs of a member state or even encourage any other member to do so. Even in cases where such adventures are necessary, a two-thirds majority vote of the ECOWAS members is required for authorisation.

3. Unfavourable to policies/interests of major powers

The prospect of military intervention in Niger in order to reinstate deposed President Bazoum does not enjoy the support of major powers, nor is it in their interests. It is instructive to note that the interests of such powers as Russia, the United States, and even China matters in determining the direction of decisions and actions in that country. Also, the preferences of such bodies as the African Union and The European Union do shape the pattern and direction of policy actions. And in the case of Niger, while France is supportive of the plan of ECOWAS to intervene militarily in order to restore the status quo and

protect its economic interests, the United States, and Russia are not in support of such venture. The United States would cherish the prospect of replacing France as the major player in Niger, just as Russia is gearing to become a substitute to whatever yearnings that the Nigeriens have had prior to the coup d'état. Also, China is presenting itself as a credible alternative and a reliable development partner whose economic and social assistance could be accessed without conditionalities that led to economic strangulation of least developed countries. Some of these political and economic posturing by China and Russia cannot be taken for granted because they are actually calculated attempts at changing things in that country.

4. Lack of unity of Purpose within ECOWAS

The ECOWAS has its own internal challenges to contend with especially in the face of such military intervention in Niger. There seem to be divided interests amongst the members on whether to support the venture and contribute troops or not. Mostly, countries that have colonial linkage with France seem to support the military coup while taking sides with the coup leaders in Niger. To throw more light on that Bilquin and Pichon (2023, p.4) asserts that “even among the ECOWAS countries supporting this option, only Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau have expressed their willingness to send troops.” This reveals that other member states have shown lukewarm attitude toward the plan of ECOWAS. In a subregional body that has fifteen (15) members states with only five members expressing interest in a task as important as that speaks volumes as to the possibility of success or failure if such venture if it is finally carried out. Also, there is the aspect of members having to pay more attention to separate diplomatic and security arrangements or agreements with their former colonial masters than to those agreed upon collectively with other West African states.

5. Damage to bilateral/multilateral foreign relations

There are different layers of inter-state relations that could be damaged in the event of ECOWAS-led military intervention in Niger. Interests involved include those of the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU). It is pertinent to understand that the outbreak of Russia-Ukraine war jeopardized the continued supply of gas to Europe by Russia. And as a result, the European Union is planning on sourcing gas through a proposed pipeline which would run from Nigeria to Algeria through Niger. Also, the relationship between Algeria and Niger could be damaged if Algeria supports an AU-backed ECOWAS intervention in Niger. Hence, every state is trying hard to play safe and not be caught in the web of diplomatic fireworks that is ongoing.

6. Parliamentary Approval needed

In most democratic states in West Africa, parliamentary approval is needed before the military is able to embark on such undertakings as going into another sovereign state for the purpose of intervening in political developments in the state. Without such legislative approval the move would amount to misapplication of executive powers. For example, even in the case of Niger coup, the senate in Nigeria were opposed to the proposed ECOWAS-led military intervention in Niger. Though two-thirds majority is needed for approval, but at their own level as members of the senate they have, through their body language and pronouncements, rejected the possibility in order to preserve the long-term bilateral relations, and cooperations in the area of anti-jihadist and anti-terrorist operations between Niger and Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1.0 Countries that make up West Africa

COUNTRY	CAPITAL	DATE OF INDEPENDENCE	POPULATION	SURFACE AREA	COLONIAL MASTER	OFFICIAL LANGUAGE
Benin	Porto-Novo	1 August 1960	11 million	42,000sq Mi	France	French
Burkina Faso	Ouagadougou	5 September 1960	17 million	105,900sq Mi	France	French
Cape Verde	Praia	5 July 1975	800,000	1500sq Mi	Portugal	Portuguese
Cote d'Ivoire	Abidjan	5 August 1960	21 million	124,503sq Mi	France	French
Gambia	Banjul	18 February 1965	2 million	3,980sq Mi	Great Britain	English
Ghana	Accra	6 March 1957	25 million	92,100sq Mi	Great Britain	English
Guinea	Conakry	2 October 1958	10 million	94,980sq Mi	France	French
Guinea Bissau	Bissau	10 October 1974	1.7 million	13,948sq Mi	Portugal	Portuguese
Liberia	Monrovia	26 July 1847	3.5 million	43,000sq Mi	None	English
Mali	Bamako	22 September 1960	15 million	478,839sq Mi	France	French
Mauritania	Nouatchott	28 November 1960	3.5 million	397,954sq Mi	France	French
Niger	Niamey	3 August 1960	16 million	489,698sq Mi	France	French
Nigeria	Abuja	1 October 1960	200+ million	356,667sq Mi	Great Britain	English
Senegal	Dakar	4 April 1960	14 million	76,000sq Mi	France	French
Sierra Leone	Freetown	27 April 1961	6.5 million	27,699sq Mi	Great Britain	English
Togo	Lome	27 April 1960	6.6 million	22,000sq Mi	France	French

Source: Kemence (2012, p. 19).

Table 1.0 shows countries in West Africa with their capitals, dates of independence, population, surface area, colonial masters and official language. It further indicates that the countries that have experienced near failed democracies, and therefore, had third wave of military coups are majorly those that were colonized by France. These include Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, only Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal have not experienced such. Most British colonized states in West Africa who have had spates of military coups are either finding their way back to democratic rule, or are going through consolidation stage in their democratic experience.

Table 2.0 Military incursions in Niger and years of military rule

Country	Number of Coups	Coup Year	Number of Years of Military Rule
Niger	5	1974, 1996, 1998, 2010, 2023	21

Source: Culled from Kemence (2012, p. 14).

Table 2.0 shows the years of military coups in Niger from 1974 to 2023. There must be reasons behind the spate of coups even when there was widespread joy and acceptability at the return to democracy few years back. There could have been dashed hopes, unrealizable yearnings, and broken expectations from the populace which, mostly have led to total loss of trust that development could be achieved under the western-style democratic arrangement. These might represent why wild celebrations greeted the coup in Niger.

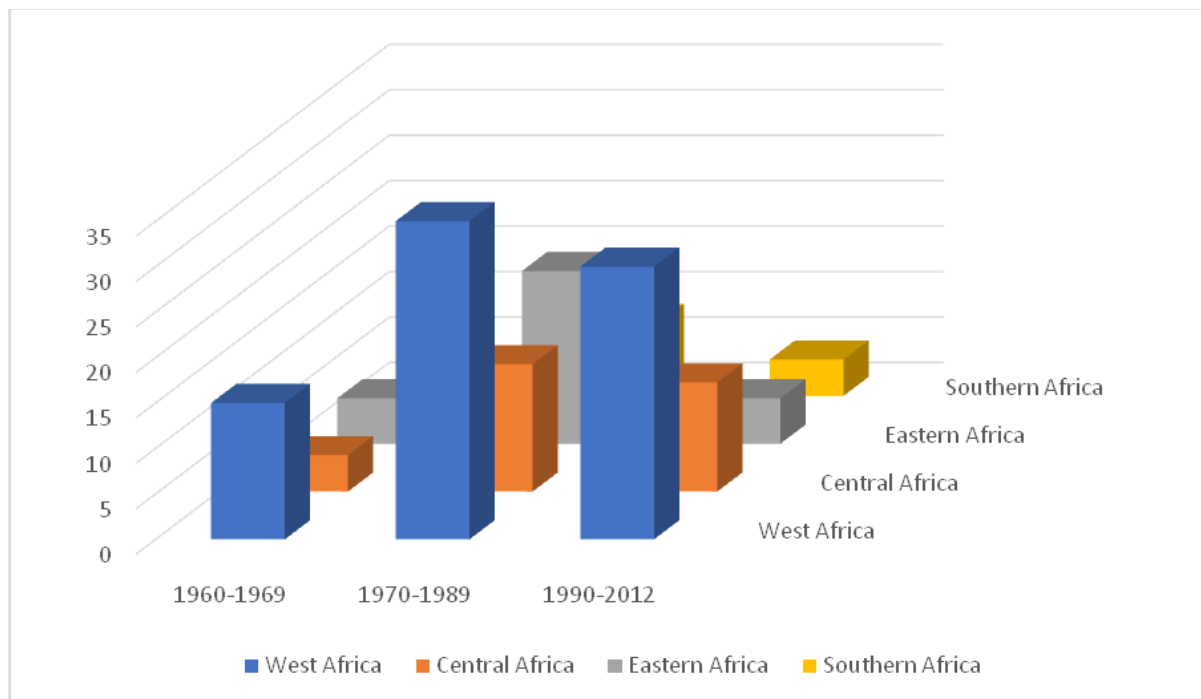
Table 3.0 Coups d'état in Niger, 1974-2023: Successful (1), Attempted (2), Plotted (3), and Alleged (4)

Country	Month	Day	Year	Extent	Leaders	Deaths
Niger	4	15	1974	1	Lt. Col. Seyni Kountche	20
Niger	8		1975	4	Maj. Souma Sido, Maj. Dilbo Bakary, Maj. Maitourane Gadjio	0
Niger	3	15	1976	4	Maj. Basere Moussa, Capt. Sidi Mohamed, Ahmed Mouddour	0
Niger	10	5	1983	2	Mahamane Sidikou, Lt. Amadou Dumarou	0
Niger	1	27	1996	1	Col. Ibrahim Bare Mainassara	2
Niger	1	20	1998	3	Hama Amadou	0
Niger	4	9	1999	1	Maj. Daouda Malam Wanke	5
Niger	2	18	2010	1	Col Salou Djibo	n.a
Niger	3	30	2021	2	Group of young soldiers	n.a
Niger	7	26	2023	1	Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani	0

Source: Compiled from different sources by researcher.

Table 3.0 above displays the breakdown of coup d'état that have been carried out in the republic of Niger from 1974 to 2023. From the table it is not difficult to understand that the Nigerien military have overseen the administration of the state for more than two-thirds of the total of sixty-three (63) years which it has existed as an independent state as at the year 2023. A multiplicity of reasons is responsible for the repeated incursion in the political life of Niger as a sovereign state by its military. The administration of the first President Hammani Diori was actually terminated on 15th April 1974 majorly because of the wranglings within the administration itself when the President tried to have a stronger grip of the country's economy right at the time when the interest of France seemed like threatened. He tried to negotiate with France on the improvement of income for Niger from the exploitation of Uranium in the country.

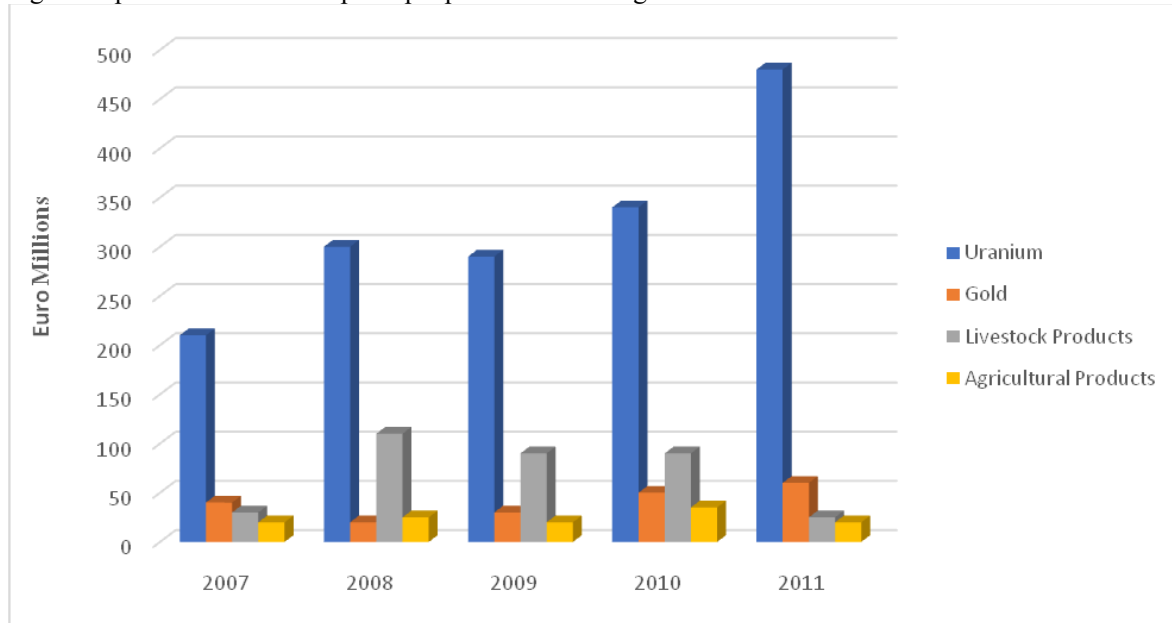
Fig 2.0 Regional Share of Military coups in Africa 1960-2012



Source: Kemence (2012)

Figure 2.0 shows the distribution of coups in Africa among the four regions in the continent, that is the Southern, Eastern, Central, and Western Africa between 1960 and 2012. Between the years 1960 to 1969, the occurrence of coups was highest in West Africa when compared to other regions. Between 1970 and 1989, West Africa recorded 23 coups that displaced elected governments, while the next on the line was East Africa with 11 occurrences. Then, between 1990 and 2012, West Africa also recorded the highest occurrence of eight (8) coups as against three (3) in Central, and two (2) in both Eastern and Southern Africa.

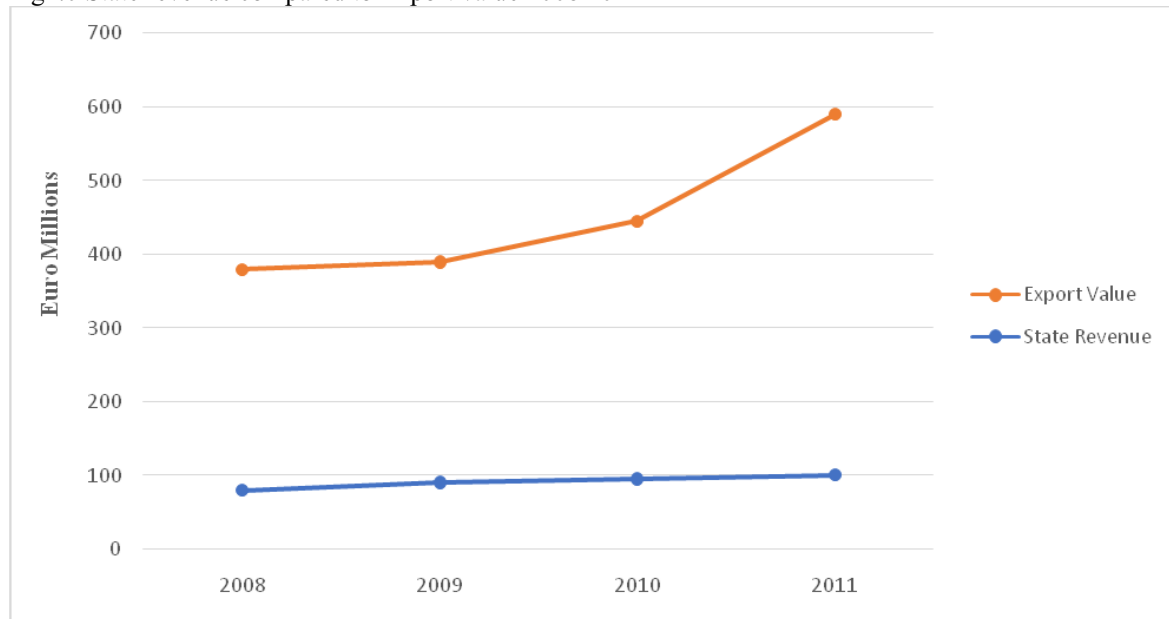
Fig3.0 Export values of select principal products from Niger 2007-2011



Source: Larsen & Mamosso (2013).

Figure 3.0 shows the export value of the main products in Niger between 2007 and 2011. The cardinal export products of Niger include, in order of importance and quantity; Uranium, Gold, Livestock products, and Agricultural products. The display indicates that while the export value of Uranium kept on rising in the international market over the years, the export value of other products including Livestock products and Agricultural products continued to lower within the same period. The exploration and exploitation process for uranium not only exposes the citizenry to environmental and health risks, but its expropriation which denies Nigeriens of rights to their natural resource without commensurate benefits for them as they also struggle to meet their food needs and other necessities from the decreasing farmland yields.

Fig4.0 State revenue compared to Export value 2008-2011



Source: Source: Larsen & Mamosso (2013).

Figure 4.0 further clarifies the fact that the export value of products from Niger including Uranium and others have been rising, but the revenue accruable to the state of Niger have not been rising also. The state revenue has remained static or have had insignificant changes within the period under consideration. When this scenario plays out over a long time there is bound to be pressure on the part of whoever is occupying the seat of government in Niamey, be they civilian or military. This pressure would, normally emanate from the masses who do not enjoy any dividends from resources of the state. At one time or the other in Niger, this has been the central reason for the removal of governments.

For example, there was a time former President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger refused to accept the status quo from AREVA as regards the terms of business in the uranium trade (Fortin, 2013). Nigerien officials hope to increase Niamey's share of uranium profits so that they make up at least 20 percent instead of the current 5 percent of the annual national budget (Fortin, 2013).

Research findings

Findings in the study turned up factors and developments that cause democratic deficits in the Niger, and invariably result to coup d'état. Some of these are as follows;

First, Nigeriens regard political leaders in their country as stooges of France, and other European and North American powers. Aside Former President Hammani Diori who, though was installed by France, but later tried to negotiate favourable deal for his country in relation to revenue from Uranium mining, was ultimately ousted from power in 1974 through a military coup. And after the ouster France displayed lukewarm attitude towards rescuing or restoring him. Other leaders that have come after him (civilian or military) have been seen as stooges who work for the economic advantage of France and

themselves while the masses of Niger suffer excruciating social and economic deprivation in the midst of plenty.

Second, internal dynamics which manifest as struggle for the control of political power in Niamey by the different ethnic and tribal groups in Niger. There is a balance which has been established over the years which is overwhelmingly tilted to the undue advantage of the Hausa ethnic divide. And any effort by anyone or group to rearrange or disrupt this balance is often met with stiff resistance normally under disguises that seem genuine on face value. General Abdurahamane Tchiani incidentally is Hausa from the Southern region while Former President Bazoum is of minority Arab of Ould Suliemani extraction. This has been one of the main explanations for the coup irrespective of the announced motivations for the coup.

Third, external factors emanating from major World super powers who are scheming to out-do each other and control the lucrative exploration and exploitation of Uranium, Gold and other minerals in Niger. In a trade in which France has had the upper hand since the discovery of uranium in the early 1960s in Niger, other powers like the United States of America, Canada, China, and also Russia are doing whatever thing humanly possible to turn the table to their favor

Fourth, lack of dividends of democracy to the masses since achievement of political independence from France. Niger remains one of the poorest countries in the world even with the abundant mineral resources underneath its soil. There is hunger and starvation, no clean drinking water, et cetera. The only things that are rising are civil strife, insurgency, terrorism, and all other negative indications. Hence, in a situation where the people cannot find any reason to be happy for democratic rule, they would have to direct their happiness to any alternative that presents itself. And in this case, it is a coup d'état, at least for a change.

Fifth, continued dwindling of national income from mining of minerals while at the same time the value of the minerals in the international market keeps increasing. The export of minerals has brought in next to nothing, while the masses are aware of the increasing value of the exports in the international market. Therefore, they feel short-changed in the whole transaction, and any form of change to the status quo would do.

Sixth, lack of critical infrastructure, and environmental degradation suffered by Nigeriens in the face of land, surface and underground water pollution. Niger is unable to generate up to 30 percent of electricity it requires, in fact 70 percent of the electricity consumed in Niger is generated in Nigeria. However, Niger's uranium is transported to France to generate electricity for the French who enjoy 24/7 electricity supply. In such a situation, there is serious imbalance in the relationship and the benefit is totally one-sided.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social and economic developments in Niger since the attainment of independence has been very slow, while on the other hand, the value of the natural resources which are mined away from Niger keep increasing. And in the midst of all these, the people of Niger only have debilitating poverty and degradation of their environment to show for it. Hence, there is widespread despondency and loss of faith in Western-style democracy. Democracy, in the eye of majority Nigeriens represents a channel through which their erstwhile colonial master-France siphons its resources while expecting the masses to be calm and conduct themselves in any way that would not disrupt the continued exploitation of Niger's natural resources.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows; there need to be a well-articulated planned and timeline for the return of Niger to elected democracy. However, the new process should incorporate the 'Africanized' method of election which was applied to widespread expression of suitability in Nigeria during the 1993 general election that was adjudged the “freest and fairest” election yet in the history of Nigeria. The “option A4” deemphasizes ethnic and tribal inclinations and encourages competence and popularism

The Nigerien military should maintain their resolve to free the country from economic stranglehold of France. They can achieve this by granting multiple exploration and mining rights to firms from different countries for uranium mining in Niger. Thereby canceling any exclusive exploitation rights initially granted to France. This is to make for competitiveness and credible alternatives for the government and people of Niger.

Negotiations regarding environmental degradation should include strict implementation of impact assessment reports carried out by independent bodies in order to minimize or eradicate the effects of exposure to radioactive substances on farmlands and people.

Lack/inadequacy of relevant infrastructure contributes to the urge for a change of government and despondency towards western-style democracy. Hence, African-style democratic system should be implemented in the Niger in order to make the citizens feel like stakeholders and participate actively in administering the state. For example, improvements in electoral processes, and deliberated agreements on the size and extent of benefits to elected individuals would minimize the general urge by both civilians and soldiers to lay hold on state political power.

The issue of using Niger as a military outpost by any super power should be discontinued as soon as possible. This escalates the spread and illegal use of small and light weapons indiscriminately. Criminality and terrorism also increase among the populace if such is allowed to fester.

Provision of electricity and other critical infrastructure should be prioritized after the return of democratically elected leaders. Economic hardship becomes more overwhelming if critical infrastructure for social and economic development are not provided in the society.

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