

The Role of the Legislative Structures in Military Coup Occurrences in Africa (1960 – 2023)

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ABSTRACT

Political scientists have identified economic hardship and prolonged presidential tenure as underlying causes of recent military coups in Africa but have overlooked the role of legislative structures. This study determines the role of legislative structures in military coup occurrences in Africa. Anchored on Karl Marx's theory and elite theory, the study hypothesised that there is no significant difference in the number of coup occurrences per decade between African countries with unicameral and bicameral legislative structures. A longitudinal study that collected secondary data from various sources, such as the Coup Agency Mechanism data and Inter-Parliamentary Union, was done. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were performed. The study tested the hypothesis using an independent sample t-test, using coup occurrences per decade as the continuous variable and the legislative structure as the categorical variable. The results show that more military coups have occurred in African countries with unicameralism than in those with bicameralism. Findings from the trend analysis show that the lines for both categories increased and decreased at the same time, except in the last decade of the study, when the opposite occurred. The independent sample t-test result shows that there is no significant difference in the number of coup occurrences per decade between African countries with unicameral and bicameral legislative structures. This implies that the legislative structures have no role in the occurrences of coups. The study's key recommendation is to focus on the actions of the legislatures, not their structure.

Keywords: legislature, bicameralism, unicameralism, military coup, Africa

INTRODUCTION

The military coup d'état in Africa exemplifies the class struggle that aligns with Karl Marx's concept of a classless society resulting from the revolution of the Protectorate. Africa has indisputably emerged as the epicentre of military coups globally, exhibiting the highest frequency of coups d'état from its immediate postcolonial era to the present, prompting a discourse on the capacity of African states to maintain a stable democracy (Oluyemi, 2024). Critics view military governance through coup d'état as illegitimate and a regression of democracy. A coup d'état is often defined as a rapid, unlawful, and violent overthrow of the government by a tiny faction, primarily comprising military or police personnel, who displace the current leaders (Ukoaka et al., 2024).

The preponderance of coups and attempted coups has transpired throughout Africa, accompanied by an extensive body of literature on the subject (Pryce & Time, 2023). Moreover, scholars have grounded their research in several theoretical frameworks to elucidate the reasons behind the occurrence of coup d'états. The theories encompass human behavior theory (Anyoko-Shaba, 2022), conflict theory (Itugbu, 2023), coup contagion theory (Boakye, 2023), and legitimacy theory (Pryce & Time, 2023). Oluyemi (2024) and Anani (2023) investigated the causes of coups, while other scholars analysed the relationship between factors such as fragile democracy (Ayoola, Ojo, & Kugbayi, 2024), political fragility (Barka & Ncube, 2012), and good

governance (Norman, 2024) with the persistent phenomenon of coups. Studies on African coup d'états often discuss weak governance but lack focus on legislative structures. However, in essence, weak governance prompts corruption, which the legislatures should address through checks and balances. There is no statistical evidence to support the high frequency of coups in these countries.

The rise of military coups d'état in African politics poses a significant threat to democracy and unequivocally highlights the leadership issue within society (Anyoko-Shaba, 2022). Furthermore, the political framework of African nations is characterized by insular leaders who manipulate constitutional amendments, stifle dissent, and use elections to validate their perpetual tenures in office. Constitutional amendments in Rwanda and Uganda have altered term limits, suppressed dissent, silenced independent media, and held political opponents' hostage, leading to unfair elections. Researchers have highlighted prolonged tenure extensions as a catalyst for military coups in Africa (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). The legislature inevitably plays a pivotal part in this occurrence. President Condé was accused of establishing an autocratic regime by altering the constitution to pursue a third term, economic mismanagement, political corruption, and inadequate service delivery, which resulted in deteriorating infrastructure and hospitals (Oluyemi, 2024).

The legislatures set the level of execution for accountability, monitoring, and law-making. Ezrow, Fenzl, & Hellwig (2024) further refer to the legislatures as the lynchpin connecting the voice of the people, who selected its members, to the government, from which it is formed. African countries adopt both bicameralism and unicameralism as legislative structures. Because proponents of bicameralism argue that bicameralism offers more benefits than unicameralism, African countries have implemented governance reforms such as having two chambers. For example, in 1999 and 2016, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire adopted bicameral legislative structures respectively. This change to bicameralism in most African countries occurred after the countries had experienced a series of coup d'état and political instability, as seen in Nigeria from independence to 1993. So, it begets the question of what role the legislative structures could play in addressing political instability.

Ezrow, Fenzl, & Hellwig (2024) assert that the relationship between legislative design and representation necessitates an acknowledgement that bicameral systems are not homogeneous, highlighting those countries with bicameralism function differently. The differences range from the authority conferred upon the second chamber, along with its representations, to structural configurations. In certain instances, the chambers possess equivalent authority; in others, one chamber distinctly surpasses the other in its powers (Arowolo, 2015). Equally empowered chambers play crucial roles in law-making, as seen in South Africa where both chambers must approve legislation and have a say in constitution amendments. In Nigeria, bicameralism involves the House of Representatives influencing legislative matters like budgeting, while the Senate confirms presidential appointments and ratifies treaties.

In centrally organized nations with bicameral systems, certain countries utilize the upper house to ensure representation for specific socioeconomic groups (Majambere, 2010). Countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya have upper house representation for inclusive legislative processes. Ultimately, when evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of different legislative structures, the critical factor is not the type of legislature a country employs but rather the effectiveness of its implementation and the dedication and sincerity of its aim. The system of checks and balances theoretically ensures power division, but dysfunction like legislature's inability to pass reforms and hold executive accountable demonstrates system failure.

With respect to the occurrence of coup d'état, does it make a difference whether legislation requires one chamber or two to restrain its occurrence? In answering this question, this study would collect secondary data on the occurrence of coup d'états in African countries and the legislative structure adopted in these countries during the occurrence of this event. The author observes that both bicameral and unicameral countries have experienced coup d'états over the decades, suggesting that the distribution of coup occurrences per decade remains independent of the type of legislative structures. This leads to the hypothesis that:

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the number of coup occurrences per decade between African countries with unicameral and bicameral legislative structures.

The remainder of this paper follows this structure. The next section presents theoretical background as well as a conceptual review. Section 3 discusses the methodology of the study, focusing on the sources of data, data analysis and hypothesis testing. Section 4 presents the results and discusses how they align with the hypothesis. Section 5 concludes and Section 6 makes practical implications of the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study bases its hypothesis on the Karl Marx Theory and the Elite Theory, which posit that conflict arises when the ruling class neglects to prioritise the interests of the ruled.

KARL MARX THEORY

Marxist political science posits that the origin of human social conflicts lies in the social relations of production (Lai, 2020). Karl Marx asserted that a social revolution occurs when the productive powers of society conflict with the prevailing production relations. He further asserted that persistent class struggles would inevitably culminate in a proletarian revolution, establishing a classless society. This argument posits that legislative framework is not inherently the catalyst for a coup; instead, it is the deficiencies in leadership or governance that inadequately address the needs of the populace. Recently, in Gabon, the military deposed President Ali Bongo due to significant issues regarding the transparency and legality of the election. African governments' inadequacies in maintaining and solidifying democratic governance both result in and catalyze coups (Chigozie & Oyinmiebi, 2022). Military regimes generally arise from political, economic, or social crises, primarily aiming to supplant ineffective leaders and governments (Itugbu, 2023).

ELITE THEORY

According to elite theory, political officials and agencies implement the preferences of ruling elites, not the populace's demands and actions, to shape public policy (Anyebe, 2018). The elite theory adeptly emphasizes the significance of leadership in policy formulation, asserting that within each political system, a select few elites manage the larger populace (Manjo, 2021). This theory asserts that legislatures can instigate coup events; Legislators can form alliances with military leaders to remove a perceived threat from the executive branch, using mechanisms like polarization, unresponsiveness, impeachment, budget cuts, or non-confidence votes. However, this behaviour is not exclusive to unicameral or bicameral systems. Given that both legislative frameworks can enact detrimental policies affecting military interventions, it is justifiable to assert that the actions of the legislature are more significant than its form. Such laws include those that trigger economic stability and resource conflicts, those that alter term limits of executives, and those that erode trust in the governance system. Elite theory's deficiency lies in potential class conflict among elites, causing apathy and potential confrontations unless bottom-up approaches are used in decision-making (Manjo, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on discussions relating to military coups and legislative structures to conceptualise the key variables in the study.

MILITARY COUP D'ETAT IN AFRICA

Itugbu (2023) describes military coups d'état as the most common method of seizing power, where members of the armed forces use force or the threat of force to overthrow the head of state. The military intervenes to correct the imbalances in the society arising from corrupt practices and mismanagement of state resources by previous governments (Anyoko-Shaba, 2022). They took place amid heightened pressures in the aftermath of

the global pandemic, deteriorating security situation, domestic socio-political instability, and rising geopolitical tensions (Cebotari et al., 2024). Military coups provide pre-emptive estoppel against mass protests and demonstrations, which often become confrontational with regime security services efforts to suppress the citizens' right to public demonstrations and protests (Norman, 2024).

Military coups d'état have been a recurring challenge in Africa's political landscape since the continent gained independence from colonial rule in the mid-20th century (Ayoola, Ojo, & Kugbayi, 2024). The history of military coups in sub-Saharan Africa dates back to 1963, with the first military coup occurring in Togo (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). Many African countries, such as Sudan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana, have had series of coups and counter-coups, both successful and unsuccessful; however, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Eritrea, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa, and Tunisia have never experienced coup plots. Each decade, from 1960 to 2023, more than five (5) successful coups occurred on the continent, as reported by various databases on coup occurrences in Africa. For example, from 2020 to date, nine (9) successful coups have occurred, of which Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Gabon are contributors.

More than 200 coup attempts occurred during the postcolonial period, which resulted in the removal of over half of the continent's governmental leaders (Itugbu, 2023). Itugbu (2023) further noted that Africa experienced six successful coup attempts in 2021, comprising four in Burkina Faso, while further attempts in Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Sao Tome & Principe were unsuccessful. Between 2020 and 2023, numerous African nations have fallen under military governance. The countries include Mali (2020), Mali, Guinea, Chad, and Sudan (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger and Gabon (2023). Of the 54 countries in Africa, 45 have encountered at least one attempted coup d'état since 1950. Research by Powell and Thyne indicates that from 1950 to the present, Africa has witnessed the highest number of coup attempts, totalling 220, of which 109 were successful.

Table 1 shows the number of coup occurrences per decade, starting from 1950 to 2023.

Table 1 Occurrences of Coup d'état per decade (1950 to 2023)

Decades	Total Coup Attempts	Successful	Success Rate
1950 – 1959	6	3	50%
1960 – 1969	41	25	61%
1970 – 1979	42	18	42.90%
1980 – 1989	39	22	56.40%
1990 – 1999	39	16	41%
2000 – 2009	22	8	36.40%
2010 – 2019	17	8	47.10%
2020 – 2023	14	9	64.30%

Source: Duzor and Williamson (2023)

LEGISLATIVE STRUCTURE

Legislatures have a variety of structural forms, with unicameral and bicameral systems being the two most common types. Numerous countries use a unicameral (single-chamber) parliamentary system, while a smaller number adopt a bicameral structure, and seldom are there instances of more than two chambers (Qerimi & Pajaziti, 2024). In Africa, currently, 29 countries adopt unicameralism, whereas 25 countries adopt bicameralism, as per the Inter-Parliamentary Union's data. Numerous federations have identified a bicameral federal legislature as a vital institutional characteristic for guaranteeing the entrenched representation of regional entities in policy-making within the "shared rule" institutions, essential for the effective functioning of a federation (Ojibara, 2018). On the other hand, Majambere (2010) asserts that countries with a centralised or unitary framework and limited size typically have unicameral legislatures.

However, recognizing that bicameralism is not solely associated with federations is crucial, yet it is rare for federal countries to adopt unicameralism. For instance, South Africa, Liberia, and Uganda, as unitary states, also adopted bicameralism. On the other hand, Ethiopia and Somalia are federal countries that adopt unicameralism.

According to Arowolo (2015), a country tends to adopt a system of government that aligns with its political structure and fits into its domestic realities, as no system of government is perfect. In fact, Qerimi & Pajaziti (2024) emphasize that both unicameral and bicameral parliaments function concurrently in parliamentary democracies. Unicameralism in African countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Angola consists of a single chamber. Bicameralism is a legislative system that vests the power of law-making in two houses or chambers, both of which must approve a bill before it becomes law (Majambere, 2010).

In Africa, countries with bicameralism include Nigeria, South and Liberia, with each country's chambers having different structures and representations. Nigeria's bicameral structure comprises the Senate, consisting of 109 members, with 3 senators per state, and the House of Representatives, comprising 360 elected members from various constituencies. South Africa's National Council of Provinces and National Assembly both have 90 members, with 10 from each province, ensuring provincial interests are represented in legislative processes.

The purpose and practice of bicameral legislature anywhere in the world stems from the need to engender enduring legislation sufficient enough to positively impact the people and also to increase and strengthen the level of political participation, representation and involvement (Arowolo, 2015). Bills undergo scrutiny in both houses, resulting in well-considered laws. This process also promotes political participation by involving diverse groups and regions in legislative processes. According to Kopchak (2022), in order to effectively check the power of each chamber and often other branches of government, each chamber in a bicameral legislature must serve a distinct purpose. This holds true to avoid reduce conflicts between the two chambers, to avoid duplication of legislative activities and to enhance their effectiveness.

However, Ezrow, Fenzl, & Hellwig (2024) opine that a more equitable distribution of power between chambers may constrain policy change compared to a single-chamber legislation process with less friction between citizens and policy makers. If both chambers have equal power, they must agree on the same legislation before it is passed, which the process of reaching agreement may become more complex and time-consuming due to different interests, priorities or perspectives. Additionally, compromise and concession must occur between the two chambers since both have the veto power to put the legislative process to halt. Responding to public demands will be slower.

Table 2 Current Legislative Structures of African Countries

Unicameralism	Bicameralism
Angola	Burundi
Benin	Cameroon
Botswana	Congo
Burkina Faso	Côte d'Ivoire
Cabo Verde	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Central African Republic	Equatorial Guinea
Chad	Eswatini
Comoros	Ethiopia

Djibouti	Gabon
Eritrea	Kenya
Gambia (The)	Lesotho
Ghana	Liberia
Guinea	Madagascar
Guinea-Bissau	Namibia
Malawi	Nigeria
Mali	Rwanda
Mauritius	Somalia
Mozambique	South Africa
Niger	South Sudan
Sao Tome and Principe	Zimbabwe
Senegal	Algeria
Seychelles	Egypt
Sierra Leone	Morocco
Togo	Sudan
Uganda	Tunisia
United Republic of Tanzania	
Zambia	
Libya	
Mauritania	

Author's Compilation from Inter-Parliamentary Union and other sources (2024)

METHODOLOGY

A longitudinal study was adopted since data were collected over a long period of time, ranging from 1960 to 2023. Through this, it was possible to perform trend analysis and record any change during the selected period.

SOURCES OF DATA

For coups d'état, the author utilized Coup Agency and Mechanism data, which includes global data on military coups and coup attempts, spanning all countries from 1950 to 2022. This dataset was used since it includes previous data collection efforts by Powell and Thyne (2011) and it focuses exclusively on military coups. However, the author focused on the 1960-2023 period and on the fifty-four (54) African countries as stated by the United Nations (UN). It was during this period that African countries gained independence. This study recorded and used only successful coups. According to CAM, a successful coup displaces the executive for at least ten days. The study also explored other databases, including the African Union's

datasets on political instability. With regard to the current legislature structures, the author obtained this data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other scholarly journals.

DATA CODING, ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Data coding involved grouping coup occurrences by decades. The aim was to convert coup occurrences per decade into categories, wherein 0 represented 1960 to 1969; 1 represented 1970 to 1979; 2 represented 1980 to 1989; 3 represented 1990 to 1999; 4 represented 2000 to 2009; 5 represented 2010 to 2019; and 6 represented 2020 to 2023. Legislative structures were also coded as 0 for unicameral and 1 for bicameral. For each occurrence of a coup in a particular country, the year was traced and the current legislature structure in that country. Data that were entered in Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v28) included the countries, years (per decade) and the legislature structures. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. Trend analysis was also done to determine the change in coup occurrences over time based on the legislative structures.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

An independent sample t-test was performed to determine whether there is a significant difference in coup occurrences per decade between the two groups. The study compiled the total number of coup occurrences for each legislature during each decade, treating this as a continuous variable and the current legislative structures as a categorical one.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

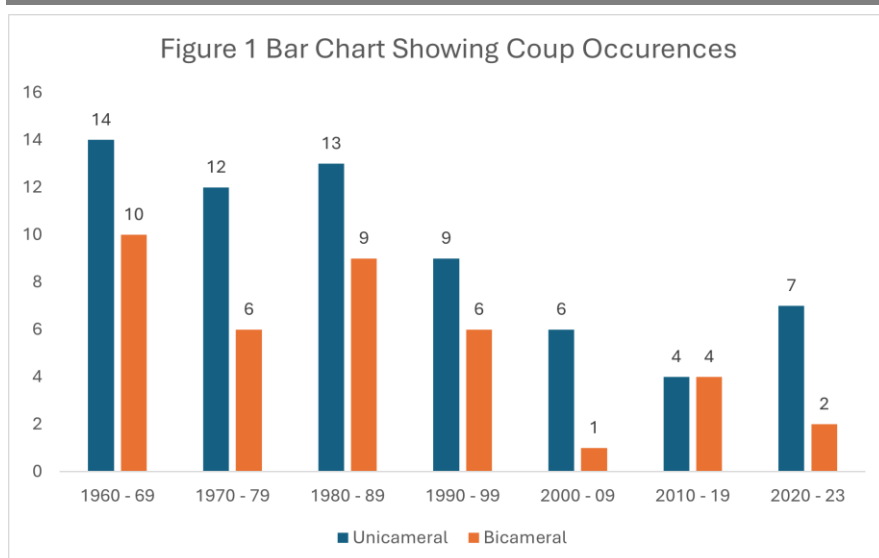
The figures and tables below present the results. These results illustrate the distribution of coup occurrences per decade across the two legislative structures.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

		COUP OCCURENCES IN UNICAMERAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES	COUP OCCURENCES IN BICAMERAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES
N	Valid	7	7
	Missing	0	0
Mean		9.29	5.43
Median		9	6
Std. Deviation		3.817	3.359
Minimum		4	1
Maximum		14	10

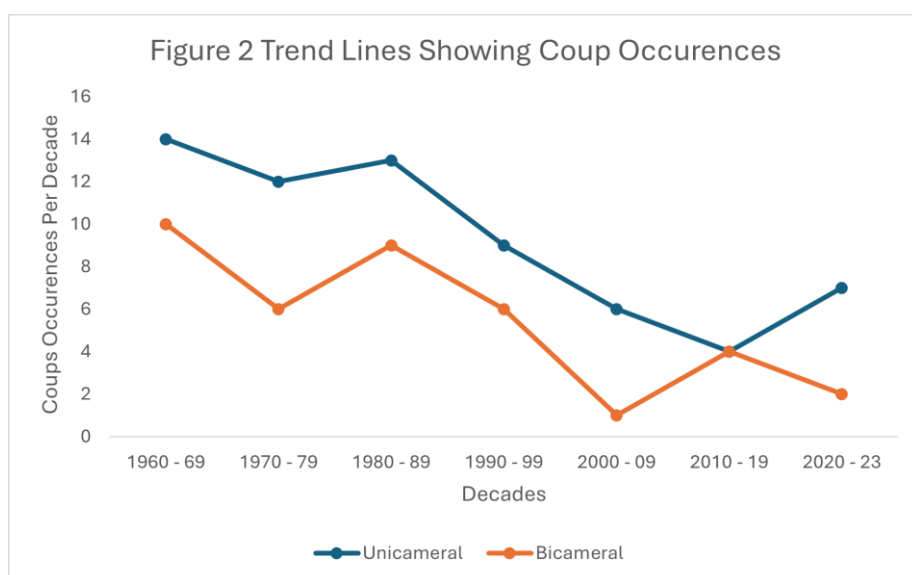
Source: Researcher's Compilation of Coup Data (2024)

Table 3 shows the mean values of 9.29 (SD = 3.817) and 5.43 (SD = 3.359) for African countries with unicameralism and bicameralism, respectively. The difference between the two mean scores is 3.86, suggesting that African countries with unicameralism have, on average, experienced more coups than bicameral African countries due to unicameralism having weaker checks and balances as compared to bicameralism. The standard deviation values indicate that the broader range of coups in unicameral countries may indicate that, while some unicameral nations are highly unstable, others are relatively stable. Bicameralism, with a slightly lower SD, indicates less fluctuation in coup occurrences—bicameral countries seem to experience a more consistent level of coups, although at a generally lower average compared to unicameral systems. The maximum and minimum occurrences are 14 and 4, respectively for unicameralism and 10 and 1 for bicameralism, showing a slight difference of 4 for the maximum and 3 for the minimum.



Source: Researcher's Compilation of Coup Data (2024)

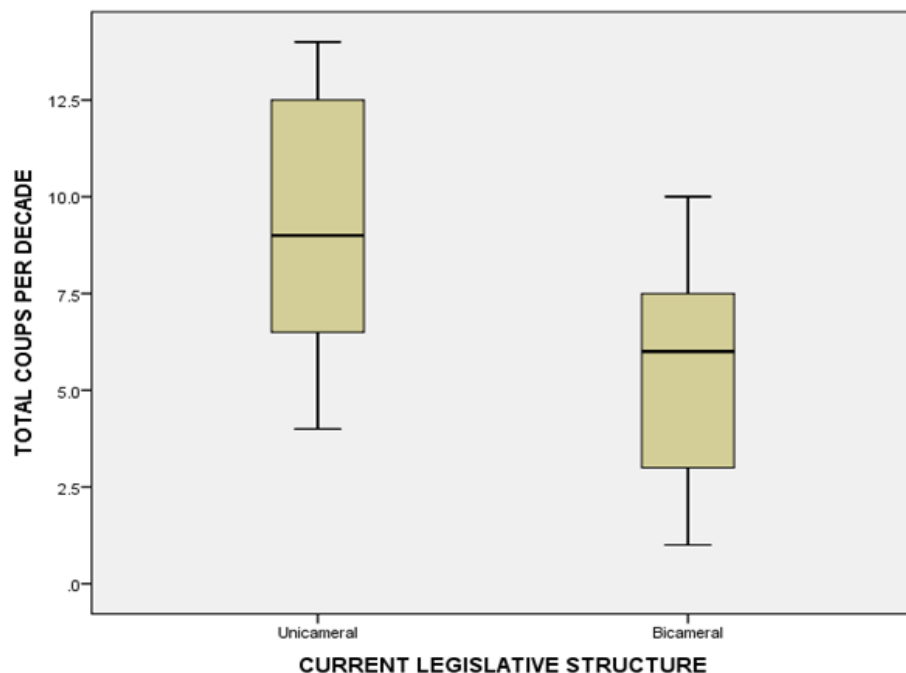
Figure 1 shows that, except during 2010 to 2019, when both types of legislatures had the same coup occurrences, more coup occurrences were recorded for African countries with unicameral system during the other decades. In the first decade of the study (1960–1969), African countries with unicameralism recorded 14 coup occurrences, whereas countries with the other legislative structure recorded 10. While African countries with unicameralism recorded 12, 13, 9, 4 and 7 during the second to last decade of the study (1970–1979, 1980–1989, 1990–1999, 2000–2009, 2010–2019, and 2020 to 2024, respectively), countries with bicameralism recorded 6, 9, 6, 1, 4 and 2 during the same periods. These results imply that African unicameral countries generally have experienced more coups than bicameral ones, with an exception in 2010-2019 due to regional efforts and international pressure. The 2020-2024 increase in coup occurrences in African unicameral countries suggests political instability and centralization may allow military interventions in poor governance and economic challenges.



Source: Researcher's Compilation of Coup Data (2024)

Figure 2 shows that the line for unicameral was above the line for bicameral, indicating that countries that practise unicameral had had more coup occurrences during the period of study. Comparing these two lines, both increased and decreased at the same time, except during the last decade, when the opposite occurred. Additionally, apart from 1980-1989, when the lines rose, all the other periods experienced a decline of the lines. Both lines met during the 2010–2019 period, indicating that African countries with

unicameralism had the same coup occurrences as those with bicameralism. The study found that both unicameral and bicameral countries experienced simultaneous increases or decreases in their lines, suggesting similar factors may influence coup occurrences. These factors include political context and economic crises. 1980-1989 saw a surge in coups in African countries, indicating significant political turmoil due to colonial rule transitions and economic challenges. The data shows a decline in coup occurrences in both unicameral and bicameral countries over most studied decades, largely due to various factors such as democratic transition, economic stabilisation and regional integration and governance reforms.



Source: Researcher's Compilation of Coup Data (2024)

Figure 3 shows the box plot, which gives the interquartile range. This figure suggests that there is a large difference between countries with unicameralism and those with bicameralism, based on coup occurrences per decade. The median score of unicameral is higher than the median score of bicameral.

Table 4 Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Total coups per decade	Equal variances assumed	0.339	0.571	2.007	12	0.068	3.857	1.922	-0.33	8.045
	Equal variances not assumed			2.007	11.809	0.068	3.857	1.922	-0.338	8.052

Source: Researcher's Compilation of Coup Data (2024)

To determine if there is no significant difference in the number of coup occurrences per decade between countries with unicameral and bicameral legislatures, Table 4 presents the results of an independent sample

test. The result of the independent sample t-test shows a mean difference (md) of 3.857, 95% CI -0.338 to 8.052, with a p-value of 0.068. The mean difference suggests that Unicameral countries experience an average of 3.857 more coups per decade than bicameral countries. The confidence interval suggests that the observed mean difference between unicameral and bicameral legislatures is not reliable enough to confidently conclude that unicameral legislatures are more prone to coups. The 95% CI ranges from -0.338 to 8.052, indicating uncertainty about the difference in coup occurrences between unicameral and bicameral countries, with a slight mean difference favouring unicameral countries but not universally significant. p-value (0.068) is greater than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. It confirms that there is no significant difference in the number of coup occurrences per decade between African countries with unicameral and bicameral legislative structures.

CONCLUSION

Although the legislative's role in coup occurrences can be explained through the policies and laws that it makes, its structure makes no difference in triggering coup occurrences. The assumption that countries with unicameral legislative structure is prone to coup occurrences is refuted on the ground that it is what the legislature does and not how it is structured or how many chambers it has. As seen recently, coups have occurred in countries with bicameralism as well as those with unicameralism. And the major factors, as explained by political scientists and commentators, were not related to the legislature structures. Rather, these reasons included security issues, state's infringement on fundamental human rights of the people, mismanagement of the economy, political corruption, poor service delivery, among others. Based on the hypothesis, the study concludes that coup occurrences per decade were not influenced by the legislative structures. Despite this, the legislature has a role to play in these issues since it serves as a law-making institution. Therefore, the legislature, whether bicameral or unicameral, must fulfil its intended roles and translate the citizens' wills and interests into effective laws. African countries should avoid issues such as amending constitutions to extend a president's stay. Additionally, they should prioritise democratic practices and respect for human rights.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Due to the recent occurrences of military coups in Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Guinea and Sudan, many studies have attempted to establish and understand what led to these coups, but they did not attempt to determine whether the legislative structures were relevant in coup occurrences. This demonstrates the significance of the research. Additionally, many of these studies were highly qualitative and descriptive in nature. This study has significantly narrowed the existing knowledge gap in these respective areas. Regarding the limitations, this study relied on secondary data and solely focused on African countries. Besides, it examined the current legislative structures of the countries and not the structures that were practised during the coup occurrences. Lastly, this study did not focus on what role the legislative structures played in the coup occurrences. Therefore, the study recommends conducting future studies to address these limitations.

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