

# Military Reshuffles is the Wrong Prophylaxis for Coup D'état in Africa: A Caveat to African Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

A day after soldiers in Gabon seized power and placed President Ali Bongo Ondimba under house arrest following the disputed elections, various international media top stories featured Paul Biya of Cameroon and Paul Kagame of Rwanda probably fearing the spread of coup d'état wasted no time to reshuffle their respective military.

Using a qualitative research approach with an emphasis on content analysis, this article takes a deeper look into the political decisions made in Cameroon and Rwanda. As its theoretical underpinning, the article adopts political development theory that guides the discussion or argument throughout the paper.

Succinctly, the article advanced the argument that reshuffling the military is the wrong prophylaxis for the spread of coup d'état. It argues that the deteriorating political development in countries that recently experienced coup d'état provides the incentives or grounds for the military to intervene on behalf of ordinary citizens and to save the state from further deterioration. It concludes with a caveat for any African leader whose country shares similar political idiosyncrasies with Gabon, Cameroon, and Rwanda contemplating to reshuffle their military. This is because the military is far distance away from the deteriorating political culture or development that provokes disenchantment and popular uprisings threatening the legitimacy of the government. Finally, the article draws African leaders attention to these complementary quotes "*Ambition knows no father*" coined by Jennes Sethi, and *Ambition knows no loyalty* developed by the author of this article.

**Keywords:** Africa, Cameroon, Coup d'état, Military Coup, Political Development, Rwanda,

## INTRODUCTION

Based on the parity of reasoning, it is difficult to dismiss the inclination that the fear of military coup d'état spreading to Cameroon and Rwanda may have possibly informed the decision of President Paul Biya and President Paul Kagame to effect critical changes in their military architecture a day after soldiers in Gabon seized power and placed President Ali Bongo Ondimba under house arrest following the disputed elections. (Africanews, 2023), (TRT, Africa, 2023).

In Cameroon, Paul Biya who has been in power since 1982 has made new appointments at the defense ministry affecting high-ranking military personnel. (Ghanaweb, 2023).

As for Rwanda, President Paul Kagame retired hundreds of soldiers, coinciding with advancing young soldiers within the nation's security framework. New generals have also been appointed to lead army divisions stationed in different parts of Rwanda (TRT Africa, 2023).

Arguably, these reshuffles pinpoint the military to be the cause(s) of the wave of coup d'état in Africa. So,

in their (Biya and Kagame) wildest imaginations, the possible and viable alternative to prevent or end coup d'état is to shake-up armies. Unfortunately, this paper disagrees with the shake-up inaugurated by the two presidents on the grounds that the military is indeed aloof from the root causes(s) of coup d'état. Moreover, the paper views Biya and Kagame shake-up as a pretense to the main drivers of military coups in Africa. For this reason, this brief article dives into the nitty-gritty by exposing the real problem that African leaders are pretending to be oblivious to.

By doing so, the article explores the caption from four subsections. The first subsection introduces the theoretical underpinning. Precisely, it examines the political development theory that offers valid insight into the wave of military coups in Africa. The second subsection likens Cameroon and Rwanda to the theoretical underpinning of the paper. Finally, the third subsection conclusively sends a caveat to other African leaders contemplating treading in the footsteps of Biya and Kagame.

## **METHOD AND MATERIALS**

Premised on the theoretical underpinning of the study is explanatory, it confines the paper to a qualitative research method with an emphasis on content analysis. It reviews relevant literature pertaining to the phenomenon under interrogation. The literature review such as published articles, reports, and news were sourced from the Internet through the Google Scholar Search Engine and the Bielefeld Academic Search Engine.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

The contribution to knowledge is one of the main essences behind the publication of academic papers. Therefore, this paper may serve as a source of academic literature. Precisely it brings out the main driver of the wave of military coups ignored by African leaders. Finally, this paper may serve as guidance for further research to be carried out on the subject matter in areas that the author did not address.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

Theoretical underpinning is essential for any social science research because it gives direction and helps prove or disprove a given social phenomenon the study seeks to interrogate. Therefore, to prove or disprove the reshuffles of the military as a proactive measure to prevent coup d'état in Africa, this study adopts the political development theory.

## **POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY**

As old as democracy itself, political development theory was propounded by several scholars like Pye (1966), Huntington (1971), Samuel Finer (1988), and others. Below are the contributions of these pioneers.

In the words of Pye (1966), political development involves mass participation and popular involvement in political activities". Pye holds that for there to be development in a country, the majority of its citizens must participate in political activities. In other words, Pye's concept could mean that the level at which people are voluntarily involved in the political activities of a country goes a long way in determining the level of political stability that bears testimony to development.

As for Huntington (1965:393), he sees political development as "the institutionalization of political organizations and procedures". Huntington says that the institutions of political organizations must be strengthened for there to be development. He further argued that "Strong civil institutions, strong political institutions, and strong democratic values" are the hallmarks of political development. In Huntington's

concept, it makes no mistake to add free, transparent, and fair elections, and change constitutional provisions for presidential term limits to maintain political hegemony to the list of hallmarks. He concluded that if these indicators are absent or paralyzed in any society, the likelihood for a government to encounter a legitimacy crisis may be apparent. History is replete with rigged elections that undermined political development and led to political instability. For example, the current political uncertainty in Cote d'Ivoire is traceable to the presidential election held on November 28, 2010, between Gbagbo, and Ouattara in which Ouattara was declared the winner (Purefoy, 2011). Democratic Republic of Congo 2019 elections plagued by fraud in which Felix Tshisekedi was declared winner is another flash point (France24, 2019).

According to Finer (1988), the level of political culture determines the level of political development. Political culture can be defined as the underlying rules that determine the success and failure of a political system. He believes that the level of political development will eventually determine the level of development. In other words, it explains the implications of political development on national development.

Political development is not only confined to politics, it encapsulates social and economic dimensions. This is simply because politics determine economic directions that have social implications. No wonder Alesia, Ozler, Nouriel, and Swagel (1996) opined that economic growth and political stability are deeply interconnected. On one end, the uncertainty associated with an unstable political environment may reduce investment and the speed of economic development. On the other hand, poor economic performance may lead to government collapse and political unrest.

Similarly, the World Bank (2006) stressed that social, political, and economic structures play a shaping role in a country's development path. The World Bank further asserts that a failure to anticipate political and institutional challenges is a chief cause of unsuccessful policy reforms that may retard development.

What is clear about political development theory is how it is related to military coups, or the military. This is the relationship. From the way the pioneers, especially Huntington propounded the theory, it explains the implications for a popular uprising or protest that may warrant the intervention of the military. Put simply in other words, when citizens act under the doctrine of popular sovereignty to protest deteriorating political development that threatens their survivability, especially in a situation where the legitimacy of the government is lost, the military may intervene to protect the state from further deterioration. The 2019 Coup in Sudan which ended the long-term authoritarian rule under President Omar al-Bashir is one of the classic examples of political development theory. The harsh economic conditions (loss of oil revenue, sharp currency devaluation, cuts to bread, and fuel subsidies) sparked demonstrations that eventually led to the army intervention through a coup (BBC News, 2019). In this example, you can see how the Sudan military took advantage of the unpleasant political development to justify the overthrowing of Omar al-Bashir. All the military coups in Francophone Countries in Africa including Niger and Gabon as the most recent are fascinating examples of political development theory.

In summation, Riggs, (1967) argued that the political development of a country may lead to a decrease or likelihood of military intervention intended to save the State from further deterioration.

## **LIKENING CAMEROON AND RWANDA TO THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

Before likening Cameroon and Rwanda to the theoretical underpinning, it would be prudent to briefly reflect on what triggered the military coup in Gabon that may have possibly influenced or informed the reshuffles in Cameroon and Rwanda. Inarguably, the political development that triggered the coup in Gabon was too counterproductive and at the same repugnant to the basic tenets of democracy. In the first place, the political hegemony created and sustained by the Bongo dynasty that entrenched abject poverty is enough to explain

the deteriorating political development. Scraping the presidential term limits in the constitution intended to perpetuate the presidency is just one of the few indicators of unfavorable political development. This is because it is tantamount to a constitutional coup that disenfranchised not only the opposition but the will of the people who are the custodians of political power. The recently rigged, fraudulent, and highjacked elections that declared President Ali Bongo Ondimba winning a third term that triggered the coup is another strong indicative fact of the worsening political culture or development articulated by Finer (1988), and Riggs, (1967) in this paper or study. It is interesting to know that the jubilant crowd that expressed their support for the military coup without thinking about how the coup would address their overdue plights or expectations speaks volumes to the fact that they were tired and dissatisfied with the level of political development in Gabon (Asadu, 2023).

Another indication of the unpleasant political development under the Ali Bongo regime was the release of political prisoners by the Junta following the coup. Any political system that imprisons political opponents because of their dissenting views or critical voices on trending national issues is an indication of worsening political development. In a nutshell, although Gabon's political system recognizes multiparty elections. However, in practice, it lacks the true content of democracy. Instead, it is a nominal democracy evidenced by political dominance through a combination of patronage and repression maintained for more than 40 years after the death deposed President Bongo's father in 2009. In summation, the military in Gabon took advantage of the deteriorating political development to overthrow Ali Bongo.

Now Cameroon and Rwanda. Comparatively, Cameroon and Rwanda to some extent share commonalities with Gabon's political development or political culture. For instance, in theory, the political development or culture of Cameroon and Rwanda recognizes multiparty elections. However, in practice, both Biya and Kagame have maintained political hegemony or dominance over two decades. Paul Biya is the second Africa's longest-serving president and the longest non-royal serving leader in the world (Further Africa, 2022). Paul Kagame has been in power since 2003. Both countries have through a referendum amended the constitutional provisions for presidential term limits intended to maintain their grips on power (Siegle & Cooke, 2021). Moreover, it is argued that both Biya and Kagame are benevolent dictators on record for restricting serious political opposition, independent media, and civil society (Sundaram, 2023), (Liguori, 2021). Inarguably, these instances or examples are some of the main semblances or indicators of the kind of political development that may provoke a popular uprising that could justify possible military intervention through a coup. Therefore, instead of improving their respective political culture or development, they have probably based on informed fear of a coup reshuffled the military as a proactive measure. Of course, targeting the military is the wrong prophylaxis for the kind of political development both Biya and Kagame have constructed over the years in power.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, this paper is of the opinion that it would be a miscalculated prophylaxis employed by any African leaders who share similar political idiosyncrasies with Gabon to contemplate the need to reshuffle their respective military commands. Improving upon the current political development as articulated in his article is the rightful prophylaxis for a possible military coup that must claim their sober reflection or attention. The reason is simple. The military is not in charge of the body politics even though it is one of its essential embodiments. It is not the military that dictates the trajectory of the political development. It is mainly the Executive and Legislature or parliament that through policies and legislations construct the political development or political culture. It is the same Executive conspicuously perceived to control or influence the independence of the judiciary strategically positioned to help strengthen the political development or political culture. Therefore, targeting the military in exchange for loyalty may be helpful for some time but not a viable prophylaxis to perpetuate the presidency. You will agree with this article that in most of the recent military coups in Francophone African countries, the soldier supposed to be loyal to the

president emerged as the leader of the junta. Therefore, African leaders must take serious cognizance of these complementary quotes “*Ambition knows no father*” coined by Jennes Sethi, *and Ambition knows no loyalty* coined by the author of this article.

## DISCLAIMER

Being an adjunct faculty member of the University of Liberia and African Methodist Episcopal University does not in any way imply their endorsement or consent. What the article expressed is entirely the views of the author. Therefore, the author takes personal responsibility for the opinion expressed therein.

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