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Democratic Resilience and Civil Society Responses to Military Rule in Mali and Niger

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Abstract

The recent resurgence of military rule in Mali and Niger has raised pressing questions about the resilience of democratic institutions and the role of civil society in these West African nations. This paper explores the dynamics between military governance, democratic resilience, and civil society responses, focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented to civic engagement and democratic practices. By analysing the historical context, the strategies of civil organisations, and the impacts of international relations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how citizens and civil society can navigate the complexities of military rule while advocating for democratic values. The findings reveal that, despite significant obstacles, civil society in both countries demonstrates remarkable adaptability and creativity in promoting democratic norms and engaging with military authorities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent resurgence of military rule in Mali and Niger has sparked a critical examination of the resilience of democratic institutions and the essential role of civil society in these countries (Akinola and Makombe, 2024). The coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, followed by a similar upheaval in Niger in 2021, have positioned these nations at the center of ongoing discussions regarding governance, state legitimacy, and citizen engagement (Demuynck and Böhm, 2023). The military's intervention, often justified by the perceived inadequacies of civilian governments in addressing escalating insecurity and economic downturns, raises important questions about the trajectory of democracy in these regions. Analyzing the historical context is crucial for understanding the current political landscape, as it reveals how past events have influenced contemporary governance challenges. This paper aims to delve into the intricate relationship between military governance, socio-political factors, and civil society responses in Mali and Niger, shedding light on their interactions amid rising authoritarianism (Azeez, 2024, Ughulu and Ihaza, 2023)).

The historical precedents of military rule in Mali and Niger reveal a troubling cyclical pattern characterized by instability and successive coups. Both nations have a long history of democratic interruptions, frequently justified by the military through claims of safeguarding national security and public order. The legacies of colonialism, compounded by post-colonial struggles for political stability and sovereignty, have significantly influenced the political trajectories of Mali and Niger. For instance, the 2012 coup in Mali was partly rooted in discontent over government inefficiency and corruption, which echoed sentiments from earlier military interventions. Examining these patterns not only highlights immediate triggers for military coups but also uncovers the deeper historical roots that have shaped civil-military relations, thus providing valuable insights into contemporary challenges in upholding democratic values in these nations (Aluko, 2025).

Moreover, the role of civil society in the face of military

rule is critical and cannot be underestimated. Despite facing repression and hostility, civil society organizations (CSOs) in both Mali and Niger have played a pivotal role in advocating for democratic norms and values. This paper will explore how these organizations have adapted their strategies to engage with military authorities while simultaneously mobilizing public opinion against authoritarianism. For example, during the recent coups, organizations like the Malian Association of Democratic Architects and various youth groups mobilized protests advocating for civilian rule, showcasing resilience and innovation in their approaches to civic engagement. By investigating these effective strategies, this research will illustrate how civil society can navigate the complexities of military governance and contribute to the broader struggle for democracy in West Africa (Minko, 2023).

Furthermore, this examination will also highlight the challenges and successes experienced by civil society in maintaining momentum for democratic ideals amidst authoritarian challenges. The interplay between military rule and civil society responses reveals a dynamic landscape where adaptive strategies can lead to significant societal change. By drawing on recent examples from Mali and Niger, such as the formation of coalitions among various CSOs and grassroots movements, this paper will illuminate how civil society not only responds to military governance but also plays a critical role in shaping the future of democracy in these nations. Understanding these interactions is essential for grasping the potential pathways toward reinstating democratic governance and ensuring that citizens' voices are heard in the political processes of Mali and Niger (Adamaagashi et al., 2024).

1.1: Historical Context of Military Rule in Mali and Niger

The history of military rule in Mali and Niger is closely tied to their colonial past and the enduring struggles of post-independence state-building. Both nations gained independence from France in 1960, but their political trajectories were soon shaped by military takeovers. In Mali, President Modibo Keïta's socialist-orientated government was overthrown in 1968 by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré, who established a prolonged period of military rule. Similarly, Niger experienced its first coup in 1974 when Lieutenant-Colonel Seyni Kountché ousted President Hamani Diori, citing rampant corruption and the government's failure to respond to a devastating famine. These initial coups set the stage for military actors to become central figures in national politics, often positioning themselves as corrective forces in response to political or economic instability (Nweke and Enwe, 2024).

Subsequent decades in both countries witnessed recurring military interventions that weakened democratic institutions. Mali experienced several coups after 1968, most notably in 1991, 2012, 2020, and 2021, each occurring amid deepening political and security crises. Niger followed a similar trajectory with coups in 1996, 1999, 2010, and most recently in 2023. These interventions have frequently been justified by the military as necessary actions to restore national order during moments of perceived governmental failure. In practice, however, they often led to prolonged periods of authoritarian governance, limited civil liberties, and the erosion of constitutional processes. This cyclical pattern has made it difficult for democratic norms to take root and sustain themselves over time (Salum, 2024 and Matei, 2021).

One of the key factors enabling the persistence of military rule in both countries has been the complex security environment. In Mali, longstanding Tuareg rebellions and a more recent surge in violent extremism, particularly from jihadist groups in the north and centre of the country, have been used to rationalise military takeovers. In Niger, similar threats from Boko Haram and other transnational extremist groups have created a climate of fear and insecurity, leading many citizens to lose faith in civilian administrations. As a result, the military often garners public support or tolerance when it claims to act in defence of national stability. These security challenges have not only intensified the legitimacy crisis of elected governments but also entrenched the military's role as a key political actor (Le Roux, 2019).

The influence of international actors further complicates this dynamic. Both Mali and Niger are pivotal to Western-led counterterrorism strategies in the Sahel, attracting significant military and financial support from countries like France and the United States. While this support is aimed at combating extremism, it has inadvertently strengthened the capacity of military institutions while undermining efforts to build accountable civilian governance. In Mali, for instance, French military operations such as Operation Serval and later Operation Barkhane were conducted in partnership with state security forces, even during periods of political transition. In Niger, the presence of U.S. drone bases and military advisors provided the armed forces with strategic advantages that extended beyond battlefield capabilities, reinforcing their influence within national politics (Center for Preventive Action. (2024).

Despite moments of democratic renewal, both Mali and Niger continue to grapple with the legacies of military dominance. Efforts to transition back to civilian rule, such as Niger's return to democracy following the 2010 coup and Mali's electoral processes in the early 2000s, have often been fragile and short-lived. The repeated breakdowns of constitutional governance suggest that institutional weaknesses remain deeply embedded. To

achieve lasting democracy in these countries, it will be important to make changes within the country and adjust international policies—focusing on building strong civilian institutions, encouraging open political discussions, and making sure that international security support does not promote authoritarian rule. Only through such comprehensive efforts can the cycle of military rule be broken and genuine democratic governance be realized (Terzungwe, 2024).

1.2: Historical Precedents of Military Rule

The historical precedents of military rule in Mali and Niger are characterised by a series of interventions that illustrate a broader narrative of governance crises and public disillusionment with civilian leadership. In Mali, the military has historically been viewed as both a stabilising force and a disruptor of democratic processes. The pivotal 2012 coup emerged from escalating public frustration over the government's failure to effectively combat Tuareg separatists and Islamist militants in the northern regions. This upheaval was not merely a spontaneous reaction; it stemmed from a deep-seated belief among the populace that only the military could restore order (Bazzouni, 2021). The perceived legitimacy of the military in such a role is paradoxical, as it ultimately led to a cycle of instability, resulting in further coups in 2020 and 2021. The transitional governments that arose in the aftermath struggled to establish genuine democratic norms, illustrating the fundamental difficulties associated with transitioning from a military-dominated political landscape to one rooted in civilian governance.

In a similar vein, Niger's history of military governance reflects entrenched patterns of political instability and public dissatisfaction with elected officials. The 2010 coup, spearheaded by Salou Djibo, was framed as a necessary response to rampant corruption and mismanagement within the civilian government. This intervention not only mirrored regional trends but also highlighted the military's acute awareness of public grievances, which it leveraged to justify its actions (Khalil & Rachad, 2021). Despite promises of a swift return to constitutional order by the military-led government, scepticism pervaded the populace. Citizens remained wary of the military's intentions, given its historical entanglement in politics. This scepticism illustrates a broader societal fatigue with political elites who have repeatedly failed to deliver effective governance, leaving a lingering doubt about the sincerity of military promises.

The consequences of these historical precedents extend deeply into civil-military relations within both Mali and Niger. The military's entrenched presence in political life creates a challenging environment for civilian authorities striving to assert their legitimacy. Scholars argue that recurrent military interventions foster a culture of impunity, undermining the institutional frameworks essential for democratic governance (Mauzé & Rachad, 2020). The military's persistent influence over political outcomes presents substantial barriers to the development of resilient democratic institutions. This ongoing dynamic complicates the efforts of civilian leaders who aspire to embed democratic principles into governance, as the shadow of military power looms large over political discourse.

Additionally, the international community's response plays a significant role in shaping the trajectory of governance in both countries. Often, external actors prioritise stability over the promotion of democratic norms, inadvertently reinforcing military authority in government. This approach can lead to a form of complicity, where international support is granted to military regimes under the guise of maintaining order, thus circumventing the imperative for democratic accountability. Such dynamics not only undermine the legitimacy of civilian governance but also perpetuate a cycle where the military is seen as the only viable authority capable of maintaining national stability.

The implications of these historical and contemporary dynamics are profound, as both Mali and Niger grapple with the challenge of reconciling military authority with the aspirations of their citizens for democratic governance. The populace's yearning for effective leadership is increasingly at odds with the realities of military dominance, leading to widespread disillusionment with political processes. This disconnect can provoke further unrest, as citizens may resort to protests or other forms of civic engagement to voice their demands for accountability and transparency.

In conclusion, the historical trajectories of military rule in Mali and Niger reveal a complex relationship among public sentiment, political instability, and military authority. As both nations navigate the legacy of previous interventions, the challenge remains to establish a political environment where civilian governance can thrive free from the shadow of military influence. Addressing these historical grievances, fostering genuine democratic institutions, and cultivating a culture of accountability are essential steps toward achieving stable and representative governance in the region. The experiences of Mali and Niger serve as cautionary tales for other nations grappling with similar issues, highlighting the importance of prioritising democratic principles even amid crises.

1.3: Socio-Political Factors Contributing to Coups

The socio-political landscape in Mali and Niger is characterised by a range of factors that contribute to the recurring phenomenon of military coups. Economic instability plays a pivotal role, as both countries grapple with high unemployment rates, poverty, and limited access to basic services. According to the World Bank (2020), Mali's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture,

which is vulnerable to climate change, while Niger faces similar economic vulnerabilities due to its reliance on subsistence farming and livestock. This economic fragility exacerbates public discontent and creates an environment where citizens are more likely to support military interventions as a means of addressing their grievances.

Additionally, the governance challenges faced by civilian administrations significantly contribute to the legitimacy crises that precede coups. Both Mali and Niger have experienced high levels of corruption and mismanagement, which have eroded public trust in elected officials (International Crisis Group, 2020). Citizens often perceive the military as a more effective alternative for restoring order and addressing pressing security concerns, particularly in the face of rising extremism and armed conflict (Hassan, 2021). In Mali, for instance, the military's intervention in response to armed groups in the north was initially welcomed by segments of the population who felt abandoned by their government, illustrating how socio-political grievances can facilitate military takeovers.

Moreover, ethnic tensions and the historical marginalisation of certain groups have further complicated the political landscape in both countries. In Mali, the Tuareg population has long felt disenfranchised, leading to a series of uprisings and calls for autonomy (Khalil, 2022). Similarly, in Niger, ethnic divisions, particularly between the Hausa and Zarma communities, have influenced political allegiances and the stability of governments. These socio-political factors not only contribute to the conditions that precipitate military coups but also highlight the challenges of fostering inclusive governance that addresses the diverse needs of the population. Understanding these dynamics is essential for identifying strategies to strengthen democratic resilience and promote effective civilian governance. 1.3: Socio-political factors contributing to coups.

1.4: The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in Both Countries

The evolution of civil-military relations in Mali and Niger has been shaped by historical patterns of governance, public perceptions of the military, and the responses of civil society to military rule. In Mali, civil society organisations (CSOs) have historically played a crucial role in advocating for democratic governance and human rights, yet their influence has often been undermined by the military's dominance (Tait, 2021). Following the coups, the military has increasingly positioned itself as the protector of national interests, sidelining civil society voices and limiting civic engagement. This shift has raised concerns about the future of democratic norms and civic freedoms, as the military consolidates its power during transitional periods.

In Niger, the relationship between the military and civil society is similarly complex. While the military's interventions have often been met with public support, particularly in times of crisis, civil society organisations have sought to assert their roles in political discourse and governance (Koechlin, 2019). However, the military's historical entrenchment in politics complicates these efforts, leading to a precarious balance between collaboration and conflict. Civil society actors often find themselves navigating a landscape where military authority can overshadow democratic aspirations, creating challenges for effective advocacy and mobilisation.

Furthermore, the international context has an important effect on civil-military relations in both countries. The involvement of foreign powers, particularly in counterterrorism efforts, has led to increased military funding and support, further entrenching military authority (Hoffman, 2019). As international partners prioritise stability and security over democratic governance, civil society's role in promoting accountability and transparency becomes increasingly marginalised. To foster democratic resilience, it is crucial for civil society organisations to adapt their strategies to engage effectively with military authorities while advocating for the restoration of democratic principles. This evolving dynamic calls attention to a comprehensive understanding of civil-military relations and the ongoing struggles for civic engagement in Mali and Niger.

2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of democratic resilience and civil society responses are central to understanding how democracies in West Africa, particularly in Mali and Niger, navigate periods of military intervention and authoritarian tendencies. Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic institutions, norms, and practices to withstand shocks such as military coups and to recover or adapt in ways that sustain democratic governance (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In the context of Mali and Niger, recent scholarship emphasises the importance of both formal institutions and informal social networks in fostering resilience amidst recurrent military interventions, which have historically challenged democratic consolidation in the region (Lindberg et al., 2019).

Civil society plays a pivotal role in fostering resilience through activism, advocacy, and social mobilisation. Scholars argue that resilient civil societies can serve as buffers against authoritarian regression by promoting democratic norms, holding military and political leaders accountable, and mobilising public opposition to military rule (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). In Mali and Niger, civil society organisations (CSOs) have been active in resisting military coups through protests, advocacy campaigns, and international lobbying, often risking repression but maintaining their influence as critical

democratic actors (Lührmann et al., 2018). Their effectiveness, however, is often contingent on their ability to operate independently, secure resources, and mobilise broad-based support.

The response of civil society to military rule in these countries has been characterised by both resilience and adaptation. For example, in Mali, civil society actors have shifted from traditional advocacy to digital activism, using social media platforms to organise protests and communicate with international audiences (Ouedraogo, 2019). Similarly, in Niger, civil society groups have engaged in dialogue with regional organisations such as ECOWAS, demanding the restoration of civilian rule and democratic accountability (Ndiaye & Faye, 2020). These adaptive strategies underscore the importance of social networks, transnational linkages, and innovative tactics in maintaining democratic resilience under authoritarian pressures.

However, the resilience of civil society in Mali and Niger faces significant challenges, including repression, limited resources, and political polarisation. Scholars warn that persistent repression and external influences, such as regional security concerns and international interventions, can undermine local civil society efforts and weaken democratic resilience (Lindberg et al., 2019). Moreover, the cyclical nature of military coups in the region illustrates the fragility of democratic gains, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how civil society can sustain resistance and resilience in a complex political landscape. Overall, the scholarly literature underscores that civil society responses are vital to democratic resilience, but their success depends on broader institutional, regional, and international factors.

2.1: Definition and dimensions of democratic resilience

Democratic resilience refers to the ability of democratic systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from challenges such as political crises, authoritarian threats, social unrest, or external shocks. It highlights not only the endurance of democratic institutions but also their capacity for transformation and renewal in response to adversity (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Resilience involves multiple interconnected dimensions, including institutional robustness, adherence to democratic norms, civil liberties, and the active engagement of citizens in political life (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). For example, resilient democracies maintain electoral integrity, uphold the rule of law, and protect minority rights even under stressors that threaten these principles (Mounk, 2018).

Furthermore, democratic resilience is increasingly recognised as a dynamic process whereby democracies develop adaptive capabilities that enable them to respond to crises without succumbing to authoritarian tendencies (Lindberg et al., 2019). This perspective shifts the focus from static institutional strength to continuous processes of renewal, innovation, and civic participation that sustain democratic vitality (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Importantly, resilience is also linked to societal trust and social cohesion, which foster collective resistance against anti-democratic forces (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). As such, resilience involves both structural features and the agency of individuals and groups committed to democratic values (Lindberg et al., 2019).

A critical aspect of understanding democratic resilience involves recognising its contextual variability; what works in one setting may not be effective in another. Cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors influence how resilience manifests in different democracies (Mounk, 2018). For instance, democracies with strong social capital and inclusive institutions tend to demonstrate higher resilience, as they facilitate cooperation and trust among citizens (Lührmann et al., 2018). Conversely, democracies with fragile institutions or deep social divisions may be more vulnerable to breakdowns, requiring targeted strategies to bolster resilience (Lindberg et al., 2019). Hence, resilience is not solely about static features but also about the capacity for ongoing adaptation and learning.

Ultimately, the concept of democratic resilience underscores the importance of proactive civic engagement, institutional accountability, and the safeguarding of democratic norms. It prompts scholars and policymakers to focus on strengthening both formal institutions and informal social networks, ensuring democracies can withstand contemporary challenges such as populism, misinformation, and external interference (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). As democracies face an increasingly complex and volatile global environment, understanding and fostering resilience becomes vital for sustaining democratic governance and safeguarding human rights (Lührmann et al., 2018). 2.1: Definition and dimensions of democratic resilience.

2.2: Comparative theories of resilience in post-authoritarian contexts

Theories of resilience in post-authoritarian contexts explore how democracies evolve and sustain themselves after periods of authoritarian rule. One dominant approach emphasises the importance of institutional capacity, arguing that resilient democracies are characterised by strong, independent courts, free media, and electoral systems that can withstand external pressures (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). This perspective suggests that institutional strength forms the backbone of democratic endurance by providing mechanisms for accountability and conflict resolution. For example, in Latin America, countries with independent judiciaries and vibrant civil societies have demonstrated higher resilience against democratic backsliding (Lindberg et al., 2019).

Another influential framework is social resilience, which highlights the role of social capital, civic

engagement, and grassroots mobilisation in reinforcing democratic stability (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). This approach argues that resilient democracies depend heavily on active citizen participation, trust in institutions, and social networks that facilitate collective action. For instance, post-authoritarian societies with high levels of civic activism and community engagement tend to recover more swiftly from crises or threats to democracy (Lührmann et al., 2018). These social factors act as buffers against authoritarian reassertion, fostering a culture of resilience rooted in societal bonds.

A third perspective emphasises the importance of leadership and political culture. Resilient democracies are often characterised by political actors who are committed to democratic norms and practices, which helps prevent democratic erosion (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Leaders who promote democratic values and adhere to constitutional constraints can serve as catalysts for resilience, especially during transitional periods (Mounk, 2018). Conversely, regimes with weakened norms or populist tendencies may undermine resilience, making democratic consolidation more fragile over time.

To crown it all, international influence and normative frameworks also shape resilience in post-authoritarian settings. External actors, such as international organisations and foreign governments, can boost resilience by providing technical assistance, monitoring election processes, and encouraging democratic reforms (Lührmann et al., 2018). However, overreliance on external support can also pose risks if it undermines local ownership or leads to perceptions of external interference. Overall, these theories collectively highlight that resilience in post-authoritarian democracies is multi-dimensional, involving institutional, social, cultural, and external factors working in tandem.

2.3: Indicators of resilience within civil society

Civil society plays a crucial role in fostering democratic resilience, with several indicators demonstrating its capacity to withstand and adapt to political crises. One key indicator is the persistence and diversity of civic organisations, which serve as platforms for advocacy, social cohesion, and political dialogue. (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). The presence of autonomous, active NGOs, grassroots movements, and community groups underscores civil society's ability to mobilise citizens and influence policy, even under repression or instability (Lührmann et al., 2018). For instance, during transitional periods, resilient civil societies maintain advocacy efforts and continue to hold governments accountable.

Another vital indicator is the adaptability of civil society networks in response to changing political environments. Resilient civil society organisations often leverage digital communication technologies and international partnerships to sustain activism and broaden their reach (Lindberg et al., 2019). For example, social media campaigns and transnational coalitions enable civil society actors to bypass state restrictions and mobilise global support. The capacity for innovation and flexibility in strategies demonstrates resilience in the face of repression or shrinking civic space.

Furthermore, the strength of civil society's social capital—trust, reciprocity, and networks—serves as a foundation for resilience. High levels of social cohesion facilitate collective action, reinforce shared democratic norms, and enable communities to resist authoritarian pressures (Krause & Moffitt, 2020). These social bonds underpin resilience by fostering solidarity and a sense of collective agency, which are essential during crises. Empirical studies show that societies with high social capital tend to recover more quickly from political upheavals and maintain democratic practices (Lührmann et al., 2018).

Resilience is also reflected in civil society's influence on policymaking and its capacity to foster democratic norms. This includes its role in promoting civic education, defending human rights, and participating in electoral processes (Lindberg et al., 2019). Civil society's ability to adapt and persist under adversity ensures that democratic values remain salient in public discourse. Overall, these indicators collectively demonstrate that resilient civil societies are vital to sustaining democracy amid political turbulence.

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2.4: Theoretical Framework of Democratic Resilience

The theoretical framework of democratic resilience integrates multiple perspectives to explain how democracies endure and adapt amid crises. Institutionalist theories posit that resilient democracies possess strong, independent institutions—such as judiciaries, electoral commissions, and legislative bodies—that uphold democratic norms and prevent authoritarian regressions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). These institutions serve as anchors that facilitate stability by providing checks and balances, especially during political upheavals (Krause & Moffitt, 2020).

Complementing this is social capital theory, which emphasises the importance of trust, civic engagement, and networks in fostering resilience. High social capital enhances collective action, cooperation, and social cohesion, which are crucial for democratic endurance (Lührmann et al., 2018). Civil society acts as a reservoir of social trust, enabling citizens to mobilise and defend democratic norms during crises. This perspective underscores the importance of community bonds and civic participation as resilience mechanisms (Lindberg et al., 2019).

A third component involves agency-based approaches that focus on the role of political actors, citizens, and civil society in actively defending democracy.

This perspective highlights that resilient democracies depend on the commitment of leaders and citizens to uphold democratic principles, even when challenged by populist or authoritarian tendencies (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Agency-driven resilience involves strategic actions such as protests, advocacy, and institutional reforms that reinforce democratic norms.

The framework recognises the importance of external factors and normative influences, including international organisations and global democratic norms, which can reinforce domestic resilience efforts (Lührmann et al., 2018). These external supports can provide legitimacy, technical assistance, and normative pressure that bolster internal resilience mechanisms. Collectively, these components form an integrated approach that underscores resilience as a multifaceted, dynamic process involving institutions, society, actors, and external influences.

3: ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NAVIGATING MILITARY RULE

The role of civil society in navigating military rule in Mali and Niger is a vital aspect of their political landscapes, especially in times of crisis. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and grassroots movements are crucial for advocating democracy, promoting human rights, and mobilising citizens against authoritarian governance. This section explores case studies highlighting prominent CSOs and grassroots movements, the dynamics of advocacy and mobilisation against military rule, and the interplay between local communities and national organisations.

3.1: Case Studies of Prominent CSOs and Grassroots Movements

In Mali, the Mouvement du 5 Juin – Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP) has become a prominent civil society coalition that emerged in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the government's inability to address corruption and insecurity. Formed in 2020, M5-RFP unites various civil society groups, political parties, and religious leaders to advocate for democratic reforms and the restoration of constitutional order after the military coup (Bazzouni, 2021). The coalition successfully organised mass protests, which not only mobilised large segments of the population but also gained significant international media attention, showcasing the power of collective civil action in challenging military authority. Their campaigns have underscored the importance of unity among diverse social groups in achieving a common democratic goal.

Similarly, in Niger, the Réseau des Acteurs de la Société Civile (Network of Civil Society Actors) has emerged as a vital player in advocating for democratic governance and human rights. This network consists of various CSOs focused on accountability and transparency within government institutions. During the 2021 coup, the network organised public awareness campaigns and educational forums to discuss the implications of military governance for citizens' rights and freedoms (Koechlin, 2019). By engaging communities in dialogue and providing platforms for discussion, these organisations have fostered a culture of political engagement that empowers citizens to voice their concerns and demands, thereby enhancing democratic processes even under military rule.

Grassroots movements have also played a significant role in advocating for change. In both countries, organisations such as Touche pas à ma Constitution in Mali and Sons of the Nation in Niger have mobilised citizens around core issues such as constitutional rights and the need for accountability. These movements leverage social media and community networks to spread their messages and organise protests, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of civil society in the face of military authority (Tait, 2021). Their grassroots nature enables them to resonate deeply with local populations, ensuring that the voices of ordinary citizens are included in the national discourse on governance and democracy.

3.2: Advocacy and Mobilisation Efforts against Military Rule

The advocacy and mobilisation efforts by civil society organisations in Mali and Niger are critical in challenging military governance and promoting democratic ideals. In Mali, organisations like Amnesty International Mali have systematically documented human rights abuses committed by the military, utilising reports and media campaigns to raise public awareness and pressure authorities for accountability (Amnesty International, 2021). By detailing cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and torture, these organisations not only inform the international community but also galvanise local public opinion against military rule. Such efforts highlight the essential role of human rights advocacy in fostering an environment where democratic principles can thrive, even amidst military governance.

In Niger, advocacy efforts have effectively mobilised citizens against military rule through peaceful protests and public discussions. The Nigerien Association for the Defence of Human Rights (ANDDH) has been instrumental in organising demonstrations that call for a return to constitutional order and the protection of civil liberties. Their grassroots campaigns have seen significant participation, reflecting a growing public sentiment against military interventions in politics (International Crisis Group, 2020). Additionally, these organisations utilise a variety of communication strategies, including social media, to reach broader

audiences and engage younger demographics, enhancing their mobilisation efforts.

The advocacy landscape is also characterised by collaborations between local and national organisations. National CSOs often rely on the grassroots support of local groups to amplify their messages and mobilise larger segments of the population. For example, the collaboration between the Association des Femmes Juristes du Mali and local women's groups has successfully highlighted issues of gender-based violence and the need for women's representation in political processes (Zohoun, 2021). This collective effort not only addresses specific grievances but also strengthens the overall capacity of civil society to challenge military rule and advocate for democratic governance, demonstrating the critical importance of unity and collaboration in civil society activism.

3.3: The Interplay between Local Communities and National CSOs

The interplay between local communities and national Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is fundamental to the effectiveness of advocacy efforts in Mali and Niger. Local communities provide the grassroots support necessary for national movements to gain momentum, integrating local needs and perspectives into broader advocacy efforts. For example, in Mali, organisations like Kandji work closely with communities to address issues such as land rights, youth unemployment, and education. By engaging directly with community leaders and residents, these organisations ensure that local voices are heard in national discussions, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among citizens (Tait, 2021).

In Niger, the relationship between local communities and national CSOs has led to creative solutions to political challenges. National organisations often rely on local networks to disseminate information and mobilise action, utilising established trust within communities to encourage participation in advocacy efforts (Koechlin, 2019). This collaboration has been particularly effective in mobilising citizens around critical issues, such as electoral transparency and government accountability. The ability of national organisations to leverage local knowledge and networks enhances the relevance and impact of their advocacy work, ensuring that it resonates with the populations they aim to serve.

Moreover, this interplay fosters resilience within civil society, as communities become active participants in the struggle for democracy. The involvement of local populations in advocacy efforts not only enhances the legitimacy of CSOs but also builds grassroots capacity for civic engagement and political participation. For instance, the Nigerien Association for the Defence of Human Rights engages local communities in training sessions on legal rights and civic responsibilities, empowering citizens to stand against abuses of power (International Crisis Group, 2020). As local communities become more informed and organised, the collective strength of civil society grows, creating a formidable force against military rule and promoting the establishment of a democratic culture in both Mali and Niger.

4: INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

The influence of international actors and support mechanisms plays a significant role in shaping the political landscape of Mali and Niger, particularly in the context of military rule and the resilience of civil society. Foreign governments, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have engaged in various forms of assistance and intervention, impacting the dynamics of governance in these West African nations. This section examines the mechanisms of international support, the implications of foreign aid on civil society and governance, and the challenges posed by external influences on democratic processes.

4.1: Mechanisms of International Support

International support mechanisms for Mali and Niger have evolved in response to the security crises and governance challenges faced by these countries. Following the rise of extremist violence in the Sahel region, international actors, including France, the United States, and the European Union, have increased their engagement through military assistance and development aid. For instance, France's Operation Barkhane has been pivotal in providing military support to combat jihadist groups in the region, contributing to the stabilisation of both countries amidst rising insecurity (Hoffman, 2019). In addition to military aid, international organisations such as the United Nations and the African Union have provided frameworks for conflict resolution and governance support, aiming to address the root causes of instability.

Moreover, development assistance from international NGOs has focused on promoting good governance, human rights, and civil society engagement. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has funded various programs aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and fostering civic engagement in both countries. Initiatives such as the Strengthening Political Participation program in Niger aim to enhance the capacity of local CSOs to engage in political processes and promote accountability (USAID, 2021). Such programs are critical in empowering civil society to effectively challenge military governance and advocate for democratic reforms. However, the impact of international support is often contingent on the political

will of local authorities, which can complicate the realisation of intended outcomes.

4.2: Implications of Foreign Aid on Civil Society and Governance

The implications of foreign aid on civil society and governance in Mali and Niger are multifaceted. While international support can provide essential resources and capacity-building opportunities for CSOs, it may also lead to unintended consequences, such as dependency on external funding. Some scholars argue that excessive reliance on foreign aid can weaken local ownership of initiatives and reduce the accountability of governments to their citizens (Koechlin, 2019). In Mali, for instance, the influx of international funds has not always translated into improved governance or human rights protections, as military regimes may prioritise security over democratic principles.

Moreover, the conditionality often attached to foreign aid can create tensions between international expectations and local realities. International donors frequently emphasise the importance of democratic governance and human rights, yet their support can inadvertently bolster military regimes that prioritise stability and security over democratic reforms. This has been evident in Niger, where international military assistance has at times been provided without sufficient scrutiny of human rights violations committed by security forces (International Crisis Group, 2020). Such dynamics highlight the challenges faced by civil society organisations when navigating the complexities of international aid, as they must balance advocating for human rights with the need for continued support in a context marked by instability.

Additionally, the interplay between international support and local governance structures can lead to fragmentation within civil society. When funding is predominantly directed towards specific organisations or initiatives, it may exacerbate competition among CSOs, undermining collaborative efforts to promote a unified democratic agenda. In both Mali and Niger, the effectiveness of civil society in advocating for democratic reforms can be compromised by a lack of coordination and strategic alignment among various actors (Tait, 2021). Therefore, while international support mechanisms can provide crucial resources, they must be designed with an understanding of the local context and a commitment to fostering inclusive governance processes.

4.3: Challenges Posed by External Influences on Democratic Processes

The challenges posed by external influences on democratic processes in Mali and Niger are significant and complex. One major issue is the international actors' prioritisation of security over democratic governance. In response to the rising threat of terrorism in the Sahel, international military assistance often emphasises counterterrorism efforts at the expense of supporting democratic institutions. This can lead to a situation where the military is seen as the primary solution to insecurity, thereby undermining civilian governance and democratic accountability (Hassan, 2021). Consequently, the long-term stability of democratic processes is jeopardised as military regimes may become entrenched, with limited pressure to return to civilian rule.

Moreover, the presence of foreign military forces can complicate the relationship between governments and their citizens. In Mali, for example, while international forces aim to stabilise the region, their presence can also fuel anti-Western sentiments and perceptions of neocolonialism among local populations (Hoffman, 2019). Such sentiments can hinder civil society's efforts to advocate for democratic reforms, as citizens may feel alienated from both their governments and foreign partners. These dynamics create a challenging environment for civil society organisations that seek to promote democratic values and human rights.

Additionally, the effectiveness of international interventions is often hampered by a lack of coordination among donor countries and organisations. Divergent priorities and approaches can lead to fragmented support for civil society and governance initiatives. In Mali, various international actors have pursued different agendas, resulting in overlapping efforts and competition for resources among CSOs (Zohoun, 2021). This fragmentation undermines the potential for a cohesive strategy to support democratic governance and civil society resilience. To address these challenges, it is crucial for international actors to adopt a more integrated approach that prioritises democratic governance alongside security concerns, fostering a conducive environment for civil society to thrive and engage effectively in political processes.

5: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL ENGAGEMENT

As Mali and Niger navigate the complexities of military rule and the challenges to democratic governance, it is vital that they think about future directions for democracy and civil engagement. The resilience of civil society and its ability to adapt to changing political landscapes will be critical in shaping the trajectory of democratic institutions. This section explores strategies for enhancing civil society's role in political discourse, identifies opportunities for reform and rebuilding democratic institutions, and examines the prospects for future civic engagement under military rule.

5.1: Strategies for Enhancing Civil Society's Role in Political Discourse

Enhancing the role of civil society in political discourse in Mali and Niger requires a multi-faceted approach that focuses on capacity building, coalition building, and effective communication. First, strengthening the capacity of CSOs is essential for empowering them to engage effectively with both the government and the public. Training programs that focus on advocacy skills, legal rights, and organisational management can equip CSOs with the necessary tools to influence policy and public opinion (Tait, 2021). International organisations and NGOs can play a crucial role in providing technical support and resources to local CSOs, enabling them to operate more effectively within the political landscape.

Second, fostering coalitions among diverse civil society groups can amplify their voices and enhance their influence in political discourse. By forming alliances across various sectors—such as women's rights organisations, youth groups, and human rights advocates—CSOs can present a unified front that reflects a broad spectrum of societal interests. This collective approach not only increases the visibility of civil society but also strengthens its bargaining power when engaging with government authorities and international partners (Koechlin, 2019). Such coalitions can organise joint campaigns, share resources, and facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, ultimately contributing to a more robust democratic process.

Lastly, effective communication strategies are vital for engaging the public and promoting democratic values. CSOs should leverage digital platforms and social media to disseminate information, mobilise support, and raise awareness about critical issues affecting their communities. By utilising storytelling and interactive content, organisations can connect with younger audiences and foster a sense of civic identity. Additionally, engaging traditional media outlets can help amplify civil society messages and reach wider audiences, thereby enhancing public discourse around democracy and governance (Hassan, 2021). These strategies together will strengthen civil society's role in political discourse and promote active engagement from citizens.

5.2: Opportunities for Reform and Rebuilding Democratic Institutions

The current political climate in Mali and Niger presents unique opportunities for reform and rebuilding democratic institutions, especially as civil society mobilises to challenge military rule. The transitional governments in both countries have an opening to implement structural reforms that can lay the groundwork for more resilient democratic frameworks. For instance, establishing inclusive dialogue mechanisms that involve diverse stakeholders—including civil society, political parties, and marginalised groups—can foster a sense of ownership and legitimacy in the reform process (Zohoun, 2021). Such dialogues can also help identify shared goals and collaborative strategies for transitioning back to civilian rule.

Moreover, addressing governance issues such as corruption, accountability, and the rule of law is essential for rebuilding trust in public institutions. Reforming the security sector to ensure civilian oversight and adherence to human rights standards is paramount in both Mali and Niger. International partners can support these reform efforts through targeted assistance, capacity-building programs, and monitoring mechanisms that promote accountability and transparency (International Crisis Group, 2020). By prioritising these reforms, transitional governments can create an environment conducive to democratic governance and civic engagement.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to enhance electoral processes and strengthen electoral institutions. Establishing independent electoral commissions, ensuring fair access to the electoral process for all political actors, and promoting voter education can contribute to more credible and inclusive elections. Civil society can play a pivotal role in monitoring electoral processes and advocating for electoral reforms that enhance transparency and fairness (Tait, 2021). These collective efforts will be instrumental in fostering a positive political environment where democratic institutions can flourish.

5.3: Prospects for Future Civic Engagement under Military Rule

The prospects for future civic engagement under military rule in Mali and Niger are complex and dependent on various factors. While military regimes can impose restrictions on civic freedoms and suppress dissent, they also create moments of opportunity for civil society to assert its voice. As seen in past movements, public discontent with military governance can lead to renewed calls for democratic reforms and increased pressure on authorities to respect human rights (Bazzouni, 2021). Therefore, civil society organisations must remain vigilant and proactive in advocating for civic rights, even in restrictive environments.

One potential avenue for civic engagement is the rise of digital activism. With the proliferation of social media and mobile technology, citizens can organise and express their grievances more effectively than ever before. Grassroots movements can utilise digital platforms to rally support, disseminate information, and create awareness around pressing issues, thereby circumventing some of the restrictions imposed by military authorities (Hassan, 2021). However, this reliance on digital tools also necessitates a focus on digital security and safeguarding

against potential government surveillance and repression.

Furthermore, the role of international actors and the global community will significantly influence the prospects for civic engagement under military rule. International pressure for democratic governance and human rights can provide a protective space for civil society and encourage governments to adhere to democratic norms. Engaging with international organisations and platforms can enable local activists to amplify their voices and draw attention to human rights abuses (Koechlin, 2019). Ultimately, while the challenges of civic engagement under military rule are considerable, the resilience of civil society and the adaptability of its strategies can foster a renewed commitment to democratic principles and a more engaged citizenry.

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