

Praetorianism on the march in the Sahel



Six successful military coups since 2020 have significantly changed the political landscape in the Sahel, marking the most concentrated wave of unconstitutional changes of government in Africa since the decades immediately following decolonization.

Coup	Date	Status as of 2025
1	Mali Aug. 2020	Amidst widespread popular protests, soldiers detained several government officials including President Keita, who resigned and dissolved the government. The junta dissolved after agreeing to a transition under military-appointed civilian leadership.
2	Mali May. 2021	Goïta dismissed transitional civilians, declared himself President of the Transition. Initially promised elections in 2022, then postponed to 2026. Still in power; no handover yet.
3	Chad Apr. 2021	Formed after Idriss Déby's battlefield death. The CMT ruled until Oct 2024, when Mahamat Déby was formally inaugurated as civilian president after an election widely seen as controlled by the military elite.
4	Burkina Faso Jan. 2022	Damiba overthrew President Kaboré citing insecurity. Promised transition but faced protests and battlefield losses. Ousted by younger officers, led by Traoré.
5	Burkina Faso Sep. 2022	Traoré suspended the constitution and extended transition; claims to lead until 2027. No handover yet; still a de facto military regime.
6	Niger Jul. 2023	Deposed elected President Bazoum. Junta remains in control, led by Abdourahamane Tchiani. Suspended constitution. Announced plans to remain in power until 2029.

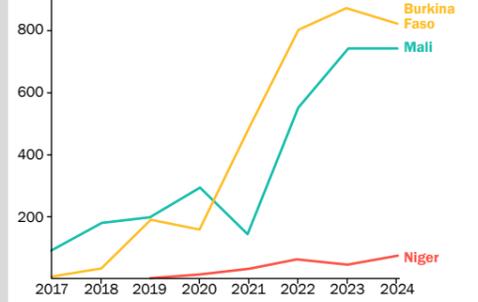
Coups have dramatically re-shaped the region

The Sahel has become a site of intense geo-political contestation. Juntas have ended security cooperation with France, ejected a UN peacekeeping mission, and embraced new economic and security partners, including Russia, China, and Turkey.

Auxiliary security deployments in the Sahel

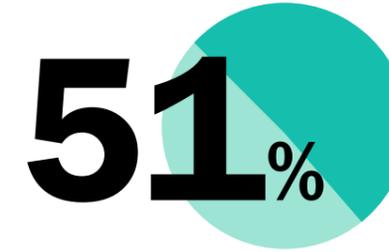
- Operation Barkhane (France) deployment - ended
- MINUSMA (UN) deployment - ended
- Africa Corps (Russia) combat deployment
- Africa Corps (Russia) training deployment or influence operation

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) attacks in the Sahel*

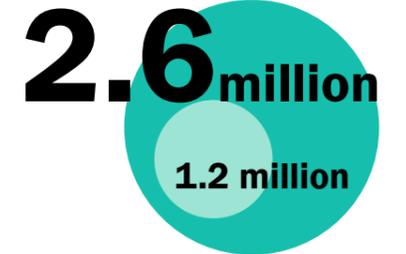


The regional population of internally displaced persons has more than doubled since 2019.

Military governments are failing to deliver on promises to restore security



of global terrorism-related deaths occurred in the Sahel in 2024. In 2017, the Sahel only accounted for 1% of terrorism-related deaths.*



The future of the Sahel is uncertain

Scenario 1. Persistence of praetorian rule

In this scenario, the military remains in power as an institution. This is, as of late 2025, the status of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States, a regional bloc made up of states under direct military-rule, suggests these regimes do not plan to return power to civilian hands in the short term.

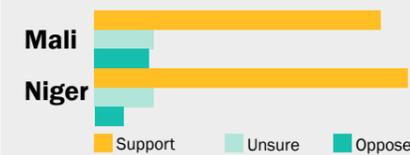
Scenario 2. Hybrid military-backed regime emerges

In this scenario, the military transfers power to a civilian representative, while retaining substantial political role and influence. Chad is in this category since the 2024 elections, where Mahamat Déby Itno campaigned as a semi-civilian leader.

Scenario 3. Restoration of civilian government

All four military regimes have promised an eventual return to civilian government but these timelines have been repeatedly extended, except in Chad where elections that returned Déby to power were seen as neither free nor fair.

Support for leaving ECOWAS (2024)*



Despite the worsening security situation, military rule remains popular.

Change in party affiliation (percent, 2011-2023)*



The coups haven't triggered a defiant popular support for opposition political parties. Declared party affiliation has actually decreased across the Sahel.

Elections canceled and postponed

- Direct military rule
- Scheduled election
- Postponed election



* 'African Insights 2024: Democracy at Risk – the People's Perspective', 13, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/flagship-report/>.

'African Insights 2025: Citizen Engagement, Citizen Power: Africans Claim the Promise of Democracy', <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/african-insights-2025-citizen-engagement-citizen-power-africans-claim-the-promise-of-democracy/>.

‡ Simon Primus, 'Who Supports the Coup? Deprivation, Decolonization and Junta Support in Post-Coup Mali', *Democratization* (2025): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2571043>.

♦ Virginie Baudais, *Military Entrenchment in Mali and Niger: Praetorianism in Retrospect* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024), <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/policy-reports/military-entrenchment-mali-and-niger-praetorianism-retrospect>.



Dysfunction and insecurity sapped support for democracy

Decades of slow growth, corruption, climate and population pressure, and growing insecurity led to a dramatic reversal in popular support for democracy in Sahelian countries.

Junta support reflects the frustration of a young and aspirational populace with the failures of civilian government

Unlike in other regions, where support for autocracy is highest among the poorest and least politically engaged, evidence from Mali suggests that it is the politically engaged middle-class that forms the support base for the junta.*



Percent of population who reject military rule: 2011 and 2023 compared*

