DEMOCRACY, NOT MILITARY COUPS, IS OUR PREFERRED PATH

People-centred views on the need for democratic renewal across Africa

UNDP

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DEMOCRACY, NOT MILITARY COUPS, IS OUR PREFERRED PATH: PEOPLE-CENTRED VIEWS ON THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL ACROSS AFRICA

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> We are tired of coups. People have suffered, lost dear ones, were humiliated, impoverished and even killed. We don't want coups.

FEMALE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSANT, ACCRA, GHANA (JUNE 2022)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracies across the globe have faced multiple challenges over the past decade, and Africa has been no exception. Constitutional manipulation has increased on the continent as some leaders attempt to extend their time in power. But perhaps the most striking factor has been a sudden uptick in military coups. Between 2020 and 2022, Africa experienced six coups and three coup attempts: a sharp rise from the previous two decades. Popular support for coup leadership has been prominent, albeit short lived.

FIGURE 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL MILITARY COUPS PER YEAR

Number of coups per year
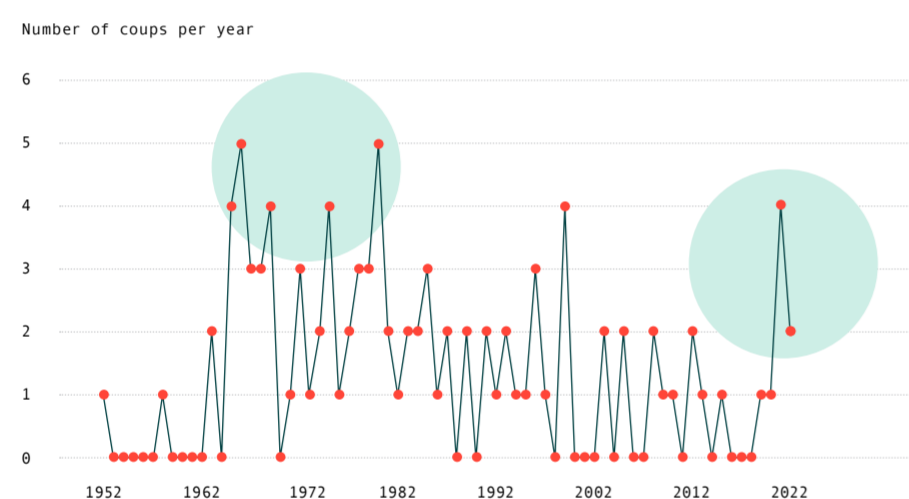
Source: Based on Souaré, I.S. (2022a). 'Are coups back in Africa?', dataset, updated as of October 2022.

98
Total number of military coups in 70 years (1952–2022)

25
years, over a 70-year period, with no successful coups

1.4
Average number of successful coups per year

While coups and military rule were common earlier in Africa's post-colonial history, a wave of democratization spread across the continent since the early 1990s. This yielded progress in favour of constitutional order. In many countries, democratic governments were established, and the peaceful change of political power through elections increased. Democratic governance became a continent-wide norm projected by the African Union (AU) through, for instance, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Against this backdrop, the recent resurgence in coups has sounded a warning note. It raises the spectre of democratic backsliding, turbulence and the close involvement

of the military in political life. When power is seized through military means, it represents a critical risk for peace and democratic progress in each affected country, along with potential spill-over effects and wider destabilization.

The AU has denounced the trend, with high-level statements and communiqués signalling renewed effort to tackle what it terms unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). Similarly, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres lamented the "epidemic of coups d'états" unfolding on the world stage and urged "effective deterrence" from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

As part of UNDP's efforts to address these events, this study adopts primarily a development-focused approach, in line with our organizational mandate. Developed as part of UNDP's partnership with the AU Commission, the report supports continental leadership efforts in tackling unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). It offers a forward-looking perspective — both for preventing further coups and for harnessing opportunities for transformative change and sustained constitutional order.

The research findings are based on a vast perceptions survey, which captured the views of 8,000 citizens across Africa. Among the respondents, 5,000 are African citizens who lived through coups or equivalent UCG events, in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan. Their views were contrasted with those of 3,000 citizens from countries on a path of democratic transition or consolidation, namely The Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania. In the report, we refer to the former countries throughout as UCG settings, and the latter as democratic transition states (DTS). As a result of this extensive survey, we have been able to interpret issues and trends through a uniquely people-centred dataset.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the development drivers of military coups, as a form of UCG, in Africa?
2. What explains apparent popular support for such coups 'in the moment' — including in contexts where democratically elected leaders were ousted?
3. What policy and programming options should regional and international actors consider to effectively prevent military coups?
4. What can these actors do to restore and sustain constitutional order, reset the social contract and boost inclusive democratic governance in UCG-affected countries?
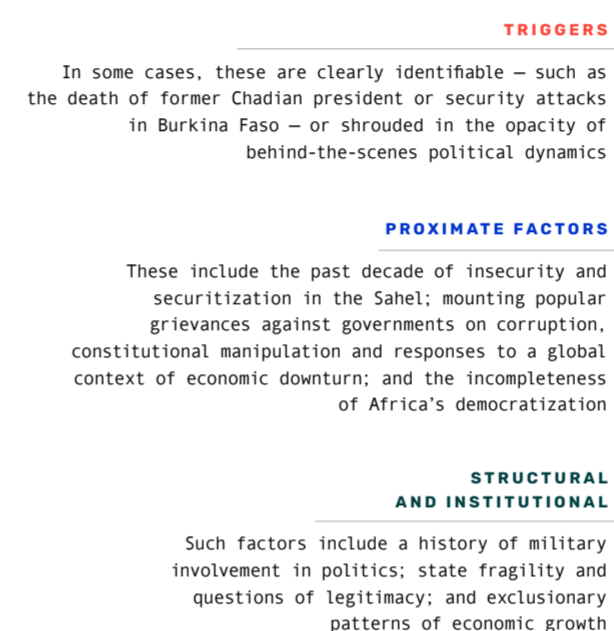
factors. Africa's recent military coups have also unfolded in an age marked by interdependence and complexity. Across the globe, geopolitical, economic, digital, environmental and sociocultural spheres are fusing to create an increasingly dynamic landscape. This makes reductive, single-factor explanations or overly simplistic solutions futile.

To untangle critical factors, the *Soldiers and citizens* research used a conflict analysis approach, which distinguishes between structural and institutional drivers (or root causes), proximate causes, and triggers (see Figure 2). This provided a contextual frame for analysing the findings of the perceptions dataset.

FIGURE 2

STRUCTURAL, PROXIMATE AND TRIGGER FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTEMPORARY MILITARY COUPS IN AFRICA

TRIGGERS

In some cases, these are clearly identifiable — such as the death of former Chadian president or security attacks in Burkina Faso — or shrouded in the opacity of behind-the-scenes political dynamics

PROXIMATE FACTORS

These include the past decade of insecurity and securitization in the Sahel; mounting popular grievances against governments on corruption, constitutional manipulation and responses to a global context of economic downturn; and the incompleteness of Africa's democratization

STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

Such factors include a history of military involvement in politics; state fragility and questions of legitimacy; and exclusionary patterns of economic growth

Citizens' perspectives: insights from the Soldiers and citizens survey

Prior to the coup event, each of the five UCG countries experienced unique dynamics. Yet, combining these factors to gain a regional perspective suggests that coup risk is influenced by a multitude of shared

Hope for a new future

The citizens who recently lived through a UCG event expressed a heightened appetite for change and positive transformation from the recent turmoil. Overall optimism was measured across several indicators. These included whether respondents thought the recent political transition had a positive impact on their country; optimism that service delivery, security and economic circumstances would soon improve; feeling 'heard' in the recent political events; and reporting positive emotions, such as 'excitement' and 'optimism', at the time of the event in question. Some 24 percent more UCG respondents felt excited about their country's direction of travel than DTS participants.

UCG-country respondents showed greater optimism and less scepticism than counterparts in DTS-category countries, indicating that they are willing to take a leap of faith. Yet the findings also conveyed the personal turmoil of living through a coup. More UCG-country respondents selected both positive and negative adjectives to describe their emotional state at the time of the event.

The UCG events explored in this study are recent, and longer-term development consequences remain unknown. However, using methods based on counter-factual enquiry, UNDP background research analysed impacts of earlier coups in Guinea (2008) and Mali (2012). The findings showed that these coups had left each country with an accumulated loss of 12.1 (Guinea) and 13.5 (Mali) of total gross domestic product (GDP), based on purchasing power parity (PPP), in the year of the coups.

Research also confirmed that the coups under review had caused political responses that discouraged investors and curtailed economic activities. Food and essential commodity prices — already under pressure due to COVID-19 and, more recently, conflict in Ukraine — have been affected by the instability in all settings. Humanitarian needs have spiked.

Despite this, a greater number of UCG-country respondents viewed the impact of their recent political transition as positive overall when compared with DTS respondents. This was particularly true for respondents from Chad, Guinea and Mali.

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'Since the elections will be conducted for the first time, some people don't know how to even cast a vote. The government needs to inform the people on how the elections will be conducted.'

FEMALE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSANT, KHARTOUM, SUDAN (FEBRUARY 2022)

Ephemeral optimism

The *Soldiers and citizens* data also reflects the ephemerality of this optimism, and related popular support for the military coups. Positive feelings were found to be in flux when respondents were asked how they felt 'now' (at the time of the research), as opposed to 'then' (during the political transition). This echoes trends from other settings where coups were popular at first, and suggests that support for coup leaders may be interpreted as a reaction against the status quo, rather than a wholehearted endorsement of incoming military rule. Indeed, in Guinea and Burkina Faso, crowds turned against the same leaders they had cheered into power less than a year earlier. This sensitive interplay between hope, delivery and expectation contributes to the risk of prolonged turbulence in transitional contexts.

Limited delivery of inclusivity

Declining civic confidence in transitional governments is partly explained by limitations in the delivery of promised inclusivity. Except for Sudan (following the coup that pre-dates the current war between armed factions), all the UCG-category countries installed a body acting as the transitional legislative council that, to some degree, reflected the countries' diversity. All engaged in at least some dialogue with socio-political forces in their respective countries to reach consensus about the management of the transition. It was clear in all five cases that inclusive and consultative processes were to guide the drafting and execution of transition plans. All contexts, however, subsequently saw increasing criticism from political and civic actors precisely on the issue of inclusivity. There has also been a general sharpening of hostility between junta leadership and opposition voices.

The *Soldiers and citizens* data revealed a strong appetite across settings for greater women and youth inclusivity in political leadership. Overall, 71 percent of respondents agreed that more young people are needed in leadership positions. Among respondents aged between 15 and 24, this increased to 78 percent.

Divergent views on democracy and the military

In DTS countries, over two thirds of respondents said that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. In UCG contexts, just over half shared this view. The remainder were split between saying that a non-democratic government can sometimes be preferable (17 percent) or that, for them, the type of government system does not really matter (20 percent).

These findings reflect disappointment with the delivery of democratically elected governments. This dissatisfaction further fuels a sense that non-democratic governance may present a legitimate alternative: an attitude that was more prevalent in the UCG countries. However, in both categories, fewer women than men indicated that a non-democratic system could be preferable. (A difference of 7 percentage points in UCG-category countries, and 4 percent in DTS-category settings.) Further analysis of the *Soldiers and citizens* data found that men were 55 percent more likely than women to say that a non-democratic government may be preferable in some circumstances. This finding suggests that improved gender parity and women's rights are better achieved via democracy than without it.

Attitudes to the role of the military in government were also divergent. UCG-country respondents expressed greater tolerance for military engagement in government affairs, including stepping in when the state shows itself to be incompetent.

Some 22 percent more UCG- than DTS-category respondents said that when a democratic government is incompetent, the military should intervene.

Time for change

A desire for change was a recurring theme across the data, particularly among those supporting the recent coup. 'Time for change' was cited as the most important reason for supporting a military takeover (44 percent). Other priorities were 'better governance' (15 percent) and 'security' (21 percent), while 8 percent selected 'don't know'. DTS-category respondents selected three prominent reasons for supporting the results of the last election, namely 'better governance' (21 percent), 'constitutional mandate' (21 percent) and 'time for change' (16 percent).

When asked to elaborate on why alternatives to democracy may be justified, most respondents pointed to instances where democracy was 'abused' or 'not working'. In UCG-category countries, more than half (63 percent) said this would warrant alternatives, while in DTS-category countries, 48 percent of respondents selected this answer. For these countries, a larger share pin-pointed 'corruption' as the second highest reason (29 percent).

Disappointment with democratically elected leaders may therefore inspire readiness to consider alternative systems of government. This attitude was more pronounced in the countries that recently experienced a coup. When asked to rank government performance, similar numbers across both settings felt that improvement was necessary. However, scepticism was again higher among those in DTS-category countries.

Coup risk may spread

Lastly, the findings of the *Soldiers and citizens* study suggest that coup risk may spread. In coup-affected countries, there is a clear risk for volatility to persist and constitutional order to continue eroding beyond transition timelines. (This is evidenced by the warfare between coup instigators in Sudan, which broke out from April 2023.) Coup leaders may also take inspiration from one another, increasingly bypassing the normative frameworks and efforts of regional institutions.

The five recently affected UCG countries are not the only states to experience this particular confluence of structural and proximate factors. This points to the potential for other cases to emerge on the continent. The research — and real-time events unfolding in Ghana and The Gambia during the study — have highlighted vulnerabilities even in states on a path of democratic transition or consolidation.

It is notable that citizens from some of the DTS countries, which are comparatively stable and developmentally advanced, cited higher levels of frustration and scepticism about government than were reported in the coup-affected countries. This discrepancy seems to indicate both higher expectations in these settings, as well as challenges that persist even in contexts with relative development progress. The research shows in a compelling manner that tolerance for ongoing inequality, government under-performance and elite self-enrichment is sharply waning across the continent.

METHODOLOGY

1. CONCEPTUAL ANCHOR POINTS

Given the complexity of the issues and dynamics at play, the research team established a set of three conceptual anchor points to guide the process.

The evolution and implementation of AU norms on UCG

Over the past two decades, one of the most notable developments in African governance and diplomacy has been the emergence of the AU and some of the regional economic communities (RECs) and regional mechanisms (RMs) as impactful players in the political transition processes of some member states. Recent experiences in countries such as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, The Gambia, Lesotho, Mali and South Sudan have highlighted the potential influence of the AU and organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This study is situated within the evolving AU normative frameworks on UCG. These began to take shape in the 1990s (under the direction of the then-Organization of African Unity), alongside a commitment to elections as forming the only legitimate basis for assuming and retaining government power. Norms against UCG are enshrined in various legal instruments. These include the 2000 Lomé Declaration; the AU Constitutive Act; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (the African Charter); as well as various declarations and decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC).

Some RECs/RMs have developed regional instruments that mirror these continental norms. The intention to inhibit and prevent UCG is strongly rooted in evolving interpretations of threats to global peace and security within international law. It further aligns with the post-Cold War normative interest of international law and international organizations in the defence of constitutional order and the promotion of democratic governance.

As articulated in AU instruments, UCG can take different forms. The first of this type of UCG, namely military coups, is presently the most prominent, and is the primary focus of this report.

Analysts have identified several gaps in this policy architecture — including a need for clearer provision in response to attempts to extend power through constitutional amendment. The March 2022 Accra Declaration reiterated a continent-level commitment to these principles, along with the AU's intention to take further actions to strengthen responses at all levels.

Urgent questions regarding both the implementation of these norms, and incentives of AU member states to adhere to them, require continued attention. The normative framework on UCG is thus both still evolving, and in need of renewed commitment. Yet it remains a pertinent, useful and opportune frame through which to view recent developments and shape response strategies, while further strengthening regional leadership and influence. UNDP's own deep partnership with the AU Commission and its various specialized agencies has been a further inspiration.

An explicit development lens on coups as a form of UCG

Experience suggests that military coups negatively impact development progress. Abrupt changes in government impede regular policy and programme implementation and stall much-needed investment. Diverse stakeholders, including development actors, need to identify options and pathways to mitigate the profound risks associated with military coups as a form of UCG. Opportunities for positive transformation must be sought and harnessed. UNDP has produced this report to respond to this need. This reflects its mandate as the lead development actor in the UN system, engaging at multiple levels in supporting African states and citizens, as well as the AU and regional organizations, to work towards Agenda 2030 (in this, its final 'Decade of Action') and Agenda 2063.

Envisaging inclusive political transitions

UNDP produced this report as part of its Supporting Inclusive Transitions in Africa

project, reflecting the organization's commitment to fostering platforms of development that engage the widest range of stakeholders. In addition, the report considers the quality and depth of inclusion during the complex political transitions signalled by military coups and during the electoral process.

The research has sought to understand to what extent people feel heard; whether a new social contract can be created after a military coup; and whether elections succeed in renewing citizens' confidence in the state. The study thus pays close attention to the inclusiveness of political processes. This dimension is presented as a key factor whereby a perilous moment of UCG might be pivoted towards transformative, longer-term outcomes.

This report was produced in the context of the new Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions (AFSIT), a joint initiative of UNDP and the AU Commission to provide integrated programmatic support to countries in Africa undergoing complex political transitions.

The trajectory linking inclusive processes to inclusive outcomes is non-linear and complex. Yet states and societies that are more open and inclusive display greater prosperity, effectiveness and resilience in the long term. A substantial body of research demonstrates how the exclusion of marginalized and minority groups from political decision-making, whether quantified or informally perceived, constitutes a key factor in conflict and instability — while also affecting prospects for democratic consolidation.

Experience in peacemaking highlights the importance of inclusive national dialogue processes for establishing trust and establishing a shared sense of a future, supported and sustained by national infrastructures for peace. These lessons are pertinent in considering post-coup transition processes and priorities. Women and young people's contributions are key to sustainable peace, for instance. As a result, critical policy norms and processes have been generated around women, peace and security; as well as youth, peace and security.

In order for democracy to work, all citizens must have access to participation and representation in institutions and processes — from election management and constitutional bodies to political parties and parliaments. The concept of political inclusion signifies that every citizen should have an equal right and opportunity to engage with, and contribute to, the functioning of these institutions and processes. Levels of inclusiveness and representativeness are critical indicators of the overall legitimacy of a given political process, including transitions, whether resulting from elections or following UCG events.

The study's starting point posits that a development lens can help yield effective responses to prevent military coups, while complementing political perspectives and instruments to protect and advance development gains. This approach highlights how different aspects of a country's development context may influence the occurrence of military coups. It also sheds light on the development consequences that are likely to accrue when coups take place. These may well be destructive, but the development lens also looks to identify opportunities for securing positive outcomes towards future progress.

This lens derives from Agenda 2030, which, in Sustainable Development Goal 16, emphasizes the centrality of achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies for delivering and safe-guarding development outcomes across all other areas. Agenda 2063 articulates related priorities in its Aspiration 3 (envisaging an Africa where good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law thrive), and Aspiration 4 (envisaging a peaceful and secure Africa). In the *Our Common Agenda* initiative, the UN Secretary-General places renewed emphasis on building fresh social contracts to deepen trust and accountability. This study reaffirms the critical and timely importance of governance-focused dimensions of international development.

Development perspectives also draw attention to citizens' lived experience of national political events (across different demographic, gender and identity vectors), in ways that political analysis may overlook. The respective and differentiated views of women and youth are key. It is well recognized that these groups are central to development progress, as reflected in Agenda 2063. The people-centred dimension is closely aligned to the UN human security approach and commitment to 'leave no one behind', and represents a unique contribution to the discourse. It is hardwired into the report's methodology, as discussed below.

2. RESEARCH TOOLS

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, which are described in further detail below. The methods were designed to triangulate findings across the sources of data, recognizing the complexity of the issues at hand.

Country case selection

The overall methodological approach has been to gather evidence and data for two contrasting types of recent political transitions in Africa. This is based on a working hypothesis that comparative analysis would yield insights. Specifically, the study contrasts UCG-category countries, which have recently experienced a military coup or equivalent event, with DTS-category countries, which appear to be on a path of democratic consolidation or transition.

These two categories do not represent a comprehensive typology of contemporary political transitions in Africa. However, they reflect the polarity between two prominent trends: either towards deepened democracy on the continent, as seen since the 1990s — or, seemingly, towards its disruption.

The study's UCG focal countries are Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan, while the DTS countries are The Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania. The emphasis of the analysis is on the first group of five countries that recently experienced a military coup (noting Chad's case is particular in this frame). The states in the second list have either experienced a substantial period of democratic transition

(Ghana and Tanzania — the latter also being the only country included with no history of military coups), or they have, if only recently, embarked on a path towards democratic transition (The Gambia).

In addition to generating comparative lessons and insights, the inclusion of DTS countries revealed potential limitations of government performance against citizens' expectations, even in apparently functioning democracies.

Quantitative research instruments

The study captures the perspectives of approximately 8,000 African citizens from eight focal countries, comparing and contrasting experiences across their locations. The report places these perspectives at its centre — 'listening' to them, while triangulating findings against other data and literature. To allow for a sufficient sample size, 1,000 survey responses were collected in each of the countries, using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). This generated a set of 5,000 respondents from UCG-category countries, and 3,000 from DTS-category countries.

The figures on the following pages present a demographic profile of this vast sample. Participants from both settings reflected an even representation of women and men (women comprised 51 percent of respondents in UCG countries, and 50 percent from DTS settings), and the average age of respondents was 35. Respondents were mostly located in urban settings (70 percent UCG, and 58 percent in DTS countries), and across both contexts, just over half of the respondents were employed (56 percent in UCG and 62 percent in DTS).

FIGURE 3

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS,
BY COUNTRY

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD

5 UCG COUNTRIES
3 DTS COUNTRIES
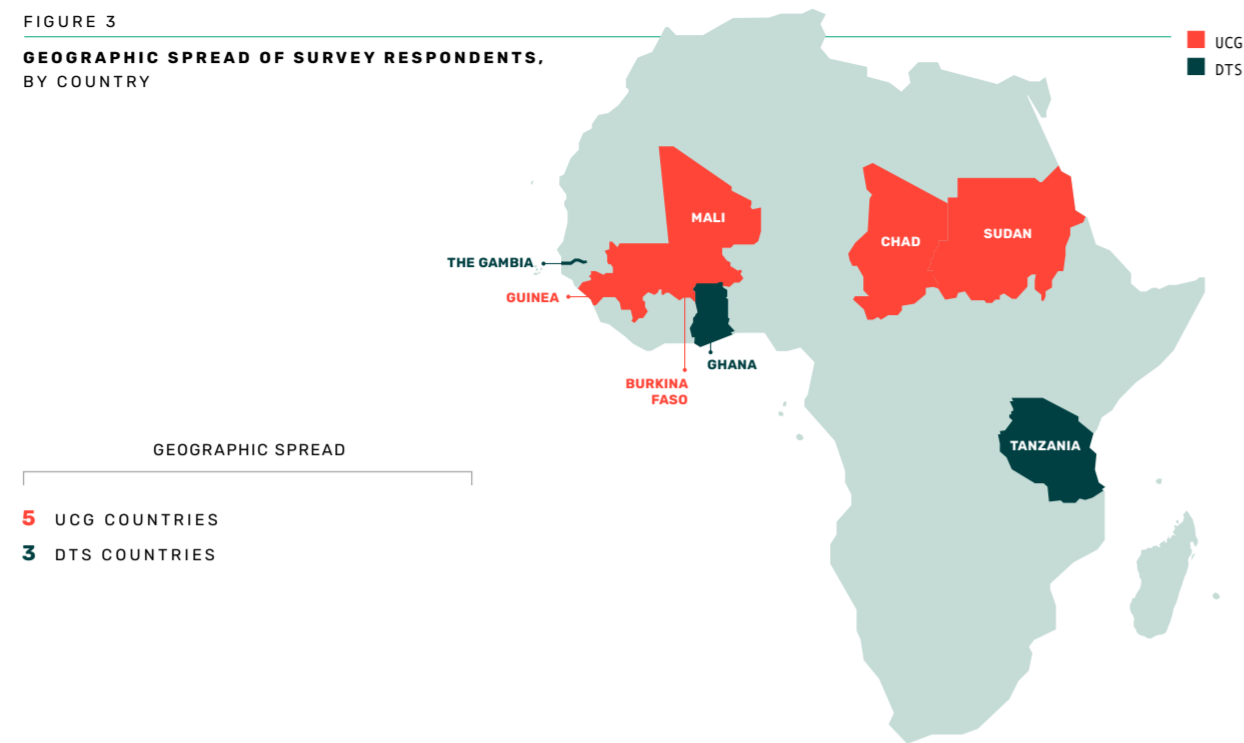
The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNDP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

FIGURE 4

SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PROFILES, BY GENDER, AGE, INCOME AND AREA (URBAN VS. RURAL)

Percentages might not add up to a 100% in some charts, as they are rounded to the nearest percentage

FIGURE 5

SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PROFILES,
BY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Percentages might not add up to a 100% in some charts, as they are rounded to the nearest percentage

Note: The employment category includes all respondents who indicated that they were working, whereas the unemployment category includes all non-working respondents. The student category includes both pupils and students. For descriptive analysis, the education category is averaged to those with no formal education and those with formal education, where each category carries equal weight. The income category is based on the basic needs question. The upper income category refers to the "I make enough money to buy basics and save the surplus". The middle income category refers to "I make enough money only to buy basics", and the low income category refers to "I do not make enough money to buy basics".

The respondents from the eight focal countries were asked to think back to the time of the last national-level political event (whether UCG or election), and answer questions related to their experiences and perspectives, as well as supplementary questions related to their attitudes to different forms of government and government performance. Respondents were also asked how they viewed the future based on their assessment of, and confidence in, government performance and the overall direction of travel.

The specific political events discussed in the UCG-category countries were:

- Burkina Faso: Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba becoming president through a military coup in February 2022;

- Chad: Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno (also known as Mahamat Kaka) became acting president when appointed by the Transitional Military Council in April 2021, following the death of his predecessor (and father) Idriss Déby;

- Guinea: Mamady Doumbouya became the transitional head of state through a military coup in September 2021;

- Mali: Assimi Goïta became the transitional head of state through a military coup in May 2021; and

- Sudan: Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan, chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, removed the civilian prime minister — effectively becoming the transitional head of state of Sudan in October 2021.

The specific electoral events discussed with the respondents from DTS-category countries were:

- The Gambia: the re-election of Adama Barrow as president in December 2021;

- Ghana: the re-election of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo as president in December 2020; and

- Tanzania: Samia Suluhu Hassan becoming president in March 2021, following the death of her predecessor.

Descriptive analysis of findings from the survey forms the basis of the primary data shared in this report. In addition, a second analysis of the dataset was conducted using multinominal logistic regression analysis and statistical modelling to further test emerging findings.

Qualitative research instruments
The primary *Soldiers and citizens* dataset was supplemented by a range of qualitative research activities. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews were conducted in two UCG-category focal countries (Burkina Faso and Sudan), and one DTS-category country (Ghana). The FGDs took place with four different groups in each country, of which one was limited to women only and one to youth.
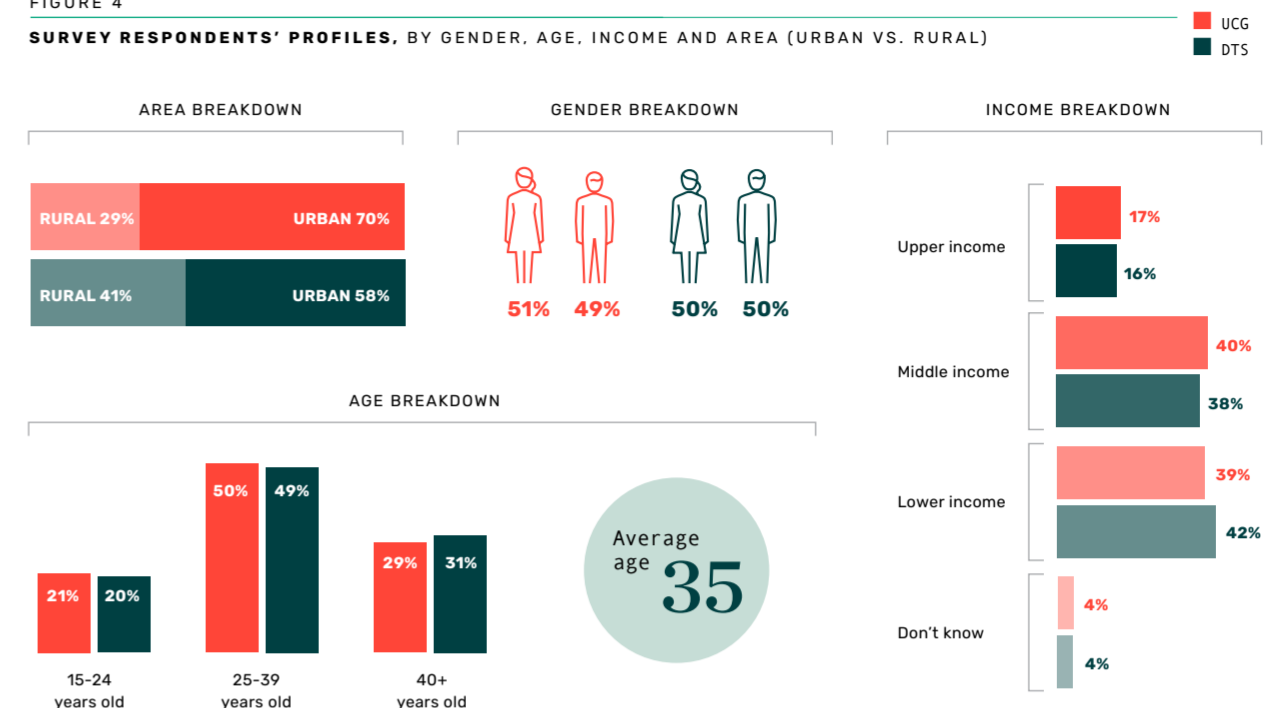
The discussions took place in three different locations within each country to explore the varied views and experiences of the sample population. The discussions revolved around living conditions, the current government, the last change of government, the role of regional and international actors, and the inclusivity of political transitions. Twelve key informant interviews were also conducted in the same countries to further explore perspectives on the issues raised, through the perspectives of community leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's organizations and religious leaders. In total, 132 people participated in the qualitative research activities.

Broader case studies and literature reviews were commissioned for each of the eight focal countries. These aimed to assess historical contexts and developments leading up to, and informing, the political events in question, as framed by the key research questions. A review was also undertaken of a sample of the academic literature on democratization in Africa, military coups and political transition more broadly. The analysis was further informed by position papers that were commissioned on the role of the AU and RECs in relation to political transition, the role of the international development system responding to UCG, and a deep dive into the Sahel's specific experiences in recent years.

The study also draws on the expertise of UNDP, with country offices providing significant support in the data-collection phase within each of the selected countries, and wider staff expertise engaged throughout the process. The research team collaborated closely with a range of other institutions, including the AU, RECs/RMs, the African Development Bank (AfDB), African academic institutions, think tanks and CSOs. Multiple consultations across these and other stakeholders, and through a continual peer review process, generated a further essential dimension of the project.

The harm [of sanctions are] mostly on the masses, more than the 'obstructors'. The coup makers are not affected. There should be individual penalties.

KEY MESSAGES

1. To mitigate coup risk, a development lens is essential

The study found that among the hybrid circumstances that shape vulnerability to coup risk, underdevelopment is prominent. Counter-factual analysis of the cost of coups further highlights that these events significantly slow down development. These findings confirm that development perspectives should be at the centre of UCG response strategies. While coups are neither inevitable, nor necessarily likely, in all low-development contexts, secondary data shows clear correlations between heightened coup risk and stagnant growth, exclusionary economic governance, multidimensional poverty, inequality, reduced youth and women's participation, governance deficits and higher levels of military spend as a share of government budget. The findings confirm that coup risk can be viewed as a subset of state fragility.

Countries that experience contemporary coups perform poorly on global development indices (see examples in Figures 6 and 7). These rankings are not abstract, but represent millions of lives marred by exclusion, infringement of rights, restriction of opportunity and frustration. These grievances create a base of frustration that coup leaders can readily exploit. The *Soldiers and citizens* data reveals optimism and a heightened appetite for change among those who recently experienced a military coup, as if willing for positive transformation to materialize from the turmoil. Poor government performance, corruption and failure to deliver security, inclusive development gains and related opportunities for populations all appear to create an appetite for change in any guise.
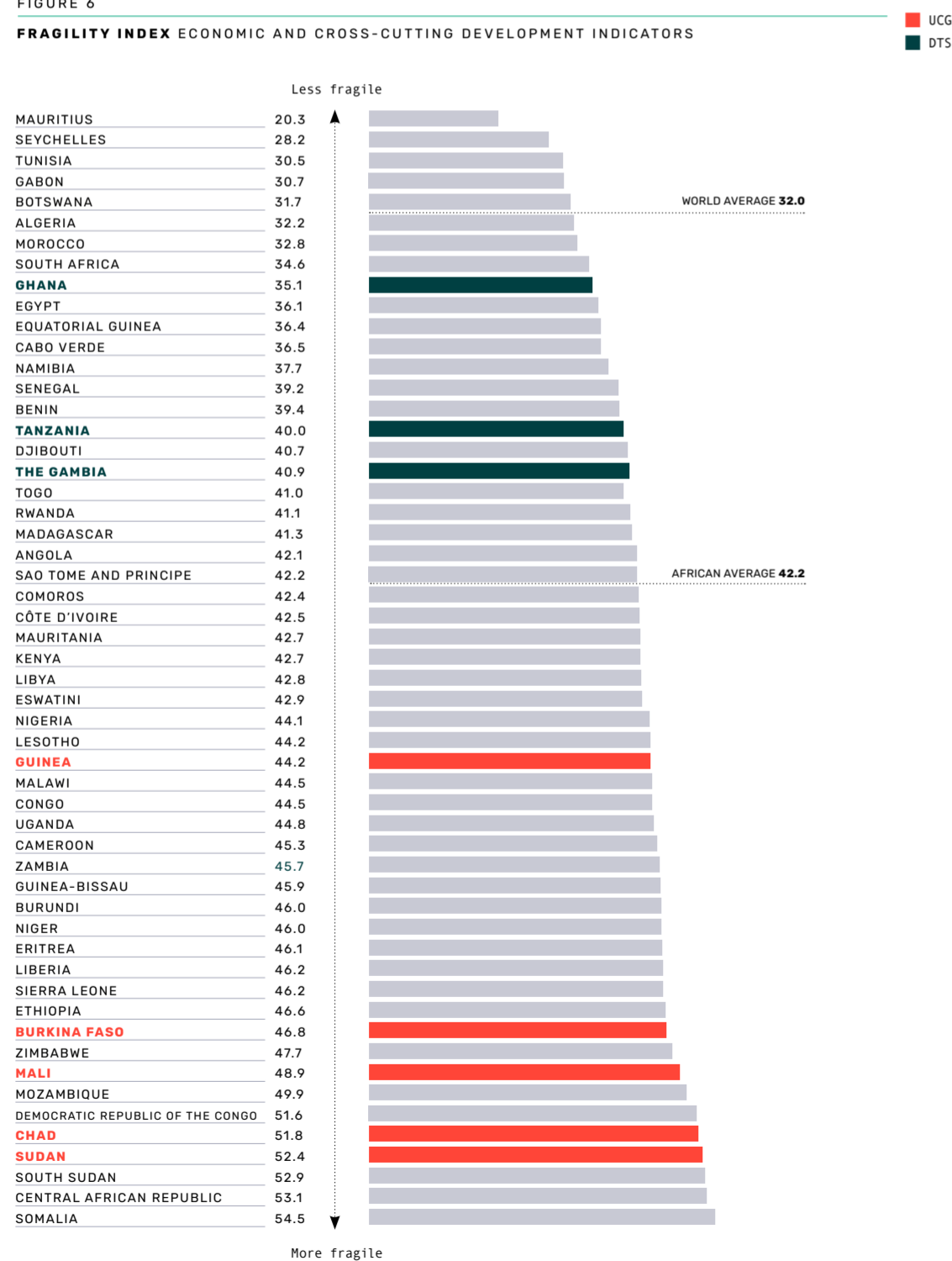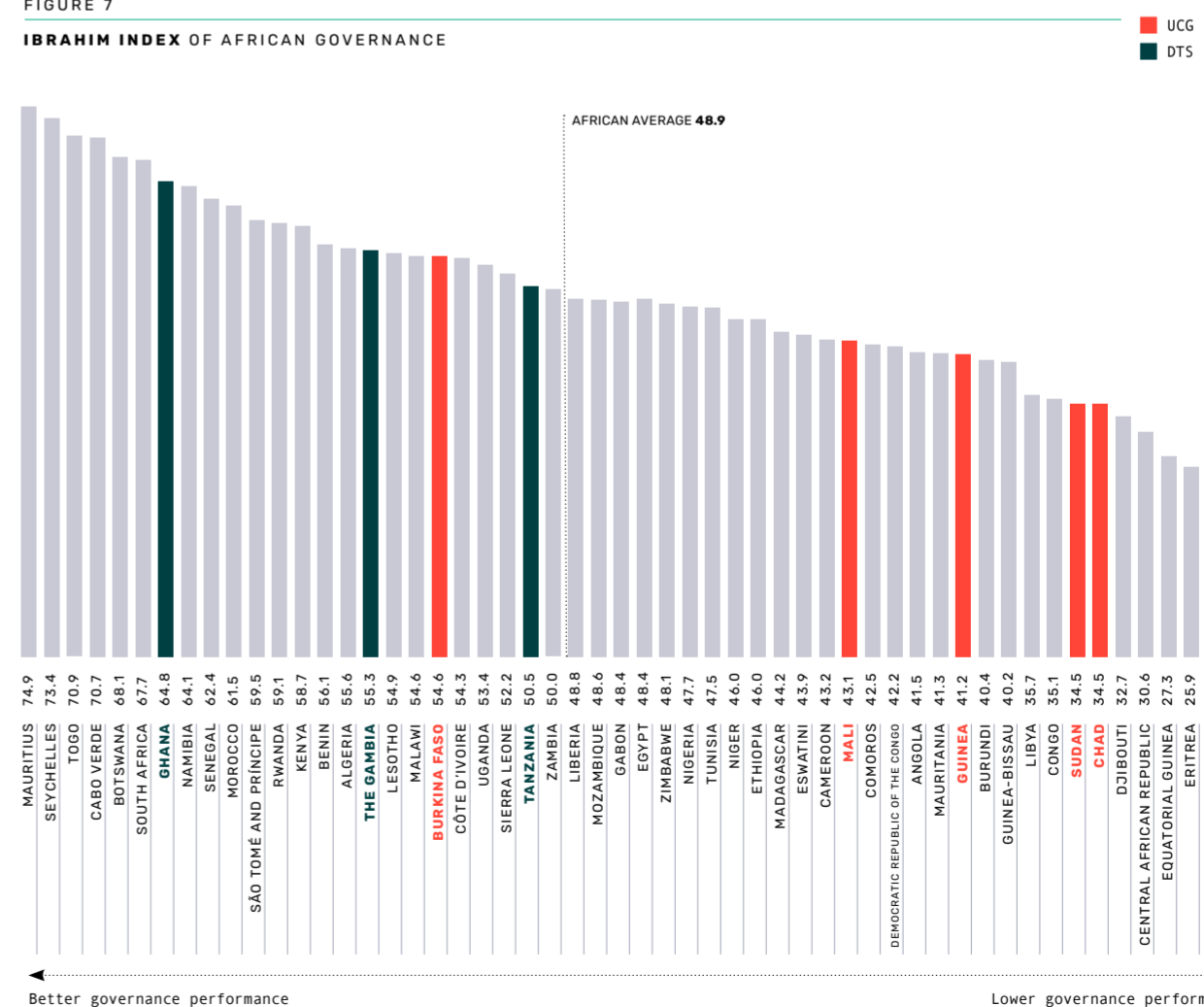
Coup leaders have explicitly invoked the giants of Africa's post-colonial history in their rhetoric of revolution and transformation. In so doing they have captured the popular imagination. This appeal points to a yearning for a better quality of political leadership, which strives to meet civilians' needs and aspirations. The base of readily exploitable grievances, linked to leaders' failures to deliver inclusive development, creates fertile ground for coups to be staged. It is therefore critical to scale up development-oriented investment that will yield results and boost citizens' confidence in a better future.

FIGURE 6

FRAGILITY INDEX ECONOMIC AND CROSS-CUTTING DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

■ UCG ■ DTS

Less fragile

MAURITIUS	20.3
SEYCHELLES	28.2
TUNISIA	30.5
GABON	30.7
BOTSWANA	31.7
ALGERIA	32.2
MOROCCO	32.8
SOUTH AFRICA	34.6
GHANA	35.1
EGYPT	36.1
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	36.4
CABO VERDE	36.5
NAMIBIA	37.7
SENEGAL	39.2
BENIN	39.4
TANZANIA	40.0
DJIBOUTI	40.7
THE GAMBIA	40.9
TOGO	41.0
RWANDA	41.1
MADAGASCAR	41.3
ANGOLA	42.1
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	42.2
COMOROS	42.4
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	42.5
MAURITANIA	42.7
KENYA	42.7
LIBYA	42.8
ESWATINI	42.9
NIGERIA	44.1
LESOTHO	44.2
GUINEA	44.2
MALAWI	44.5
CONGO	44.5
UGANDA	44.8
CAMEROON	45.3
ZAMBIA	45.7
GUINEA-BISSAU	45.9
BURUNDI	46.0
NIGER	46.0
ERITREA	46.1
LIBERIA	46.2
SIERRA LEONE	46.2
ETHIOPIA	46.6
BURKINA FASO	46.8
ZIMBABWE	47.7
MALI	48.9
MOZAMBIQUE	49.9
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	51.6
CHAD	51.8
SUDAN	52.4
SOUTH SUDAN	52.9
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	53.1
SOMALIA	54.5

WORLD AVERAGE **32.0**

AFRICAN AVERAGE **42.2**

More fragile

Source: Fragility Index, 2022, (https://fragilestatesindex.org/).

FIGURE 7

IBRAHIM INDEX OF AFRICAN GOVERNANCE

■ UCG ■ DTS

AFRICAN AVERAGE **48.9**

MAURITIUS	74.9
SEYCHELLES	73.4
TOGO	70.9
CABO VERDE	70.7
BOTSWANA	68.1
SOUTH AFRICA	67.7
GHANA	64.8
NAMIBIA	64.1
SENEGAL	62.4
MOROCCO	61.5
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE	59.5
RWANDA	59.1
KENYA	58.7
BENIN	56.1
ALGERIA	55.6
THE GAMBIA	55.3
LESOTHO	54.9
MALAWI	54.6
BURKINA FASO	54.6
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	54.3
UGANDA	53.4
SIERRA LEONE	52.2
TANZANIA	50.5
ZAMBIA	50.0
LIBERIA	48.8
MOZAMBIQUE	48.6
GABON	48.4
EGYPT	48.4
ZIMBABWE	48.1
NIGERIA	47.7
TUNISIA	47.5
NIGER	46.0
ETHIOPIA	46.0
MADAGASCAR	44.2
ESWATINI	43.9
CAMEROON	43.5
MALI	43.1
COMOROS	42.5
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	42.2
ANGOLA	41.5
MAURITANIA	41.3
GUINEA	41.2
BURUNDI	40.4
LIBYA	40.2
CONGO	35.7
GUINEA-BISSAU	35.1
SUDAN	34.5
CHAD	34.5
DJIBOUTI	32.7
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	30.6
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	27.3
ERITREA	25.9
SOMALIA	23.2
SOUTH SUDAN	18.5

◀ Better governance performance   Lower governance performance ▶

Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2022, (https://iiag.online/downloads.html).

2. States must deepen democracy and reset their social contract with citizens

For African governments to build coup resilience, better governance, deeper democracy and inclusive development progress should be a guiding star. The quality of democracy and the prevalence of wider dysfunction in governance systems have been brought to the forefront. For too long, some states in the region have ruled behind a façade of democracy while deploying innately exclusionary models of governance. Democracy is at an inflection point on the continent, confronted by its own shortcomings and incompleteness.

A reset of the social contract is needed both to assist coup-affected states in moving forward and to help prevent future coups. To achieve this, governments should shift their focus to practical delivery that directly improves quality of life and opportunity for all segments of society. The initial popularity

of coup leaders should serve as a rallying call for governments to do better in demonstrating inclusive and principled governance.

The question of *how* the social contract is best renewed goes to the heart of the governance agenda of today — in Africa, as elsewhere. This emphasizes the need for processes such as national dialogue, which help people to hear and understand each other, and new frameworks for managing differences collectively. The UN Secretary-General's recent *Our Common Agenda* report highlights key policy areas for transforming lives and building trust. These include universal social protection, health coverage, education, skills, decent work and housing, as well as universal access to the Internet by 2030 as a basic human right.

Limited inclusivity could create a crisis of legitimacy of governments and governance institutions. These include traditional institutions (which may shape an individual's choices more than the government itself), the private sector and other economic actors, and social media influencers. Lived experience happens at grassroots and localized levels, whether in cities or villages. This demands a multi-level framing of the social contract that ties the local to the national, regional and global.

Deepening democracy and rebuilding the social contract are long-term endeavours. Key processes should be identified to signal to the population that inclusive development has been made a priority of the state. This can include setting up complaint mechanisms and clear service delivery standards with realistic implementation roadmaps.
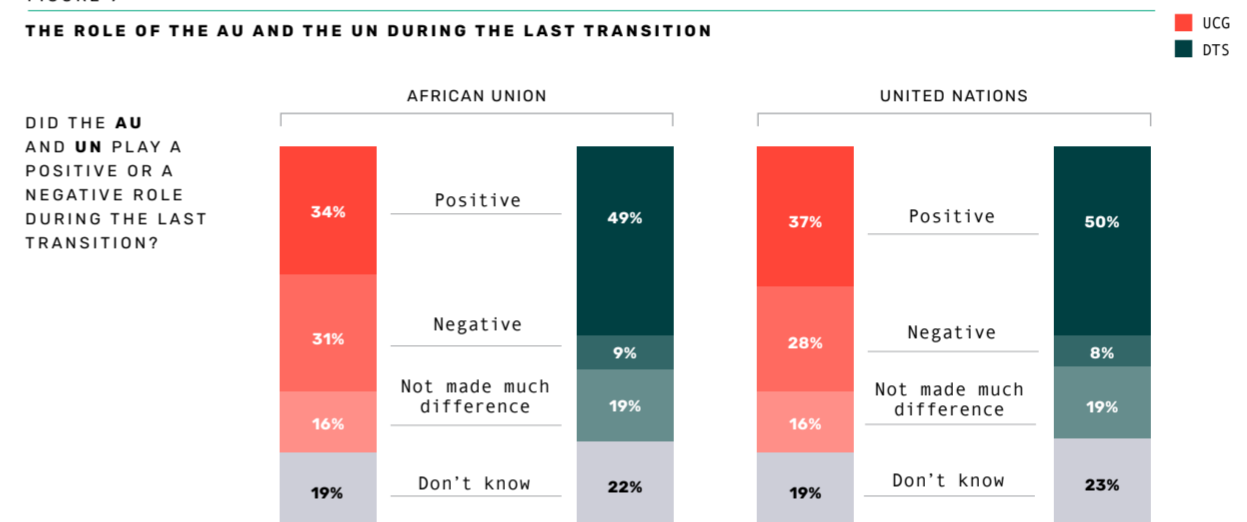

FIGURE 8

PREFERENCE FOR DEMOCRACY OR OTHER KIND OF GOVERNMENT

WHICH OF THESE THREE STATEMENTS IS CLOSEST TO YOUR OWN OPINION?

UCG DTS
- Democracy is preferable
- It doesn't matter for someone like me
- Non-democratic governance may be preferable
- Don't know

55% IN THE UCG COUNTRIES BELIEVE THAT DEMOCRACY IS PREFERABLE

67% IN THE DTS COUNTRIES BELIEVE THAT DEMOCRACY IS PREFERABLE

8% Don't know

20% It doesn't matter for someone like me

17% Non-democratic governance may be preferable

11% Non-democratic governance may be preferable

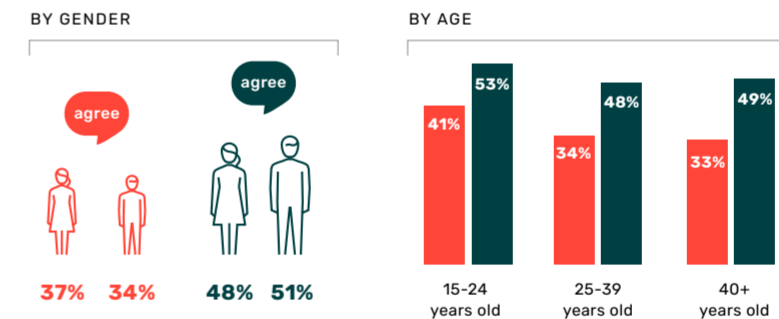16% It doesn't matter for someone like me

6% Don't know
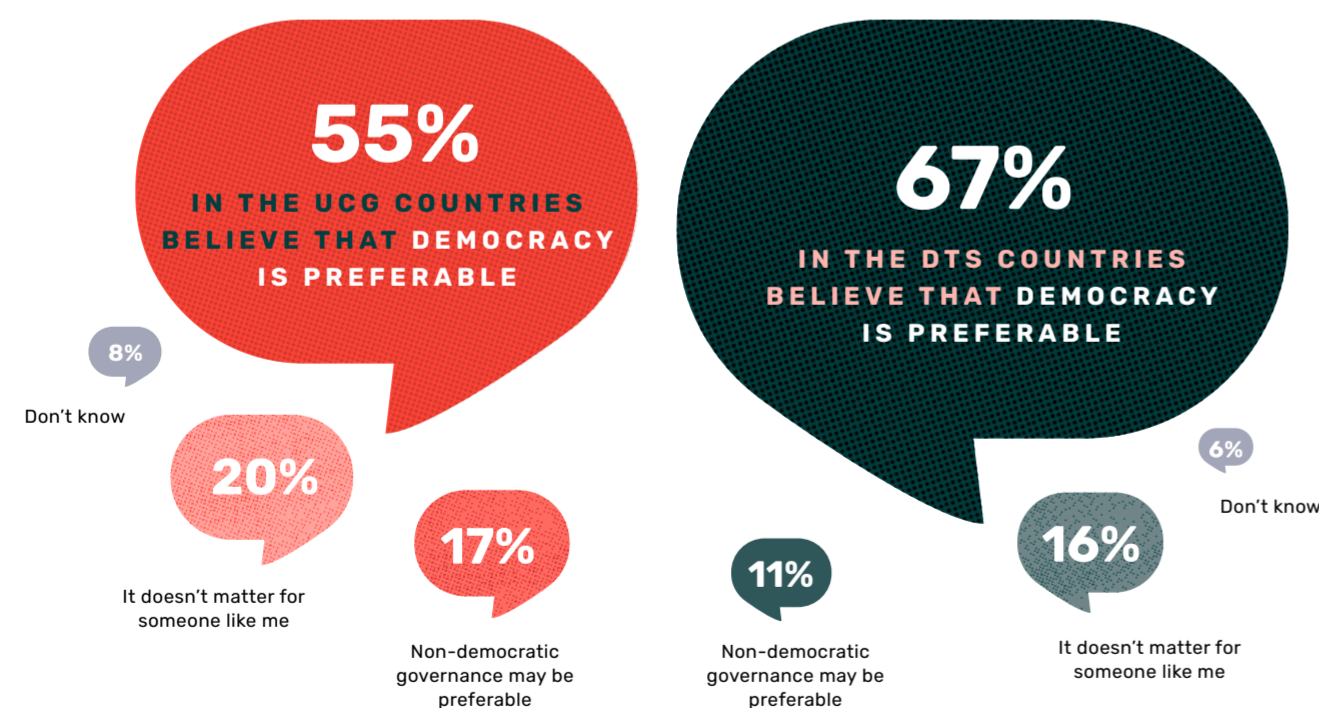
3. International and regional partners should reaffirm their commitment to constitutional norms, democratic principles and human rights

FIGURE 9

THE ROLE OF THE AU AND THE UN DURING THE LAST TRANSITION

UCG
DTS

DID THE **AU** AND **UN** PLAY A POSITIVE OR A NEGATIVE ROLE DURING THE LAST TRANSITION?

AFRICAN UNION

	Positive	
34%		49%
Negative		
31%		9%
Not made much difference		
16%		19%
Don't know		
19%		22%

UNITED NATIONS

	Positive	
37%		50%
Negative		
28%		8%
Not made much difference		
16%		19%
Don't know		
19%		23%

POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE AU AND UN DURING TRANSITION, BY DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

BY GENDER
agree / agree
37% 34%   48% 51%

BY AGE

	15-24 years old	25-39 years old	40+ years old
	41% / 53%	34% / 48%	33% / 49%

Regional and international partners such as the AU, as well as RECs like ECOWAS, have played a key role in projecting democratic and constitutional order, responding to coups and helping to prevent further instances. Nonetheless, critical questions have arisen regarding the implementation of norms and the incentives for AU member states to comply. Prevarication and inconsistency in upholding continental norms risk undermining their relevance. Efforts by the AU and RECs to uphold norms are, at times, hampered by insufficient political will among member states, creating tensions between normative principle and political interests. The very credibility of these institutions is at stake, should their legitimacy be further eroded in the eyes of African citizens.

For their part, international partners must demonstrate solidarity by encouraging a deepening of Africa's democratic process, while resolving contradictions in their engagement. In recent decades, investment in governance has declined while security and other pillars of international cooperation have been favoured. Security priorities have in effect, served to undermine principle. Some of these at-risk contexts have seen international partners pursue security and political objectives, with scant attention to the accountability of government partners. In some scenarios, these geopolitically driven interventions have compounded the very factors that heighten coup risk. The recent coups and further risks point to a moment of reckoning. A change of direction is needed.

22   **DEMOCRACY, NOT MILITARY COUPS, IS OUR PREFERRED PATH:** PEOPLE-CENTRED VIEWS ON THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL ACROSS AFRICA

UNDP 2023   23

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The findings of this report suggest five sets of specific priorities as the basis for a framework for policy and programming action in responding to contemporary coup risk in Africa.

1. Strengthening continental and regional response mechanisms

The *Soldiers and citizens* research highlights that states across Africa must redouble efforts to ensure effective and consistent responses to contemporary coup risk.

As discussed above, this calls for improved governance to help reset the social contract with citizens. The political will needed to uphold related norms and principles at regional and continental levels must also be mutually incentivized.

A series of actions, if taken together, can enable better continental and regional-level leadership in responding to coup risk. Enhancing AU and REC norms and principles as they relate to UCG, as well as constitutional manipulation to extend power, must be a priority. The ongoing review of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, including clauses related to presidential term limits, is encouraging. A similar review at the continental level through the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Elections would be timely and should be supported.

The capacity of the AU and RECs to uphold norms in member states represents a further challenge. This relates both to having in place relevant structures and mechanisms, such as special envoys, as well as the resources needed to implement such support.

Recent events underscore the necessity for AU, ECCAS and ECOWAS to enhance their capacities in preventive diplomacy through mechanisms such as the ECOWAS Council of Elders and the AU Panel of the Wise. Effective coordination between the AU and RECs is critical for advancing normative coherence. A further gap in the overall AU architecture is the lack of specific frameworks for planning, establishing, deploying and implementing the necessary support in the event of a coup. The capacity of the AU and RECs to provide technical support for constitutional review and amendment processes is also crucial.

2. Preventing further coups

The need for more proactive approaches to coup prevention is clear. Though possibly pre-empted in political risk assessments, the recent coups caught many off guard. Responses were stymied by delays and other challenges, while the risk of multiple coups in the same state became evident. Yet the gains of preventing crises and conflict, rather than reacting when they occur, have been recognized at the highest levels of international policy and decision-making for decades.

While the practice of prevention lags behind principle, several actions can be identified to remedy this. Continental norms that prohibit UCG and discourage constitutional manipulation should be projected in a more consistent and robust manner. Complemented with sharper AU- and REC-deployable capacities, as mentioned above, this is a key avenue for assisting a coup-prevention agenda. Regional and international actors must engage proactively with countries where presidents are nearing the end of their term limits to secure public assurances that they will resign and allow for a peaceful transfer of power. Additional short- and medium-term priorities include boosting early warning and response; supporting problem-solving dialogue processes between political and military elites; and prioritizing programmatic investment in national infrastructures for peace.

3. More effective responses when coups occur

Regional and international partners, including development agencies and financial institutions, play a critical role in shaping the trajectory of coups. Partners need to support and sustain post-coup transition processes by investing in strategic entry points that boost inclusivity and effectiveness. In this way, the foundations for long-term renewal may be established. For example, UNDP's approach in recent coup-affected contexts has been to 'stay and deliver' and to prevent the development agenda from being jeopardized.

Partners must also improve response mechanisms in the event of future occurrences where prevention has failed. Transition plans can harness opportunities for positive transformation where they are based on, and run alongside, continuous and inclusive national dialogue processes, and are characterized by a readiness to address grievances across stakeholder groups. Specific priorities include strategic coordination across sectors and partners, continued assistance to vulnerable populations, advocating for meaningfully inclusive transition processes, and supporting the capacities of key transition institutions.

4. Building long-term coup resilience by addressing structural and institutional drivers

Structural factors feed into grievances which, in turn, represent proximate factors that are readily triggered in support of military coups. Addressing these root causes is critical for longer-term coup prevention, or 'coup-proofing'. Responding to the key structural drivers that contributed to coup vulnerability identified in this research suggests the following priorities: deepening democratic governance, a strategic reset of civil-military relations, and inclusive economic development and poverty reduction.

5. Reorienting international engagement in the Sahel

Although the findings and recommendations of this study are relevant in contexts across the continent, the concentration of recent coups in the Sahel subregion has direct implications for regional and international engagement.

During the past decade, the Sahel has experienced increasing insecurity and turmoil. Due to its geopolitical importance, its mineral wealth and ongoing struggles against violent extremism, the Sahel features prominently on international agendas. However, in a context of shifting geopolitical brinkmanship, attention to the region should urgently be renewed and refocused. Drawing together the above framework for action in responding to coup risk, such a recalibration in the Sahel demands a reinvigorated development response that puts governance priorities and a reset of the social contract between states and citizens at its centre.

WORLD OF
AFRICA
2022 THE YEAR THAT WAS

WORLD OF AFRIC