

Foreign Aid and the Stability of West African Governments and Military Coups: The Burkina Faso's Experience

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This paper explored how foreign aid influences the stability of the West African governments and military coups with specific reference to Burkina Faso. The research thus sought to explore the question of whether foreign aid had empowered the institutions of governance or led to political instability and unconstitutional governmental transitions. **Method:** The research was based on the Dependency Theory, which was developed by Andre Gunder Frank (1966; 1967). The research methodology used was qualitative. Secondary sources were used to get data, including textbooks, academic journal articles, government publications, newspapers, and international news sources. Content analysis was used to analyse the data in order to determine patterns and relationships between foreign aid, governance stability, and military coups in Burkina Faso. **Results:** The results indicated that foreign aid had helped in certain areas of governance by providing administrative support, development programmes, humanitarian aid, and security cooperation. These gains, however, failed to translate into long term political stability and popular legitimacy. The study discovered that aid was more successful in situations where institutions were already in place, but in Burkina Faso weak governance structures, insecurity and low levels of state legitimacy diminished the value of aid in stabilising situations. **Novelty:** The research found that foreign aid had reinforced the remnants of the state, but not the political legitimacy and institutional stability needed to achieve stable democratic governance in Burkina Faso. The study suggested more powerful domestic institutions, more people-oriented aid interventions, and less reliance on external assistance by mobilising domestic resources.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign aid is a broad term that is used to describe financial, technical, humanitarian or security aid that is given to recipient countries by external actors like states, multilateral institutions and development agencies. Government stability, in its turn, refers to the ability of a political regime to retain power, ensure social order, provide services, and address crises without breaking the constitution. Military coup refers to the sudden overthrow of the state authority by military forces without following the constitution. The three concepts are convergent in West Africa where aid dependency, institutional weakness, and frequent insecurity have formed a strained political environment. Ideally, foreign aid is supposed to enhance state capacity, good governance and protect vulnerable populations. However, its real impacts are disputed, particularly in the presence of aid flows and weak institutions and mistrust among elites.

Recent research indicates that foreign aid can facilitate development outcomes in the presence of good governance, but it may produce few political payoffs in the presence of corruption, insecurity, and institutional weaknesses [1], [2]. This discussion is very pertinent in West Africa where external aid has been traditionally discussed as a

stabilizing tool, but the region has witnessed new democratic backslides. The irony is dramatic: even with the long-term international involvement, a number of states still swing between the electoral rule and the military intervention. This paradox poses a significant academic issue—whether aid only treats the symptoms of weakness or whether it can actually strengthen political order in a setting characterized by insecurity, popular dissatisfaction, and declining trust in civilian leadership.

Burkina Faso provides an interesting and eye-opening perspective in which this puzzle can be viewed. Previously seen as a state that has been sailing through democratic transition with cautious optimism, the country has over the past few years been a symbol of the greater crisis of authority in the Sahel. The contagiousness of jihadist violence, domestic displacement, financial strain, and the loss of citizen confidence in elected leadership revealed the constraints of externally funded governance reforms. Instead of protecting the state against collapse, decades of donor-funded development and security alliances were accompanied by the growing frustration of the population with the ineffective leadership and the worsening safety situation. The January and September 2022 coups did not come out of thin air; they were based on the long-standing dissatisfaction with insecurity, unequal state presence, and the sense that formal democratic institutions had not addressed the urgent needs of the population [3], [4]. Newer research on post-2020 coups in the region also suggests that popular disillusionment with civilian rule and an increasing sense that the current political order was too corrupted to provide either security or sovereignty have been feeding the popular acceptance of military takeovers [5], [6]. Burkina Faso is thus not only a national case, but a dramatic stage where the pledges and constraints of foreign aid are put to the test of the harsh realities of political survival.

It is against this backdrop that the current paper identifies a key paradox in the modern African political economy: the external aid is frequently explained as a route to resilience, but the frequent occurrence of coups indicates that formal aid does not necessarily lead to long-term legitimacy or institutional stability. In fact, recent findings show that aid can help provide resources, but the stabilization of the fragile states is more achieved through the enhancement of political stability and governmental effectiveness than through the amount of aid [2], [1].

In Burkina Faso, the disjuncture between aid-funded statebuilding and experienced insecurity seems to have been increased, and the space has been left to military actors to position themselves as saviors, restorers, and national pride. This renders the nation a revealing example of questioning whether aid has been structurally transformative or palliative. The importance of the topic thus is that it enhances the knowledge of the interaction of foreign aid with the quality of governance, performance of security and legitimacy of the people in coup prone environments. The study, by investigating the experience of Burkina Faso, adds to broader discussions about whether aid can actually entrench constitutional rule in West Africa, or whether, in a situation of chronic fragility, it actually coexists with the very instabilities it is intended to avert. In that regard, the

path of Burkina Faso is not a one-off event, but a warning story of how incomplete the process of transforming foreign aid into lasting political stability is in a foreign aid driven state.

Statement of the Problem

Foreign aid has been flowing into weak states but the stability of the government has been poor. Foreign aid is usually meant to empower institutions, enhance service delivery, aid security reform, and forestall state collapse, but the recent experience of Burkina Faso makes that expectation difficult. In 2022, the country experienced the further deterioration of insecurity, disillusionment of the population, and military intervention despite decades of development and security support by bilateral and multilateral partners. This paradox poses a grave academic and policy question: whether aid is supposed to stabilize weak governments, why has it failed to stop constitutional collapse in one of the most aid-sensitive security theaters in the region? The literature is increasingly linking coups in the Sahel to poor governance, insecurity, and frustration among the population, but it tends to use foreign aid as a background factor instead of a variable that needs to be directly interrogated [3], [4]. Other articles address aid and governance in Sub-Saharan Africa in a broader sense, yet they fail to provide sufficient explanations as to why externally assisted states are still politically fragile when under extreme security pressure [1]. The unanswered question of aid inflows and regime instability thus requires research.

The problem is in the fact that current research on coups and aid in West Africa is limited. A large part of the literature describes the revival of military rule due to democratic disillusionment, anti-incumbent frustration, insecurity, and anti-colonialism, particularly in Francophone Sahelian countries [5], [6]. Although these explanations are useful, they are not exhaustive since they rarely stand alone in the sense that they can be used to explain how foreign aid can strengthen weak elites, perpetuate superficial institutional changes, or give rise to unfulfilled expectations among the population. The political crisis, jihadist expansion, and collapse of state authority are frequently reported in studies on Burkina Faso, but they do not go further to determine whether the structure, conditionalities, or security orientation of aid played a role in the legitimacy crisis that led to the coups [3], [4].

Therefore, the aid-instability nexus is still unclear. Is it possible to hail foreign aid as a stabilizing tool when the governments that receive it continue to lose their territories and popular trust? Is it possible to say that external help can be neutral when its structure can favor regime survival at the expense of institutional resilience? The unanswered questions reveal a knowledge gap in the present knowledge and put Burkina Faso at the center of a puzzle whether aid has been able to deal with the causes of instability or only dealt with its symptoms.

An issue that requires consideration is a contextual one. The study of foreign aid in Africa tends to be done at a continental or cross-national scale and thus it is hard to capture the interaction of aid with legitimacy, security failures and civil-military relations

in a coup-prone state. Broad literature indicates that aid performance is determined by the quality of governance, but such equations have the potential to simplify the complexity of Burkina Faso, where terrorism, displacement, anti-elite bitterness, and geopolitical realignment intersected in a manner that cannot be fully explained by aid models [1], [5].

Moreover, numerous studies characterize coups as the effects of bad governance without demonstrating whether the involvement of donors alleviated the governance shortcomings or merely coincided with them. This forms an empirical blind spot: the success of aid is frequently presumed, and the implications of its failure are under-researched. Burkina Faso is one of the examples where external aid, the weakness of the state, and military intervention seem to be inseparable. The question that has not been adequately answered is whether aid reinforced institutional trust, undermined it by dependency, or avoided it altogether in favor of short-term security alliances. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine the implications of foreign aid on the stability of West African governments and military coups: The Burkina Faso's experience. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between foreign aid inflows and the stability of governments in West Africa, with particular focus on Burkina Faso.
2. Analyze the extent to which foreign aid has influenced the occurrence and recurrence of military coups in Burkina Faso.
3. Assess whether foreign aid interventions have strengthened governance institutions or contributed to political fragility and legitimacy crises in Burkina Faso.

Conceptual Framework

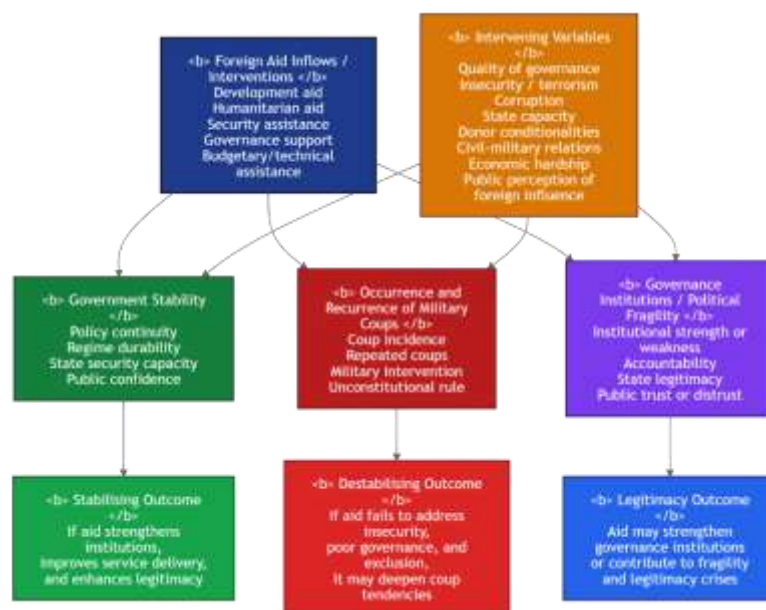


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the relationship between foreign aid inflows and interventions, government stability, military coups, and governance fragility in Burkina Faso.

Source: Author's Visualization. 2025

The above conceptual framework describes the inflows and interventions of foreign aid as the independent variable of central interest, whereas the government stability, military coup occurrence and recurrence, and government institutions/political fragility and legitimacy crisis are the dependent variables of primary interest. The framework presupposes that foreign aid does not have one homogenous effect; instead, its impact is conditional on the domestic political and institutional situation in Burkina Faso. This aligns with the research that aid may facilitate development and state performance in those countries where the effectiveness of governance is comparatively higher, and may have weak or negative impacts in those countries where institutions are weak [1], [2].

The arrows in the framework show that foreign aid can either empower institutions, increase state capacity, and make governments more stable, or, in the presence of insecurity, corruption, and weak legitimacy, can make governments fragile and prone to coups. This is consistent with the recent literature on Burkina Faso and the Sahel region more broadly, which attributes coups to governance crises, insecurity, and a lack of trust in civilian rule [4], [6]. Therefore, the framework demonstrates that the intervening variables between aid outcomes and governance quality, insecurity, donor conditionalities, and civil-military relations mediate the relationship between aid and governance quality.

Theoretical Underpinning

The paper is grounded on the Dependency Theory, which was primarily linked to Andre Gunder Frank (1966; 1967) and subsequently developed by other researchers, including Samir Amin and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The theory was developed as a response to the orthodox modernisation thought and contends that underdevelopment in the Global South is not a transitional phase on the path to development, but a structural phenomenon created by unequal relations between powerful core states and subordinate peripheral states. Its main hypotheses are that external economic and political connections tend to favor donor or metropolitan powers over recipient states; that aid, trade, finance and security alliances can strengthen rather than weaken dependency; and that domestic institutions in peripheral countries can become influenced by external interests rather than domestic demands. In this perspective, foreign aid is not considered an apolitical act of goodwill, but a political tool that can perpetuate elite compromise, undermine policy independence, and recreate fragile state systems. This reasoning is reflected in recent research on Africa and the Sahel, which demonstrates that aid and broader external interaction can be mediated by neo-colonial hierarchies, particularly in the context of sovereignty, security, and governance that are highly mediated by foreign forces [7], [8]. In that regard, Dependency Theory offers a keen conceptual prism through which to view how foreign aid can co-exist with profound political weakness instead of eradicating it.

The applicability of the Dependency Theory to the current research is that it can help to understand the paradox of the Burkina Faso experience: the high levels of external aid have failed to produce the long-term stability of the government and the lack of

military coups. Over the years, Burkina Faso was provided with development, humanitarian, and security assistance, but the state continued to experience deteriorating insecurity, a lack of trust in the state, and the coups of 2022. Dependency Theory assists in explaining this not as a simple policy failure, but as a sign that externally backed governance can be superficial when it is rooted in asymmetrical power relations. It implies that foreign aid may keep regimes alive without creating legitimacy, enhance security structures without addressing structural grievances, and bind weak governments to foreign benefactors in a manner that sparks nationalist bitterness. This comes in particularly handy when it comes to understanding why anti-French and anti-Western sentiments were politically powerful in Burkina Faso and the Sahel in general after 2020 [5], [6]. This theory is thus most suitable in this work since it connects foreign aid, undermined autonomy, legitimacy crises, and military intervention under a single explanatory framework. When applied to this study, it explains how aid can inadvertently perpetuate the same weaknesses that subsequently feed unconstitutional transformations of government.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research takes a qualitative methodology to examine the connection between foreign aid (independent variable) and government stability/military coups (dependent variables) in Burkina Faso. Textbooks, journal articles, government reports, and international media are secondary data that offer a lot of contextual information on aid dynamics and political instability. Content analysis facilitates a systematic explanation of patterns, stories, and causal relationships between aid inflows and regime outcomes. This approach is suitable since the phenomenon is a complex socio-political process that cannot be easily measured. It can also be used to gain a deeper insight into historical patterns, institutional vulnerabilities, and external factors that contribute to coups and instability in governance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Foreign aid inflows and the stability of governments in West Africa, with particular focus on Burkina Faso.

The inflows of foreign aid are frequently discussed as the means of stabilisation, but in West Africa they have been disproportionate, conditional, and even contradictory. This paper thus looks at the implications of these foreign aids with special reference to Burkina Faso.

In West Africa, foreign aid inflows have been long explained as a way of building state capacity, reform, poverty reduction, and political breakdown prevention. Theoretically, aid is supposed to assist governments to fund government goods, increase welfare, enhance institutional performance, and create resilience to shocks. In reality, though, the connection between aid and governmental stability has been much less direct. Recent research indicates that aid is not necessarily a source of political order, but

its impact is strongly contingent on the quality of institutions, the effectiveness of governance, and the political environment in general. In a cross-country analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa, Ilorah and Ngwakwe [1] claim that the developmental benefits of foreign aid can only be positive in the presence of rule of law and effective governance, but weak institutions and corruption undermine the benefits of foreign aid.

Likewise, Babalola and Shittu [9] discover that aid, per se, has a rather neutral or even negative impact unless it is mediated by more powerful institutions. This implies that aid inflows are not necessarily stabilising; they can give fiscal breathing space without necessarily entrenching political legitimacy. The stabilising effect of aid is thus over-rated in West Africa where most states are still susceptible to elite competition, insurgency, and poor administrative accessibility. It is not merely the presence or absence of aid, but the institutional credibility and social compact of recipient governments that is needed to convert external resources into long-lasting public trust and effective state authority.

This broader regional trend is particularly pronounced in West Africa since aid often interacts with weak tax regimes, weak penetration of the state, and weak political settlements. According to some studies, aid may have a small positive impact when the government is already becoming more stable, but its role is small where the state is not coherent. As an example, Yohou et al. [10] demonstrate in WAEMU nations that the effect of aid on the performance of the public revenue depends on the degree of government stability, i.e., aid is more effective in the countries where the political order is already established. This is a significant warning to West Africa: foreign aid can strengthen stability in places where institutions are becoming consolidated, but it can have little effect in places where the public authority is disaggregated. Arioz and Topdag [2] reinforce that argument by discovering that political stability and government effectiveness are more effective in reducing fragility than aid itself. That is, aid does not replace legitimate governance.

In West Africa, the massive inflows of bilateral donors, multilateral lenders, and humanitarian agencies have been accompanied by military intervention, constitutional conflicts, and popular discontent. This paradox shows one of the main flaws of most donor assumptions: the simple presence of external finance cannot solve the more fundamental political shortcomings that render governments fragile. In situations where citizens feel that the state is remote, corrupt, or unable to offer security, assistance can alleviate signs of crisis without addressing the structural complaints that threaten the existence of the government. The local experience is chastening: aid may be able to help states, but it cannot, alone, generate state legitimacy.

Burkina Faso demonstrates this dilemma in a strange way. The nation has over the years been receiving significant foreign aid which has been channeled towards development, security, humanitarian aid and counter insurgency aid. However, instead of slowly heading to stability, it plunged into a deep crisis of militant violence, mass displacement, popular outrage, and finally military coups. This finding does not imply

that aid was not important; it only indicates that aid could not counter more fundamental governance and security failures. Recent studies of the Sahel reveal that political instability in Burkina Faso cannot be decoupled with the weakening of state power in the peripheral areas where poor service delivery, armed violence, and local mistrust undermined the credibility of civilian government.

Okafor et al. [11] claim that bad governance and socio-economic marginalization were major factors that aggravated the crisis in Burkina Faso and Mali, and Ziso & Hamandishe [4] attribute coups in the Sahel to state fragility and the spread of terrorism. Aid inflows in such a situation could have served to keep programmes and security responses alive, but it failed to regain confidence in the state by the people. Burkina Faso thus illustrates a very important difference between regime support and regime stability. Governments can continue to operate administratively with the help of external resources, but these resources cannot ensure that citizens will perceive governments as effective and legitimate. In places where insecurity is escalating and aid-based policies do not yield any visible security, foreign aid can even deepen disillusionment, as hopes grow and state performance stays low. The Burkinabe case therefore reveals the constraints of aid as a political stabiliser in the circumstances of growing violence and divided power.

The issue in Burkina Faso was not merely the availability of aid, but rather the incompatibility between aid architecture and the type of crisis. Security partnerships, emergency responses, and externally-led programmes have been used to channel a large portion of international assistance in Sahelian states. Although such interventions can be explained by the necessity of urgent need, they can also favor short-term containment over long-term state legitimacy. The case of Burkina Faso demonstrates that governments backed by foreign forces can still be weak when people do not perceive that their lives, livelihoods, and integration are getting better. The wider Sahel crisis has been influenced by poor governance, extremism, and failure of civilian governments to effectively respond to insecurity [12]

Similarly, Fasinu et al. [8] have shown that in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the increasing dissatisfaction of the population with the traditional external security relationships contributed to the demands of diplomatic reorientation and the increased sovereignty. The significance of these findings is that they indicate that aid inflows can be politically controversial when linked to foreign influence as opposed to national recovery. This perception was very important in Burkina Faso. The civilian governments were no longer evaluated based on the approval of the donors, but rather on their ability to conquer land, defend the people, and represent the national independence. When such expectations were not fulfilled, aid no longer seemed like a stabilising tool but started to seem to many citizens as an exhausted political formula. The outcome was a further legitimacy divide, whereby externally backed governance institutions remained formally intact but their internal credibility was lost at a very high rate.

Regionally, Burkina Faso is not a solitary case but a condensed manifestation of a wider West African conflict between foreign aid and national political power. The new wave of coups in the Sahel has compelled scholars to reconsider the belief that donor involvement is a precondition that constitutional rule is strengthened. Recent reports are increasingly arguing that insecurity, failure of governance, and frustration of the people with the political systems that appeared to be unresponsive despite years of international assistance facilitated coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

According to Mintoiba [6], the recent coups in West Africa were a result of governance crises and social dissatisfaction and not military ambition. This is very close to Burkina Faso where aid inflows failed to avert the loss of trust in elected leadership. The bigger picture is that foreign aid can only help in bringing stability when it is institutionalized in accountable institutions, credible delivery of security, and an authentic social contract. In places where such conditions are feeble, aid can postpone collapse, but not avert it. Burkina Faso thus forces a more critical approach to aid in West Africa: not as a sure source of stability, but as a conditional tool whose impacts are determined by the political and institutional landscape into which it is channeled. In that regard, the Burkinabe experience demonstrates the constraints of donor-centred stabilisation and highlights a more difficult reality: governments in West Africa are stabilised not so much by the amount of aid they get but by the legitimacy, competence, and security they can provide to their own citizens.

Foreign aid and the occurrence and recurrence of military coups in Burkina Faso

There is a complex and indirect connection between foreign aid and military coups in Burkina Faso. Aid does not tend to cause coups in a mechanical way; it may instead influence the political context in which coups are more probable or more enduring. In Burkina Faso, external aid has collided with insecurity, poor governance, donor conditionality and changing geopolitical alliances in a manner that makes it difficult to explain political instability in a simple manner.

Foreign aid is often discussed in terms of development, state-building, and conflict prevention, but the recent history of Burkina Faso indicates that aid may coexist with and even be involved in the phenomenon of military coups. The main problem is not that aid necessarily leads to unconstitutional takeovers, but that aid frequently enters weak political systems where legitimacy is already weak, state power is unequal, and security demands are high. In these conditions, aid can help the government to survive in the short term without addressing the underlying failures that bring about military intervention. Recent research on the spread of political instability in the Sahel region demonstrates that coups in Burkina Faso have been created in an environment of insecurity, governance crisis, and popular disillusionment with civilian leadership and not necessarily due to purely barracks-based ambition [6], [13]. Prior to the 2022 coups, Burkina Faso had been heavily aided by external forces in terms of security and development, yet the state was unable to stop the growth of militants or to assure the citizens that the elected leaders were in power. This disconnect between foreign aid and

national performance turned into a political issue. Governments that are perceived to be reliant on foreign partners but incapable of delivering security may lose legitimacy at the top and bottom. In that regard, aid may be incorporated in a broader legitimacy crisis. It can keep formal institutions afloat, but it can do little to rebuild the popular trust that is required to discourage military adventurism. The incidence of coups in Burkina Faso must thus be explained by the interplay between aid, poor governance, and the apparent inability of the civilian state to provide safety, power, and national guidance.

The military coups within January 2022 and September 2022 in Burkina Faso demonstrate how foreign aid can be involved not as a direct cause but as a precondition of a collapsing political order. Burkina Faso was firmly integrated in a web of international security relationships, donor programmes, and external development interventions. Nevertheless, these aid relations failed to stop the decline of state authority in most regions of the country. Rather, they tended to present themselves to the masses as a sign that the government was being backed by outside forces but was ineffective internally.

Studies of recent coups in Africa show that those countries hit by coups since 2020 have been poor, insecure, and facing democratic consolidation, particularly where jihadist violence has worsened already weak institutions [13]. Burkina Faso was such a profile. Associated literature on the broader coup resurgence in West Africa also highlights how bad governance, corruption, and socio-political instability provided space in which military rule could be offered as a solution or salvation [14], [15]. Foreign aid in Burkina Faso failed to eliminate these vices. To the extent that anything, the continued involvement of donors in the face of deteriorating performance may have only served to strengthen the popular suspicion that external aid was indeed not contributing to the development of national capacity but was instead just keeping alive a tired civilian order. The January coup was therefore taking place in a situation where aid had not been turned into good governance and where the military could argue with some popular appeal that the civilian government had failed despite the massive foreign assistance.

The repetition of coups in Burkina Faso is even more telling in terms of the political impact of aid. The fact that there was a coup in January 2022, and another in September 2022, suggests that it was not just a change of regime, but the continuation of state fragility following the initial putsch. This implies that after constitutional rule had failed, external reactions, such as suspensions, sanctions, and aid recalibration, were not adequate to restore a stable political order. The recent studies of aid sanctions in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the success of anti-coup actions is determined by domestic legitimacy, regional coordination, and the presence of other external partners [16]. The case of Burkina Faso fits that logic. Following the initial coup, the international pressure failed to seal the political space that the junta had, but rather the rulers of the country were acting in a regional context where other forms of partnerships, particularly non-Western ones, were becoming more viable. This undermined the disciplining authority of traditional donors.

In addition, aid conditionality might not have gained much domestic momentum since the approval of the donor was not the decisive factor to many citizens but the delivery of security. When foreign aid is seen to be conditional on foreign tastes instead of domestic security, coup leaders can rebrand donor coercion as meddling and position themselves as champions of sovereignty. That dynamic is one of the reasons why there is recurrence. The second coup was not an anti-aid statement per se, but an expression of ongoing instability in a system where neither previous donor involvement nor post-coup coercion had restored authority. In this way, the issue of foreign aid is relevant to recurrence since its suspension, redirection, or politisation might not alter military calculations when civilian legitimacy is already lost and other patrons are available.

The other significant dimension is that aid can also affect coups due to the politics of perception, not necessarily due to resources. The symbolic meaning of foreign support was more controversial in Burkina Faso. With the escalation of insecurity, sections of the population started to equate old-time Western-supported security collaboration with reliance, disappointment, and strategic defeat. This aligns with the literature on post-2020 Sahelian coups, which emphasizes the importance of anti-colonialism, anger over French influence, and the need to have more policy autonomy in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger [6], [17]. It does not mean that all aid is neo-colonial in nature, but rather that aid relations are politically exposed when they seem to be linked to external security interests that fail to enhance life on the ground.

This was important in Burkina Faso since military leaders could use the disillusionment of the populace with the old order of aid to legitimize the usurpation as well as the consolidation of power. When aid is symbolically linked with an unpopular civilian institution, it may lose its stabilising value. It can then be used as a contrast to which military actors can build a story of national salvation. This is one of the reasons why coups may happen again even in the cases when the involvement of donors is high: the external aid is not only the distribution of funds and skills, but also the political message. In Burkina Faso, the meaning of the word changed radically during the crisis. Many people no longer perceived aid as a sign of state assistance and interpreted it through the lens of failed security relationships and undermined sovereignty. Such a change in perception allowed military actors to question, and subsequently re-question, constitutional authority.

Finally, the association between foreign aid and the incidence and repetition of military coups in Burkina Faso can be described as conditional and mediated. Aid does not explain the coups or remain an innocent background factor. Instead, it has been engaged in poor governance, security failure, external reliance, and geopolitical rivalry in a manner that created the environment in which coups became conceivable, tolerable, and recurrent. Greater comparative studies indicate that recent coups in sub-Saharan Africa seldom produce democratic gains and tend to deteriorate economic and political performance [18].

The more profound lesson in Burkina Faso is that foreign aid can only discourage coups when it assists in generating visible institutional competence, credible security provision and domestic legitimacy. In the absence of such conditions, aid can finance programmes without stabilising the polity; it can stimulate sanctions following a coup without overturning it; and it can even be re-used rhetorically by coup-makers as evidence that the old order had become externally maintained and internally bankrupt. Burkina Faso thus demonstrates that the actual issue is not merely the presence or absence of aid, but the inability of aid to establish a political settlement that citizens believe is effective, sovereign and worth defending. In that regard, foreign aid is relevant to the frequency and the repetition of coups since it functions within the same arena where legitimacy, power, and foreign influence are fought. In cases where such contests are not resolved, aid can be used in managing the crisis, although it does not always exclude the restoration of military rule.

Foreign aid interventions have strengthened governance institutions or contributed to political fragility and legitimacy crises in Burkina Faso.

Interventions by foreign aid in Burkina Faso are the focal point of a thorny academic debate: have they actually empowered the institutions of governance, or have they despite their good intentions become embroiled in political weakness and frequent legitimacy crises? The most persuasive response is neither entirely jubilant nor entirely rejectionist. Burkina Faso has been heavily assisted in development, humanitarian aid, security reform, and support to the public sector; the country continued to receive high amounts of official development aid in 2023, and governance disintegrated into two coups in 2022 and a larger humanitarian crisis that displaced over 2 million people internally by the end of 2024. Simultaneously, the delivery of aid has been centralized in the hands of few major donors and the application of national systems has not been extensive but selective. These background characteristics already hint at the problem of analysis: aid has existed, but institutional consolidation has been incomplete, politically contentious, and subject to reversal.

A strand of the literature holds that foreign aid can empower governance institutions when it is consistent with domestic reform capacity and it is institutionalized in operational administrative systems. This stance is not naive but emphasizes the fact that aid is most effective as a complement to state capacity, not a substitute to it. As Ilorah and Ngwakwe [1] demonstrate, aid may facilitate development outcomes in places where governance is more effective and the rule of law is stronger, whereas Arioz & Topdag [2] state that aid volumes alone are much less effective in reducing fragility than government effectiveness and political stability.

These studies applied to Burkina Faso suggest that donor aid might have been somewhat institutionally advantageous in budgeting, administrative practices, service delivery, and sectoral programming, particularly prior to the acute worsening of the security crisis. The aid-efficiency snapshot of the World Bank also indicates that Burkina Faso was not entirely sidelined by donors; part of the aid was directed through country

systems, which is important since the utilization of country systems can, in theory, develop bureaucratic competence and enhance state ownership. However, the same evidence also indicates some obvious boundaries: the two leading donors provided almost half of all assistance, the fragmentation of donors was high, and the utilization of country systems was not deep or transformative. That ambivalent image is essential. It indicates that the institutional benefits that aid generated were tangible but limited, frequently technical, and not adequate to make the state resistant to growing violence and popular suspicion. The current literature that highlights the governance advantages of aid is thus somewhat convincing but tends to assume institutional fortification based on programme logic and aggregate performance without sufficiently demonstrating how the fortification led to legitimacy, coercive power, or citizen trust in the Burkina Faso context. That is, aid might have enhanced aspects of the administrative state without necessarily strengthening the political bases of rule.

Secondly, existing literature is more sceptical and holds that foreign aid may be a source of fragility when it supports underperforming elites, promotes external dependence, disaggregates accountability, or pursues donor security interests at the expense of domestic legitimacy. This reading is very eloquent to the recent course of Burkina Faso. As Denisova and Kostelyanets [3] demonstrate, the crisis in the country was more and more influenced by the undermining of state power, particularly in peripheral areas, and Ziso & Hamandishe [4] relate coups in the Sahel to state weakness and the growing terrorist violence.

In a wider sense, Mintoiba [6] states that the recent coup in West Africa was a result of governance crises, social injustice, and insecurity and not a result of military ambition. These works do not argue that aid led to the crisis in Burkina Faso in a straightforward linear manner, but instead, they indicate that aid accompanied, and at times did not stop, institutional erosion. The failure is politically significant. When citizens observe governments getting international support and losing land, inability to defend people, and incapacity to administer justice or even provide basic services, foreign aid may be linked to ineffective governance rather than state reconstruction. This is where legitimacy comes in the picture. Institutions of governance are not enhanced by the fact that ministries are trained or projects are funded but by the fact that citizens believe that the state is competent, responsive, and sovereign. The two coups in 2022 in Burkina Faso and a shift towards complete autocratisation as per the BTI country report are strong indicators that whatever institutional support assistance had been offered did not help to avert a legitimacy collapse at the centre of the state. The empirical challenge, however, is not merely to enquire whether aid built institutions, but whether it constructed institutions which the population accepted as authoritative and worth defending.

Nevertheless, the current research is not entirely satisfactory, and this is where a more critical questioning is required. Much of the aid-and-governance literature relies on large cross-country data, which are helpful in identifying patterns but tend to smooth out the unique political trajectories through which aid is mediating legitimacy in a coup-

prone Sahelian state. The studies of Ilorah and Ngwakwe [1] and Arioiz and Topdag [2] are useful, but they consider aid as a more or less aggregate variable and thus do not tell us much about the political impact of humanitarian aid, budget support, governance aid, military assistance, and donor-driven security partnerships. On the other hand, numerous Burkina Faso and Sahel studies are full of descriptions of insecurity, anti-state violence, and anti-colonial sentiment, but they tend to refer to foreign aid only briefly, as a background to crisis, not as a variable that needs to be disaggregated.

Akinola and Makombe [14] and Onapajo and Babalola [15] shed light on democratic rollback and weak anti-coup reactions, but neither of them specifies the role of donor presence in domestic views of sovereignty and accountability comprehensively. This criticism is enhanced by baseline data. The aid architecture in Burkina Faso was still centralized with a small number of large providers, the number of donor agencies was growing with the growth of aid, and the use of country-system was not decisive but partial. They are not small technicalities; they refer to an aid regime that can strengthen administrative roles and at the same time decentralize the accountability among external actors and domestic institutions. The literature is yet to decide whether such an arrangement empowers the state by providing resources or undermines it by externalizing political authority. Neither has it sufficiently justified why technocratic advances in the management of public finances failed to avert constitutional breakdown in 2022. It is that unresolved tension that makes Burkina Faso worthy of case-specific analysis and not inference based on regional averages.

Put together, the facts lead to a paradox and not a mere verdict. The interventions of foreign aid in Burkina Faso have certainly empowered some of the governance institutions in a narrow administrative meaning: they have funded programmes, subsidized portions of the bureaucracy, maintained humanitarian activities, and, to some degree, utilized or enhanced country systems. However, the more powerful argument, which is that aid strengthened the political legitimacy and stability of the Burkinabe state, is far less convincing. The fact that the state was unable to sustain territorial control, defend civilians, and uphold constitutional order indicates that institutional benefits provided by aid were either too superficial, too fragmented, or too unrelated to the social contract to ensure that fragility did not escalate.

In this regard, Burkina Faso validates the caution of the better governance empirical findings: aid is conditional on institutions; it cannot create them externally. It also validates the sceptical literature that external assistance can inadvertently co-exist with dependency, fragmentation of donors, and lack of legitimacy, particularly when security alliances are more dominant than state-building based on local foundations. The most convincing explanation, thus, is that aid in Burkina Faso has been two-sided. It has reinforced fragments of the state without winning the power of the state as a political entity. That difference is significant. Institutions may be better on paper but less believable in the popular imagination; ministries may operate and regimes lose legitimacy; and development partners may continue to operate as the constitutional order

falls apart. The experience of Burkina Faso compels scholarship to go beyond the duality of aid works/aid fails and instead pose a more difficult question: what sort of institutions are being reinforced, on behalf of whom and with what effects on sovereignty, trust and political order? The argument that foreign aid either consolidated governance or gave rise to fragility will be too crude until that question is answered more specifically.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: Foreign aid in Burkina Faso had yielded a very ambivalent result. On the one hand, the aid interventions had assisted in areas of governance by providing administrative aid, development programs, humanitarian aid and security collaboration. Conversely, these contributions had not been converted into sustainable political stability, institutional legitimacy, and effective state authority. The key conclusions were that although foreign aid had served to keep some formal institutions afloat, it had failed to avert the deterioration of insecurity, disillusionment of the populace and the subsequent reoccurrence of military coups. The research also established that aid worked best in situations where the governance systems already existed, but in Burkina Faso, the institutions were weak, civil-military relations were weak, and the state was weak in conflict-affected regions, which diminished the value of aid as a stabilising factor. It was also determined that external support had sometimes been seen to strengthen dependence and elite survival instead of legitimacy based on the masses. **Implication:** These results were in line with the Dependency Theory that was used to conduct the study. The theory had clarified that the imbalanced external relations tended to undermine the autonomy of peripheral states and render them dependent on external assistance in a manner that compromised internally based development. In the case of Burkina Faso, the research found out that foreign aid had not radically changed the frameworks of fragility; instead, it had tended to coexist with them. In this way, aid had reinforced bits of the state, but not the political legitimacy required to have stable democratic governance. The governments of West Africa, particularly Burkina Faso, need to focus on the empowerment of domestic governance institutions rather than relying on foreign aid. The aid must be directed towards the enhancement of rule of law, accountability, delivery of public services, and civil-military relations. Thus, institutional reform must be viewed as the basis on which foreign aid can lead to significant and sustainable political stability. **Limitation:** As the results showed that aid did not help to avoid insecurity, coups, or disillusionment of the people, a more people-oriented and context-sensitive strategy is required to enhance state legitimacy. The research discovered that external support occasionally strengthened dependence and elite survival as opposed to widespread legitimacy. **Future Research:** International development partners and donors must re-architecture foreign aid interventions to deal with the underlying causes of fragility and not just fund short-term security or humanitarian reactions. Inclusive governance, local participation, job creation, and community-based peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions of Burkina Faso should be

given more priority in aid packages. The government of Burkina Faso and regional organisations like ECOWAS ought to lessen overdependence on the outside by encouraging local resource mobilisation and self-sufficiency in policy making. This involves enhancing taxation, prudent management of national resources and investing in indigenous institutional resilience. The development of internal capacity would thus make them less vulnerable to legitimacy crisis and improve the long-term stability of democratic governance.

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