



CALL FOR PAPERS

“IMPACT OF MILITARY COUPS AND THE MILITARISATION OF POLITICS ON CONSTITUTIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA”

Pretoria, 5 - 6 November 2025

The Centre for Human Rights (CHR) and the Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa (ICLA), of the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, in partnership with the African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union are pleased to announce a call for papers for a conference on “Military coups and the militarisation of politics on constitutionalism and democracy in Africa,” that will take place in Pretoria on 5 - 6 November 2025.



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INTRODUCTION

In spite of the decline of military coups the direct and indirect involvement of the military in politics today presents a serious challenge to constitutional democracy in Africa. African militaries have, at various times, purported to act as arbiters of political crises, guardians of the state, protectors of democracy, and agents of modernisation. However, their involvement in politics has often undermined democratic processes, prompting scholars to advocate for military disengagement from politics to facilitate democratic transition and consolidation.

The relationship between civilian governments and the military in Africa has undergone significant transformations amidst a backdrop of militarisation and military coups, influenced by a range of historical, political, socio-economic, and institutional factors. Historically, military involvement in politics can be traced to the colonial era, when they were used by the colonialists to maintain law and order as well as protect the economic interests of the colonialists. This militarisation of internal security laid the groundwork for post-colonial military interventions, as newly independent nations inherited militarised states, resulting in the politicisation of African armies and a focus on internal security.

Since independence, military involvement in politics has created significant obstacles to constitutional democracy in Africa. The late 1980s and 1990s ushered in a wave of democratisation across Africa, leading many countries to transition from military rule to democracy under new or revised constitutions, some of which contain provisions that tried to regulate civil-military relations, although the scope and content vary significantly from one constitution to another. The wave of democratisation and efforts to regulate civil-military relations contributed to a decrease in military coups compared to earlier decades, military incursions into politics have persisted in post-1990s Africa. There is now a shift from traditional hard military coups, characterised by violent power grabs, to “soft coups,” in which the military collaborates with politicians or leverages popular protests to share power. This transition has led to a politicised military that has effectively militarised political power, gaining legitimacy through electoral processes. In many autocratic regimes, the military remains the main actor for regime survival. Africa’s vulnerability to militarisation and coups is further exacerbated by weak civil societies that struggle to effectively challenge military actions. In some instances, as was recently the case in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger, segments of civil society have even supported military interventions, undermining efforts to promote democratic governance and reinforcing military influence in political affairs.

B. Objectives and goals

This seminar aims to convene leading experts in constitutional law and civil-military relations to critically examine the challenges posed by militarisation of politics and military coups pose to constitutional democracy in African states. The focus is to explore how innovative constitutional frameworks can effectively manage civil-military relations, thereby mitigating the risks of military intervention and coups.

The seminar will address a number of key questions, including

- In what ways and to what extent have colonial legacies influenced post-colonial military behaviour, militarisation, and civil-military relations in African states?
- What patterns of military coups have emerged in Africa since independence, and how do these patterns correlate with historical, socio-economic, and institutional factors?
- What legal frameworks exist within African constitutions to address issues of militarisation and military coups, and how effective have these frameworks been in practice?
- What trends have been observed in African constitutions since independence regarding the prevention of militarisation and military coups?
- What role do judicial institutions play in challenging the legitimacy of military coups in Africa?
- How do civil society organisations contribute to preventing militarisation and promoting constitutionalism in post-coup environments?
- What lessons can be drawn from case studies of countries that have employed strategies to prevent coups and militarisation?
- What insights can be gained from case studies of countries that have effectively disengaged the military from political involvement?
- How does the militarisation of politics impact human rights, constitutionalism, and democracy in Africa?
- To what extent is the African Union (AU) framework sufficient to address the challenges of militarisation and military coups in Africa?

C. Sub-Themes

The following sub-themes will be explored:

- 1. Historical Context, Militarisation, and Democratic Governance in Africa:** This theme will explore the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary problems of civil-military dynamics in Africa.
- 2. Military interventions, coups, and constitutional design in Africa:** This sub-theme will focus on factors contributing to the frequency and nature of military coups across the continent. It will also explore the historical context and institutional weaknesses, including deficiencies in the constitutional framework that have led to recurring military interventions.
- 3. The design of African constitutional frameworks regarding civil-military relations:** This sub-theme will focus on the structural and legal designs of African constitutional frameworks regulating civil-military relations. How can this be enhanced and the different roles clearly defined?
- 4. Case studies:** Countries employ a variety of strategies to prevent coups and military interventions, including ethnic manipulation, civil-military integration, and political neutrality of the military and anti-coup provisions. Each of these mechanisms exhibits varying levels of effectiveness and carries distinct implications for the processes of democratisation and constitutionalism. This sub-theme will focus on conducting country-specific or cross-country analyses to identify the approaches adopted in different contexts. It will assess whether these strategies are successful in curbing military interventions and evaluate their overall impact on democratic governance.

5. **The role of the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in addressing militarisation and coups:** This sub-theme will explore the role of the AU and its RECs in confronting the challenges posed by militarisation and military coups in Africa. Key questions to be examined include:

D. Information on submission of abstracts and full papers

1. We hereby invite all scholars and other persons interested in research in this area to submit a proposal on any of the sub-themes indicated above. The proposal should include an abstract of the paper of about 600 words and **must clearly indicate the sub-theme you want your abstract to be reviewed under.**
2. The deadline for submitting proposals is **31 July 2025**. Proposals should be sent as e-mail attachment to **Nomusa Nkwanyana**, *Project Coordinator, Democracy and Civic Engagement Unit, CHR* at Nomusa.Nkwanyana@up.ac.za and copy the organizers, **Prof. Charles M. Fombad**, *Director of ICLA* at charles.fombad@up.ac.za and **Ms. Bonolo Makgale**, *Programme Manager, Democracy and Civic Engagement Unit, CHR* at bonolo.makgale@up.ac.za.
3. Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be informed from 11 August 2025 and given until 20 September to submit the first draft of their papers. All authors whose abstracts and first drafts of their papers are accepted will be provided with a return economy class air ticket, board and lodging in Pretoria for the duration of the conference.

Please, kindly distribute this call for papers as widely as possible to all colleagues in your faculty as well as to other interested persons who carry out research in this area.