



Introduction

The African Union (AU) is a continental organization founded in 2002 to foster unity, peace, and sustainable development among African nations. With 55 member states, it works to promote political and economic integration, advance human rights, and address conflicts through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and peacekeeping missions. Headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the AU prioritizes collaboration on governance, security, and socio-economic growth under its long-term vision, Agenda 2063.

Topic I: Addressing extreme water insecurity within member-states

Water insecurity is a critical and escalating challenge for many African Union (AU) member states, threatening food security, economic stability, and social cohesion. Factors such as climate change, erratic rainfall, rapid urbanization, and inefficient water management have worsened scarcity, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions like the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and parts of Southern Africa. Recurrent droughts, over-extraction of groundwater, and pollution further strain limited resources, displacing communities and fueling conflicts over access to water.

The African Union has recognized water security as a priority under Agenda 2063, which calls for integrated water resource management, climate adaptation, and infrastructure development. Key initiatives such as the African Water Vision 2025 and the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) aim to foster regional cooperation, promote sustainable water use, and build resilience against water-related disasters. However, progress is hindered by insufficient funding, weak institutional capacity, and competing national priorities.

Questions to consider:

1. What policies are currently in place to manage water resources, and where do they fall short?
2. What role should national governments play in enforcing water management laws, and how can they be held accountable?
3. How can indigenous knowledge and traditional water management practices be integrated into modern policies?



4. What incentives can be created to encourage sustainable water use in agriculture, industry, and households?

Topic II: Military coups and democratic backsliding

Military coups and democratic backsliding have emerged as significant threats to stability and governance across Africa, undermining decades of progress toward democratic consolidation. In recent years, coups have surged in the Sahel, West Africa, and parts of Central Africa, often justified by grievances over insecurity, corruption, and economic mismanagement. While some coups initially gain public support due to frustration with inept or authoritarian regimes, they frequently lead to prolonged instability, human rights abuses, and prolonged transitions away from democratic rule.

Democratic backsliding characterized by the erosion of checks and balances, restrictions on civic freedoms, and the manipulation of elections further exacerbates these challenges. Weak institutions, ethnic divisions, and external geopolitical influences (e.g., Wagner Group operations, foreign military partnerships) often fuel these trends. The African Union (AU) and regional bodies like ECOWAS have responded with sanctions, mediation efforts, and calls for rapid civilian transitions, but inconsistent enforcement and shifting alliances among member states have limited their effectiveness.

Addressing these crises requires a multi-faceted approach, including strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality, and insecurity. Regional organizations must also enhance their conflict prevention mechanisms and ensure that responses to coups prioritize long-term stability over short-term political expediency. Without decisive action, the continent risks entrenching a cycle of instability that threatens peace, development, and the aspirations of its people.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the primary drivers of military coups in Africa today (e.g., insecurity, economic mismanagement, corruption, elite manipulation)?
2. What are the immediate and long-term consequences of military coups on governance, human rights, and socio-economic development?



3. How do global powers (US, EU, China, Russia) influence or respond to coups and democratic backsliding in Africa?
4. What role can education and civic awareness play in fostering a culture of democratic participation?

Topic III: The expansion of extremist groups in the sahel

The Sahel region spanning countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria has become a hotspot for extremist violence, with armed groups linked to Islamist terrorism, organized crime, and insurgencies rapidly expanding their influence. Groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Boko Haram exploit weak governance, porous borders, and local grievances (e.g., marginalization, poverty, and ethnic tensions) to recruit members and control territory. Climate change, desertification, and resource scarcity further fuel instability, displacing millions and creating fertile ground for extremism.

Despite international efforts including French-led counterterrorism operations (e.g., Barkhane), UN peacekeeping missions, and regional alliances like the G5 Sahel violence has surged, with coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger exacerbating the crisis by withdrawing support from Western partners and aligning with Russian Wagner Group mercenaries. The withdrawal of Western troops has left a security vacuum, allowing extremist groups to deepen their foothold. Addressing this threat requires a holistic approach: strengthening local governance, addressing socio-economic disparities, and fostering community resilience, alongside sustained regional and international cooperation. Without urgent action, the Sahel risks becoming a permanent haven for extremism, threatening global security and the stability of the entire continent.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the primary drivers of extremist group expansion in the Sahel (e.g., poverty, weak governance, climate change, ethnic divisions)?
2. How do extremist groups adapt to counterterrorism efforts (e.g., shifting tactics, decentralizing operations)?
3. What role do foreign mercenaries (e.g., Wagner Group) play in counterterrorism, and what are their long-term consequences?
4. How do weak or corrupt governments contribute to the rise of extremist groups?