

Love Democracy and Support the Coup d'Etat the Paradoxes of a Youth in Search of Good Governance and Security

Maxime Kaboré

Department of Sociology, New Dawn University, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Email address:

amiralkabore79@yahoo.be

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Abstract: This article analyzes the logic of youth support for the military coup d'état that occurred on September 30, 2022, in Burkina Faso. Constituting most of the population and considered as the spearhead of society, youth spontaneously mobilized to support the military who were trying to overthrow the military junta that had been in place for eight (8) months. The mobilization was aimed at preventing a possible counter-offensive by the junta, which had lost the nerve centers of power on the morning of October 1. This is since the youth, disappointed with the eight months of governance of the junta, had already begun to look for another way to return security to the country. They had placed in these soldiers the hope of reversing an increasingly degrading security situation, but also of restoring the principles of good governance, the foundations of which had been undermined by the governance of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) of Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba. The article shows that it is the disappointment of governance and the deterioration of the security situation that are the basis of the dynamics of mobilization of youth in favor of the coup. By mobilizing, young people have founded the hope that the authors of the coup d'état, who are young people of their generation, will manage to improve the security situation and allow the country to start again based on democratic governance.

Keywords: Youth, Civil Society, Coup d'Etat, Democracy, Good Governance

1. Introduction

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has been confronted with a challenging security situation with attacks from armed terrorist groups. This situation has hardly improved despite many changes in governments and military officials. It also justified coups in January and September 2022. These overthrowing events were supported by a youth who had long fought for the establishment of democratic principles [1-4]. This paradoxical attitude stems from the fact that not only are young people the most affected by the deteriorating security situation, but they also believe that this is due to the incapacity of leaders, most of whom are not part of the youth class.

Youth is a category [5] which denotes a plurality of social representations. From an administrative point of view, young people in Burkina Faso are between the ages of 15 and 35. They represent the majority of the Burkinabè population. The most recent 2019 General Census of Population and

Housing shows that much of the population is under the age of 40. Within the total population, children under 15 years of age represent 45.3% and youth aged 15 to 34 years represent 32.6% (RGPH, 2019). This category of people deals with issues of employment, security, and good governance. Considered the cornerstone of society, they know how to mobilize to support or challenge the actions of those in power that they perceive as deviating from their expectations.

Historically, youth who fought for democratic principles found themselves supporting a military coup in 2022. This attitude reveals unnatural support, which the youth nevertheless manage to justify. This is a pragmatic assessment of the state's survival in the face of the serious security crisis it has been experiencing since 2016. The results of the State's essential diagnosis have led young people to support, despite their attachment to democracy, access to power through weapons. What are the logics of this support?

The article starts from a plural methodological approach whose objective is to describe the socio-political context of the country and a grasp of the justifications of the fringe of the population who supports the coup of September 2022.

2. Methodology

The main objective of this article is to understand the logics of youth support for the military coup d'Etat of September 30, 2022, in Burkina Faso. To do so, it is imperative to mobilize approaches that allow us to grasp both the logics and the strength of the youth in this mobilization movement.

Thus, we mobilized a socio-anthropological approach. It consisted in using quantitative and qualitative instruments to understand the motivations of a youth who supports a coup d'état, even though they had previously mobilized to prevent the overthrow of a regime by the military. This approach allows us to have a view of the different opinions that led to the mobilization of young people.

A double sampling technique was used. The first was on-site sampling, which consisted of administering a questionnaire to young people met at the sites of demonstrations in support of the new government that took power in a coup d'Etat on September 30, 2022. The sample for the first part consisted of three hundred and fifteen (315) people.

The second sampling technique was purposive sampling. It was directed towards the leaders of these movements. A semi-directive interview was conducted with these leaders. The size of the sample was obtained by applying the principle of saturation. For J-P. Olivier de Sardan [6], saturation occurs when

on a "problem", the productivity of observations and interviews decreases. With each new sequence, with each new interview, we obtain less and less new information. We have then more or less "gone around" the representations for a given field of investigation or gone through the range of strategies relating to a particular arena.

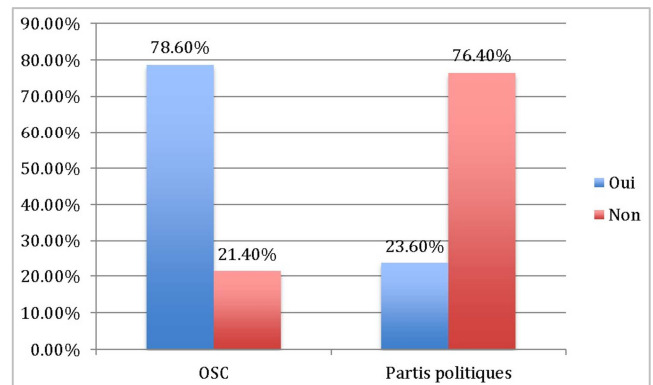
Applying this principle, seventeen (17) leaders of youth movements involved in the coup protests were interviewed.

3. Results

3.1. Profiles: Cultured and Politically Unaffiliated Youth

The young people who protested and supported Captain Traoré's rise to power are young "alter-activists" in the sense of Pleyers (2017). For him, the "political culture 'alter-activist' does not refer to a particular movement, but to a heuristic category that refers to a form of engagement, an 'activist culture' defined as a logic of action based on a coherent set of normative orientations and a conception of the world, of social change, and of the nature and organization of the social actors who carry that change" [7]. The youth who supported the September 30 takeover are not affiliated with political parties or are not motivated by the aspirations of a political party. É. de Bonneval [5] had

moreover shown that "young people seem to have a fairly negative image of politics overall, reflecting a loss of confidence and a loss of credibility in terms of its principles, its modes of operation, its actors and its institutions. These are people who came out to support the military in their struggle against the current regime, not because of a call from a CSO or political party, but because they are angry at a government that is unable to find a solution to the problem of insecurity. Graph 1 shows that the demonstrators had no political or union affiliation.



Source: Field survey, October 2023

Figure 1. Affiliation of young protesters with political structures.

The spontaneous character of the movement surprised the political parties, who did not have time to analyze and make calls to counter or support the current military movement. Although the non-affiliation with political parties is low, it is nevertheless found at the CSO level. These organizations have mobilized their activists against what some of them have called the excesses of the governance of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) of Lieutenant-Colonel Sandaogo Damiba. Prior to the September 30 coup d'Etat, the Burkinabe public sphere had undergone a reorganization and bipolarization with the birth of movements such as the Patriotic Front, which was highly critical of the country's management. The pre-coup period of September 30 also saw violence orchestrated by structures close to the MPSR against other civil society organizations. For example, Balai Citoyen activists were beaten by MPSR supporters for holding a public demonstration demanding the release of their comrade in custody at the Central Brigade for the Fight against Cybercrime. These behaviors of those close to the MPSR had succeeded in exacerbating the criticism of this regime and the opening of a protest front. In its annual camp held in Loubila on September 24 and 25, 2022 under the theme Preservation of democratic gains and the rule of law in the face of the fight against terrorism in a context of transition, the Balai citoyen openly called for demonstrations against the MPSR, whose governance deviated from the principles of good management and respect for collective and individual freedoms.

1. Considering the unprecedented aggravation of the security crisis in our country;
2. Considering that the priority of the MPSR is far from

being the restoration of the territorial integrity of our country;

3. Faced with the autocratic impulse of the MPSR;

The Balai Citoyen reiterates its urgent call for the general mobilization of all the sincere, disinterested, and patriotic living forces to slow down the descent into the abyss of the Country of Men of Integrity to which the MPSR is inevitably leading it.

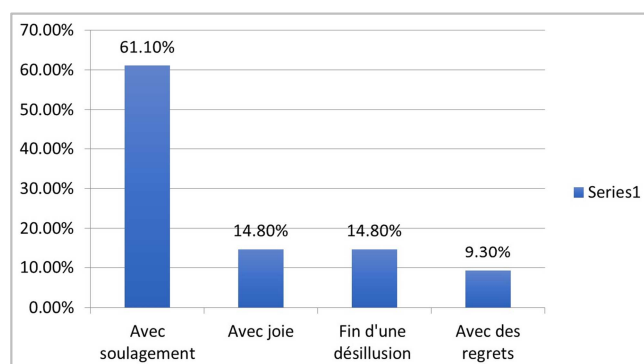
Civil society is also known for its opposition to the France-Africa policy, while in the events of October 1, a communiqué read on Radio Télévision National suggested that

Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba is said to have taken refuge in the French military base in Kamboinsin (northern suburb of Ouagadougou), in a position to plan a counter-offensive to stir up trouble within our defense and security forces. This follows our firm commitment to reach out to other partners willing to help us in the fight against terrorism.

This announcement had the advantage of awakening a young hostile to the French intrusion into the internal affairs of his former colony. Thus, the entire hostile civil society seized this opportunity to demonstrate against the maintenance of a head of State who would only do the business of France.

The CSOs' stance against the country's form of governance may justify the fact that many of its members took to the streets to support the overthrow of the MPSR. The youth support the military movement because they look for an alternative solution to secure the country. The eight months in power of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) of Lieutenant-Colonel Sandaogo Damiba convinced the youth that the MPSR was not up to the challenge of security. They were therefore in search of an alternative that could only come from these young soldiers.

3.2. The September Coup d'état, a Relief for Young People



Source: Field survey, October-November 2022

Figure 2. *Sentiment of young people at the advent of the coup d'état.*

After the January 24 coup d'Etat, the President of Faso suspended political demonstrations in a speech to the nation on April 1, 2022. This has limited the ability of civil society organizations and political parties to mobilize against the regime. The youth were critical, but they did not have a chance to protest. Many felt that the security situation behind the January 22 coup had worsened. The grievances that the youth

had against Damiba's regime are numerous, and listening to them, some were waiting for the first chance to fight. This occasion came with the soldiers' movement on the night of September 30 to October 1, 2022. As a result, they mobilized in favor of the military movements and initially saw relief as shown in Figure 2.

This sense of relief comes from the fact that for the youth, the departure of President Damiba can be an opportunity in the fight against insecurity and in the establishment of good governance. These two elements are important to Burkinabè youth, who first demonstrated against bad governance [2] during the popular uprising of 2014.

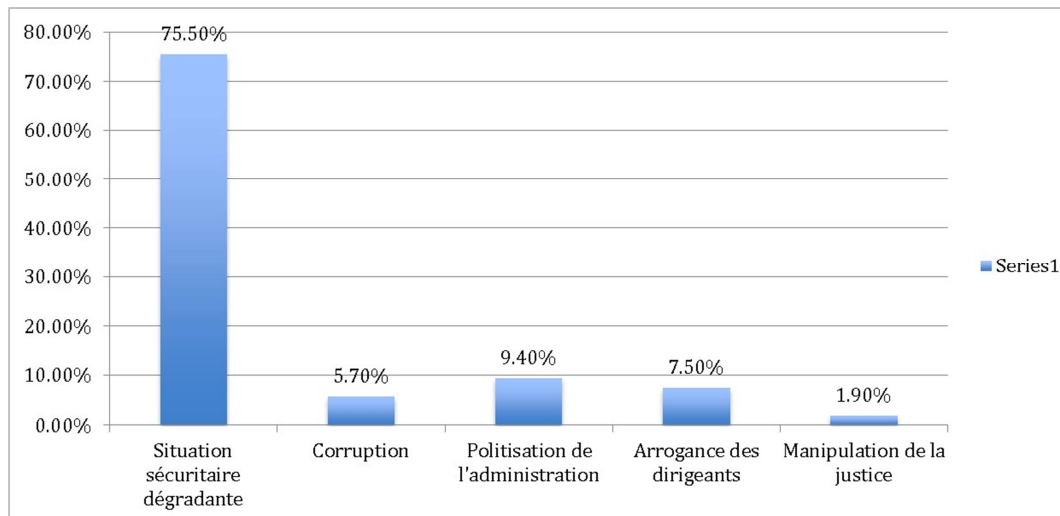
The sentiment that facilitated the mobilization of youth to support the September 30, 2022, coup d'Etat was the impression within them that Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba had turned away from the mission he had set for himself in January 2022. These national reconciliation initiatives were not well received by a population that saw in his actions the consecration of impunity. This followed the arrival of President Blaise Compaoré in July 2022 while he was under a court sentence. This return created controversy and was seen as a personal initiative of Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba. This sentiment is carried by a 27-year-old.

He had turned away from the objectives for which the people had accepted his putsch in January 2022, namely the fight against terrorism. Also, the fact that he was flouting judicial decisions was unbearable in my eyes (Interview, October 2022).

Indeed, the factors that justified the January 2022 coup d'état were more related to the continued deterioration of the security situation, as the content of the first MPSR public statement shows:

People of Burkina Faso, fellow citizens. In view of the continuous deterioration of the security situation that threatens the very foundations of our nation, the manifest inability of the power of Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré to unite the Burkinabè to deal effectively with the situation and following the exasperation of the various social strata of the nation, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration (MPSR), has decided to assume its responsibilities before history, the national and international community. The movement, which brings together all the components of the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), has thus decided to put an end to the power of Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré on January 24, 2022. Given this justification, the youth believe that all actions of the MPSR should aim at reconquering territories under the control of armed terrorist groups. But months go by, and the problem remains, worse, areas have recently been conquered by armed groups that have even proceeded to massacres of populations. This is the case with the Seytenga tragedy, which claimed over a hundred (100) victims. Thus, the youth think that if the security situation worsens, the president is incapable. The main goal of their release was to denounce the deterioration of the security situation and to call for change because the president failed. The reasons for the demonstration in support of the coup d'état on

September 30, 2022, are compiled in Figure 3.



Source: Field survey, October-November 2022

Figure 3. Reasons for demonstrating support for the September 30, 2022, coup d'Etat.

It was a whole range of grievances, led by the deteriorating security situation, that led to the demonstration in support of the removal of Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba on September 30, 2022. The most highlighted fact is the security problem.

The multiplication of attacks despite the military taking power. Things were supposed to take a different turn (33-year-old, secondary level, October 2022).

The military takeover had given the youth hope that the security situation would improve and that they would be able to resume their activities for some and to return to their villages for others.

3.3. Mobilizing to Prevent Clientelism from Taking Root in Governance

Growing insecurity, looting of public funds, lack of sincerity with the people, valet of the great powers, deep aspirations of the people put in second place. It was difficult for us to see all this and say nothing (Young person, 21 years old, Higher education level, October 2022).

The judgment of Paul Henri Sandoago Damiba's governance by the youth is severe. He is accused of mismanagement of public funds, but also of promoting injustice and impunity. In addition to the suspicions of embezzlement of public property, which put them in a situation of revolt, there is the attempt at reconciliation initiated by the President and the return of President Blaise Compaoré to the country. The young people see this as an indicator that the President is being held hostage by a class of politicians and the military hierarchy who are only pursuing political interests that are not in line with the expectations of the people. Moreover, mocking messages had transformed the MPSR into a movement to restore the Compaoré regime. Young people had taken the return of President Compaoré to Burkina Faso as an act of restoration of his regime. Some saw

the president of the MPSR as a hostage of the former ruling party, which had managed to infiltrate the MPSR and direct actions according to its interests: "He was manipulated by a certain military and political hierarchy" (Young person, 35, university level, November 2022). The youth do not want governance by proxy and felt that the only solution is the fall of President Damiba.

The relief also comes from the fact that for the youth, the departure of Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba is also an opportunity to put an end to the clientelism that had begun to take root in public governance. Indeed, the press had reported on the mismanagement of public resources in Burkina Faso. This for some young people who had participated in the popular uprising of October 2014 looked like an unacceptable democratic setback. The youth remember that they spearheaded the movements that fought these types of practices. Suspecting the President of the MPSR of pursuing personal enrichment, the youth did not want to see him remain for much longer as head of state. This is what we can learn from the words of this 23-year-old who came out in support of the military who were on their way to overthrow Paul Henri Sandoago Damiba on September 30.

He should fall because he was not doing the people of Burkina Faso any good but rather a sample of dishonest men who were always ready to sell a whole country indirectly to live in extraordinary conditions in a continent said to be poor yet naturally very rich. (23-year-old, higher education level, October 2022).

Dimé et al (2021) had already shown that Burkinabe youth have been educated to fight for the establishment of good governance in the country, "there is not only the will to break with the past, but also the incentive for youth to take the lead in the struggle for the advent of good governance" [8]. In Burkina Faso, structures such as the *Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples* (MBDHP) and the *Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption* (REN-LAC) have

been active in educating young people against bad governance and corruption. The actions of these structures, as well as those of new structures such as the Balai Citoyen, have instilled in young Burkinabes a dynamic of control over the actions of those in power. Thus, the youth are not only attentive to the actions of those in power but are also ready to challenge and demand accountability. According to some youth, this monitoring of leaders' actions has made it possible to detect a type of governance among those primarily responsible for managing the country that does not conform to their perception of democratic governance. For a 25-year-old interviewed in October, the impression emerged that "he [President Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba] came to fill his pockets. It even seems that he is the first president who had the highest salary of all the presidents in Burkina" (interview, October 2023). The mobilization of the youth was also aimed at curbing the clientelist dynamic that had begun to take hold in the management of the country.

3.4. *Logics of Coup d'Etat Support*

The support of the youth for the coup d'Etat reveals a paradox: how can young people who are inclined to demand the principles of democracy and good governance manage to support a method of access to power other than through the ballot box? The reaction of the youth to this paradox is pragmatic and, according to some, of an existential nature. Indeed, if you listen to them, they reluctantly support the September 30 military movement, and they do so because they are disappointed with the country's governance. A. O. Hirschman [11] locates the causes of disappointment in the discrepancies between expectations and reality, and in weariness. The youth have seen the hopes born in January 2022 with the arrival in power of Damiba collapse.

The support of the youth for the coup d'Etat is also based on reasons linked to both a generational affiliation, but also to a hope of reversing the degrading security situation. It should be noted that the youth complain that they are not involved in the management of the country at levels that would allow them to contribute to change. They complain that the political class has not been renewed since the August 1983 Revolution [3]. Some youth believe that the elders who run the country care little about the future of youth and that with one of their own, the dynamic will change. In the political history of the country, they always remember President Thomas Sankara whom they consider the president who had more results in the governance of the country. Many of them relate these results to the fact that Thomas Sankara was young and that it is thanks to the ardor of youth and recklessness that he achieved this result. M. Diouf and R. Collignon [9] summarized the characteristics of youth by noting that it is "ardor, the spirit of risk, adventure, innovation, in a constant temptation that occasionally takes on the violent figures of dissent.

Holding a golden past with the results of Thomas Sankara's ardor and madness, the youth dream of seeing these values reincarnated in Ibrahim Traoré, the leader of the September 2022 coup. Z. Soré (2017) had in a work on youth participation in the popular insurrection of October 2014

shown that youth accuse the leaders of not wanting to advance their living conditions: "the youth accuse the "elders" of having made the conditions of life, studies, and insertion difficult while these areas were provided by the newly independent states" [2]. E de Bonneval, [5] also noted that the youth, victims of an excess of idealism, are finally affected by dissatisfaction, frustration, and melancholy when the disenchantment caused by a confrontation with the realities operates.

In the world of youth, there also emerged forms of comparison between Captain Traoré and Thomas Sankara, the father of the Revolution. First, the comparison in terms of age, noting that like Captain Thomas Sankara, Captain Ibrahim Traoré came to power at the age of 34. Also, some recalled that like Thomas Sankara, Ibrahim Traore came to power after the failure of a regime that lasted eight (8) months and especially for which he had contributed to its advent. The expectation of the reincarnation of Captain Thomas Sankara is strong among young people, as can be seen in this recent comment by a young person who demonstrated with the aim of facilitating Captain Ibrahim Traoré's arrival in power: "Conscious youth is worth a thousand times more than a confused old age. Thomas Sankara was young but just as visionary as his Excellency Mr. Traoré" (30-year-old youth, secondary school level, November 2022). This type of discourse is in line with M. Diouf and R. Collignon:

Youth presents itself as the living double, the replica of nations under construction. It is both the present and the promise of a future of maturity and success. It carries the possible and the desirable. It is at the point of departure of the break with the past and at a point of arrival, with the inauguration of a future carrying a future of individual and collective realization and inscription in a new world historicity [9].

The strong mobilization in support of the coup d'Etat came after the broadcast on national television of the communiqué signed by Ibrahim Traoré. At that moment, the Burkinabè wanted to know who he was, and what he had done in the army and in his studies.

We went looking for information about him and we understood that he is a young man who loves his country and fights well. For example, I learned that he stood up for himself when he was in college, that he is a young man who does not like injustice. So, I said to myself that he is the young man we need to lead this country, that is why I took the risk of demonstrating so that his move would succeed, and he would lead the country (32-year-old university student, interview October 2022).

Considering the central actor as one of their own, the youth believe that without their support, not only will he not be able to come to power, but it will also be difficult for him to govern. They therefore mobilize to accompany their fellow man so that he takes up the challenge and shows everyone that with youth, it is possible. It is therefore like an arm of honor that they throw to the other bangs of society with their mobilization of support to Captain Traoré. For a young person interviewed in October 2022, it is undeniable that Captain

Traoré's success will depend on the ability of youth to mobilize behind him: "for the president to be able to carry out his work, which is a question of security, he must have the support of the youth of the people. (24-year-old, university level, October 2022).

Membership in the youth class was thus a determining factor in the mobilization of youth support for the September 2022 coup d'Etat. For some, having a young person at the head of the state means opening a field of hope for the people. With Captain Traoré, the hope of the youth was twofold: to take advantage of the ardor of youth to bring about change in governance and to use his experience and knowledge of the military terrain to reverse the curve of violence.

This sentiment was justified by the hope of seeing the return of peace to Faso through the actions of the new transitional president. Captain Traoré has been on the ground, we have seen his photos in Mali when he was fighting terrorists in the north of that country, we have also seen him in the Kaya area, where he was leading troops with the FDS and VDP. He is a man of the field, and he can rise to the challenge (Male, age 42, November 2022).

Youth in Burkina are still building on their recent victories (e. g., the popular uprising that toppled President Compaoré from power after 27 years of rule) in the country's political history and remain convinced that with their support, nothing is impossible. The youth are aware of their strength of mobilization and their ability to change things. From the stories collected from them, they have a strong self-confidence that allows them to be fundamental actors in the success of governance actions.

History has convinced us that the support of the youth is an asset for the president in power. We can illustrate the strength of the youth who succeeded in opposing the coup d'état of General Diendière (33-year-old, university level, November 2022).

In fact, this perception of Captain Traoré as a "man on the ground" who has mastered the artillery was also a decisive factor in the mobilization of the youth. They, who were still waiting for the strong man who would get them out of the difficult security situation, believe that with Traoré, the end of the tunnel is not far off. The support also comes from the fact that in Burkina Faso, the army has succeeded in establishing an image of a strong, apolitical institution oriented towards the interests of the citizens. Indeed, B. N. Ouédraogo shows not only that the army has a long life in the management of the country, but also, that this "perpetuation of the army at the head of the state in Burkina Faso is not the product of direct domination, of a mode of "functioning with coercion" [10], but rather the result of a process of routinization of charisma in the army" [1]. This membership in the army is also a strong point in the street's support for the seizure of power on September 30, 2022. He notes that what makes the Burkinabè trust their army is the fact that

1. Under the military leaders before Compaoré, the army did not operate in an authoritarian manner;
2. The army often intervened based on the disqualification of the civilian elites to embody the nation and its unity;

3. The military leaders before Compaoré did not favor their home regions, as Compaoré will do by stimulating unprecedented local development in his home region of Ziniaré (about 40 km northeast of the capital);

4. The Burkinabè army distinguished itself by its achievements during two border conflicts with Mali (1974 and 1985) [1].

It is therefore a double sense of belonging: to the army, to the youth, and the hope of regaining a stable security situation that is at the foundation of the mobilization to accompany the coup of September 30, 2022.

4. Conclusion

The coup d'Etat of September 30, 2022, was supported by a disillusioned youth who were disappointed with the political class, which was seen as incapable of bringing security to the country. The hope of a return to security brought about by the overthrow of the civilian government of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was short-lived. As the attacks did not diminish in intensity, the youth were left disappointed [11]. It was in this context that the coup d'Etat of September 30, 2022, occurred, and the youth spontaneously decided to support it.

The field research conducted among the youth who demonstrated during the events following the September 30 coup d'Etat and their movements provided a portrait of the youth who supported the coup. They were young people with high cultural capital, not affiliated with political parties and formations, but who had benefited from the teachers of civil society organizations. While publicly, no structure from the early days of Burkinabè society called for support for the military's movements, some young demonstrators claim to be members of civil society structures.

Their support for the coup d'Etat was justified by their disappointment with the governance of the state, but above all by the fact that the young military perpetrators of the coup were of their generation and held out the hope of changing security and political governance. The youth therefore came out to get out of the military on whom rests the hope of a recovery of the country and a return to the values claimed following the popular uprising of October 30 and 31, 2014.

The support of the youth becomes uncomfortable for the President in view of the deviations and the rise of radicalism in the remarks. The strong support of this youth for the seizure of power in September 2022 has given rise to a certain form of accountability that prevents the Traoré regime from detaching itself from and acting with respect to this youth, which nevertheless is increasingly illustrating itself in undemocratic attitudes.

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