Failure of Democracy, Cataclysmic for Military Coup in Africa

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Absract

The study examines the failure of democracy as a Cataclysmic for military coup in Africa. The study established that democracy in practice in Africa is metamorphosing into an oligarchy as it has produced only few rich as against the generality of the people. That failure of democratic institutions to perform to expectation, sit-tight syndrome and tyrannical nature of the leaders led to the frustration of the people and the resurgence of military coup in Africa. The study adopts the use of secondary source of data, which basically connotes the review of existing literatures on the research topic. The method of Data collection and analysis were built on qualitative descriptive approach. The study provided conceptual clarification to some concept for clear understanding of the subject matter. The study adopts the frustration aggression theory to explain the depth of the failure of democratic institutions, the frustration and aggression of the people and the resultant effect of military coup. The study concludes that failure of democracy as a form of government is responsible for coup resurgence in Africa and demands an immediate action to curb the spread. The study recommends the urgent need for democratic reforms to allow citizens of various African countries to regain their confidence and interest in democracy and defend it from the reversal.

Key Words: Democracy, Cataclysm**,** Good Governance, Democratic Institution, Military coup

Introduction

Democracy as a form government became generally accepted in the African continent shortly after the independent of some countries from colonial

administration followed by incessant military incursion into power. Consequent upon decades of military rule in most African countries, there were continuous struggle to have a democratic government in power. Hinging on the belief that democracy as a form of government is far better than military government commonly referred to as autocratic government. Democracy as a form of government African borrowing leave from the United State of America came with attractive features that provide answers to the yearnings of African people as a form of government that upholds human right, majority decision making, a fairly representative government and can alleviate poverty. Thereby sweeping away authoritarian regimes and the one-party system that had dominated the African scene since independence. The trend began with the 1988 riots in Algiers and the 1990 release of Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years in South Africa's prisons. Saliba et al (2012) explained that For the most part, changes came about because both military and civilian governments had failed to alleviate poverty, solve unemployment problems, and oppression and had not provided their citizens with such basic social services as health, housing, and education. Administrative inefficiency, high cost of governance, political corruption, economic mismanagement, and social decay had further undermined the authority of autocratic leaders and national institutions. These unpalatable conditions led to popular demands for reform throughout Africa and the massive reception of democracy. Saliba (2012).

From the 1990s till 2020 democracy has gained wider acceptance and has invariably become generally accepted form of government in Africa. The last two to three decades of the 19th and 20th century witnessed renewed hope about the birth of democracy in Africa. The democratic aspiration of the African people is not only confined to the arena of political democracy (of elections, and granting of civil and political rights), but involves the demand for economic empowerment, better living standards, and adequate social welfare. Indeed, for the majority of the people, democracy is meaningful only when it delivers socio-economic goods. In other words, political democracy must be linked to socio-economic development. The deteriorating social welfare and living standards of the people in spite of the vote for democracy is gradually undermining the confidence of the people in the new democratic order. As a Nigerian petty trader aptly puts it; "Na democracy we go chop?"Sayid (2012).

In spite of the growth and spread of democracy in Africa, especially in the last three decades, irregular military coups have continued to threaten the sustenance and consolidation of democracy in some African states. As witnessed recently, the spate of military coups in Africa threatens peace, stability and sustainable growth. Between 2000 and 2023, over Tevlve (12) military coups have occurred in Africa. In 2022 alone, there were four attempted and successful military coups in Mali, Burkina-Faso and Guinea-Bissau. The majority of the recent coups occurred in the West African sub-region. For instance, Mali alone has recorded three coups in just more than a decade. This means that nearly 20 percent of African countries have succumbed to coups since 2013 (Siegle, 2021). Undoubtedly, the era of internationally anti-coup norm that criminalized military coup is still far from discouraging, dissuading and eliminating military juntas in Africa. The coups in Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso Guinea, Niger and recently Garbon indicate that many African states are still in the threshold of relapsing into military autocracy if urgent steps are not taken to deepen democracy in the region. It is against this backdrop that this study tends to provide answers to salient issues like understanding the nature of democracy in Africa, examine the success and failure of democracy in Africa, understudy the factors responsible for the resurgence of military coup in Africa and evaluate how the menace of military coup could be mitigated against to curb the spread in Africa. Therefore the study shall examine the nature of democracy in Africa, to discuss the success and failure of democracy in Africa, to investigate why there is a resurgence of military coup in Africa and how it could be mitigated against in order to drive the sustainability of the democratic institutions in Africa.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

Appadorai (2004) described democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. He further explained that a state may, in political science, be termed a democracy if it provides institutions for the expression and, in the last analysis, the supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy Odigbo et al (2012). Therefore, democracy embodies virtuous principles necessary for inclusive, progressive and stable society. In all, democracy has inbuilt principles and institutional mechanisms for development thereby

establishing linkages between democratic practices and development in every society. With these innate or inherent abilities, it strives to provide greatest happiness to greater number of people in the society. Democracy is a form of government in which government is under the control of citizens as a whole. It encourages good citizens to play active role in the political affairs of their country. It is popularly regarded as "rule by the people". Abraham Lincoln (2004:91) defines democracy as "government of the people by the people and for the people". Lincoln's definition of democracy is catchy but for the purpose of rigorous intellectual display, it is in deficit.

Cataclysm

A cataclysm could be defined as a sudden change and unpleasant event that that creates drastic collapse of a phenomenon. A **cataclysm** is a large-scale, often sudden event that causes widespread destruction or significant change. It can refer to natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, or metaphorically describe any major upheaval or crisis, like political or social revolutions. The term emphasizes the severe and transformative nature of the event. The term **cataclysm** has its roots in the Greek word "kataklysmos," meaning a "deluge" or "flood." Over time, it has come to represent not just literal floods but any catastrophic event that radically alters the state of something.

In politics and history, cataclysm often describes major upheavals. For instance, the **Russian Revolution of 1917** is seen as a cataclysmic event that reshaped the political landscape of the 20th century. Similarly, the **Second World War** is often referred to as a global cataclysm because of the massive loss of life, the destruction of nations, and the redrawing of international borders.

Military Coup D'etat

Military coup d'etat alludes to the sudden, forcible and unconstitutional removal from power of an existing government by the military usually with violence. Military coups are either carried out against a civil led government or against the military themselves regardless of regime type. or simply a coup, is an illegal and overt attempt by a military organisation or other government elites to unseat an incumbent leadership by force. Coup d'état, also called coup, the sudden, violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group. The chief prerequisite for

a coup is control of all or part of the armed forces, the police, and other military elements. Unlike a revolution, which is usually achieved by large numbers of people working for basic social, economic, and political change, a coup is a change in power from the top that merely results in the abrupt replacement of leading government personnel. A coup rarely alters a nation's fundamental social and economic policies, nor does it significantly redistribute power among competing political groups. Timothy (2023).

Literature Review

The Failure of Democracy as the Cataclysm for Military Coup in Africa

The article is a replete of other literature on the on the subject for it remains a contemporary discuss in the international and domestic academic fora. The resurgence of military coup and its continuous spread across African countries majorly west Africa has continue to generate concerns and scholars have unequivocally provide palpable explanation as to why failure of democracy has remain a cataclysm for resurgence of military coup in Africa. According to Sayid (2022) discussing the nature of democracy in Africa submitted that the process (democracy) was actively supported by all segments of society labour, students, market women, rural dwellers, and the lumpen elements, who saw in it the prospects of reversing the trend of political despair and disillusionment that hitherto characterised political life in Africa. He stressed further that the orgy of political tyranny and dictatorship while having its own clientele and beneficiaries had negative and suffocating effects on the majority of the people. The political space was contrived, entrepreneurial creativity and ingenuity stifled, and the logic of difference, of social pluralism, cultural divergences and identities, suppressed. The opening up of the political space constitutes an uncompromisable part of the democratic agenda of the African people. Said (1990).

In the words of Saliba et al, discussing the features of democracy stated that democracy is easier to understand than to live. It is not a quick fix, or to be practiced only on election days. It is a generational project that must be anchored in the participation of citizens, accountability of rulers, open economies, and just societies. The duo stated further that democracy cannot be achieved through manipulated elections or rubberstamp parliaments. Therefore For any country to have democracy, its political structures must be based on a multiparty system

without ideological disqualifiers. Its elections must be free, frequent, and fair in order to ensure the consent of the governed. Its judiciary must be independent, and must apply the rule of law in an equitable and impartial manner. Its fundamental individual civil liberties and political rights, such as freedom of expression and assembly, must be protected. Its citizens' human rights, religious freedoms, human development, and economic freedoms must all be guaranteed. For democracy to work, all major political factions, including opposition groups, must agree to play by the same rules and uphold the same law. The rule of law is essential as a safeguard against those who would limit democracy to its formal trappings by creating to what amounts to a single party system, or those who would seek power with the intention of ultimately disempowering others. Saliba et al (2012).

African countries and people are not alien to military coup and rule, especially from the era of independence and formation of self government as against the prevalent colonial rule. . Military coup was at a time a general practice and seemingly contagious among African countries. Buttressing this Chilaka (2022) stated that Africa has seen more coups or military interventions in polity than any other continent in the world both in the 20th and 21st centuries (Falola, 2022). Stating historically, coups in Africa could be traced to independence in the 1960s. And so far, the continent has experienced over 200 hundred coups, both successful and failed coups. Hence, one can describe Africa as a continent of frequent coups with about 41 states in the continent experiencing either failed or successful coups. The general manifestations of coups in Africa in recent times have been attributed to several issues such as the absence of democratic practice, leadership failure, economic crisis, the greed of military officers, youth and citizens' discontents, etc (Isilow, 2022).

In the view of Okoye (2023) given a concise submission, posited that, the rashes of successful military takeovers in some African countries signpost the failure of democracy on the African continent. Buttressing this view, he further explained that However, many African political leaders practised egregious variants of democracy. They practised democracy in the breach, which resulted in the political implosion of those countries. Sudan and Ethiopia disintegrated, with other countries emerging from them. Africa's political leaders' promotion of ethnic

chauvinism and practice of religious bigotry, which negate secularism that characterized democracy, were at the roots of the failure of democracy in African countries. Corrupt political leadership, indisputably, contributed significantly to the failure of democracy in most African countries, too. This view is evident as it is applicable to all African countries especially where we have military coup in place. The above nature of African democracy remains the cataclysm for the recrudescence of military takeovers in some African countries, with Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sudan, Niger republic, and Gabon being ruled by military juntas. The rashes of military coups that took place in some African countries are symptomatic of the political leadership malaise, which has afflicted Africa. The stark fact is that most African countries have not got it right, politically. Okoye (2023). Advancing this view above, Ake opined that, the resurgence of military coups in Africa points to the failure of democracy in the continent. Generally, the salient features of African state are namely, intense ethnic conflict, the single-party system and high incidence of efficiency norms on political competition, the recurrence of military coups, political repression, and the poor performance at economic development (Ake, 1981).

Buttressing the fact that failure of democracy is cataclysm for the military coup in Africa, he posited that, the reason for the failure of democracy in Africa is not far-fetched. African political leaders perceive their occupation of the most exalted political posts in their respective countries as opportunities to amass stupendous wealth at the expense of their long-suffering fellow citizens. Being megalomaniacs, they trample on the fundamental human rights of the people and amend their countries' constitutions to elongate their stay in office. Their attempts to perpetuate themselves in offices by transforming democratic governments to monarchies; and their political maladministration of their countries predispose them to becoming victims of military takeovers. The failure of democracy in Africa is linked to our political leaders' practice of representative government in the breach. African political leaders should play the roles of a servant-leader in their leadership of their respective countries. And they should subsume their self-interests beneath the collective good of the people. Their doing the aforementioned is the anti-dote to the wave of coup d'etat sweeping through the African continent Okoye (2023). The analysis above explained the nature of democracy in Africa.

Failure of democracy has degenerated to the extent that When the military strikes, instead of total condemnation of the act, a reasonable number of citizens of the countries affected celebrate the military because democracy has failed to provide its dividends to the people. This narrative also suffices it that, democracy and military regimes interchangeably have a relationship of causality. It is an undeniable fact because both antithetical forms of government are deterministic cause of each other from our analysis so far. A democratic deficit or decay begets a military coup. Conversely, military regimes after sanitizing the polity which involves conduct of elections and probably adjustment of the constitution among after things, return power to a democratically elected government or civilians. Taking a wider view of the situation a "Democracy globally is being threatened," he said. "But for Africa in particular, the kind of democracy we see in Africa, cases where you see dictatorial democrats in power, it is not very surprising that these things are happening. It is not certain to say this is the end to it. African countries should be expecting more." (Isilow, 2022).

Proffering how to strengthen democracy in Africa with the aim of mitigating against the menace of military coup in Africa, Ake espoused that one of the enormous challenges facing virtually every African nation is on how to apply or redefine democracy and make it more responsive and efficient. Over the years, there exists plethora of scholarly commentaries on the dysfunctionality and the floundering trajectories of democratic practice in Africa. Early African Scholars like (Awolowo, 1985; Ake, 2003; Houngnikpo, 2006; Collier, 2009; Omotola 2009; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013; Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2014; Omotola, 2021). Sighted in Ake 2023. To buttress his view Ake (2003) argued that the form of democracy suitable for Africa. This according to him would be a democracy characterized by the following features:

a. A democracy in which people have some real decision-making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice.
b. A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasizes abstract political right.
c. A democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights as it does on individual rights.

d. And lastly a democracy of incorporation (Ake, 2003).

Setting the above position aside, he further argued that Apart from these assumptions, it is important to posit that the basic challenges facing democracy in Africa stems from the fact that most African societies and their leaders lack basic democratic orientation and some never willingly embraced democracy.

His position and recommendations above attest to the fact that democracy in African is not being practice in a manner that portrays the features of the kind of democracy borrowed from the United State of America. The nature of African democracy is oligarchy in natures and support the decision of individual or perhaps the chronic few that rather than the majority. The recruitment process and the cost of running the democratic government, posses serious challenges to its sustainability in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The prevailing political and socio-economic circumstances in Africa has attracted numbers of theoretical propositions to explaining failure of democracy and the resultant effect of military coup in Africa. This study found the adoption of frustration aggression theory in explaining the underlining contradictions responsible for military coups in Africa and the recent coups in West Africa. The frustration aggression theory was propounded and popularized by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939); Berkowitz (1962); Berkowitz (1983) and the theory has over the years been applied in numerous fields of study (Breuer & Elson, 2017). Thus, the basic assumption of the theory is that there is always a link between frustration and aggression. For the theorists, it presupposes that aggression occurs as a result of frustration In fact, Zillmann et al (1976) explained the theory of frustration-aggression as a retaliatory act directed to the perceived source of frustration. Incidentally, the frustration aggression thesis has been criticised severally on the basis that it has become obsolete and the fact that not all aggressions can be seen as direct consequences of frustration. Essentially, the relevance of the frustration-aggression theory lies in its capacity to disentangle the linkages and connections between frustration and aggression. In all, the fundamental assumption of the theory is that frustration can potentially trigger aggression.

From the above premise, military coups in Africa and more specifically West Africa according to Odigbo, et al (2023) could be viewed from the perspective of elitist power contestation, conspiracy of the ruling oligarch and bandwagon effect that characterized the post independent politics in Africa. However, it is the position of this paper that the most appropriate empirical understanding of the prevailing resurgence of military coups in West Africa would rest on the impact of the present frustrations steering on the faces of the populace in the region. These frustrations are made manifest in diverse forms. There are socio-economic, political, cultural and leadership frustrations that fraught almost every Africa's political space. Indeed, the rising number of people in abject poverty, increasing unemployment, corruption, human rights abuse, crass impunity, wars, rebellious activities have compounded the state of insecurity. Also, leadership deficit are all horrible incidences frustrating many Africans. Presently, West African nations have high and unacceptable inflationary rate. People die of preventable diseases in West Africa. There is also environmental degradation, injustice, lack of infrastructure, ethnic conflicts, militancy, terrorism and insecurity of different sorts, all of these breed hostility and intermittently produce aggression against democratic leaders who are rightly or inadvertently seen as being responsible for people's ordeal.

No doubts therefore, that people tend to be responding aggressively to the above frustrations. For instance, in Mali, Guinea, Burkina-Faso and some other African nations such as Chad and Sudan and most recently Niger and Garbon, sometimes citizens call for military intervention and some citizens overtly celebrate military incursions. More specifically, in January 2022, hundreds of people trooped out in Ouagadougou to celebrate military coup that dethroned the government of former President Roch Marc Christian Kabore. While these celebrations may not mean an end to maladministration (for instance in Sudan people celebrated military coup and after some months confronted same military to go) it signifies a needed change that may have temporarily extinguished or eased frustration. In all, crop of leaders in Africa and West Africa in particular are either deliberately or unknowingly under-developing the already underdeveloped institutions, political systems and the people. This has led to an accumulated frustration which seems to have compelled some people to misconstrue democracy as being incapable of addressing the challenges confronting the West African region hence, the resolve

to attack the system if not completely dismantle it in search of peace, stability, security and development. Frustration-aggression theory therefore remains the basis for understanding the recurring military incursions in politics in West Africa. The utility of the theory lies in its capacity to demonstrate that some of the coups in West Africa occur as a result of people's restive tendencies towards democratic government. This restiveness sometimes serves as an invitation of military or even public invitation by the people. Odigbo et al (2023).

Discussion of Findings

Democracy globally is undergoing a form of threat particular in Africa, the nature of democracy that is operative in Africa is a case where you see dictatorial democrats in power, tyranny being supported by oligarchy, sit tight syndrome by elected leaders who continuously manipulate the electoral bodies and process, alter the constitution to support them to remain in power. For example in 2009, Ali Bongo took over the reins of power from his father, who had ruled the country for 42 years before his death. Bongo also amended the country's constitution to allow himself a third term in office. Bongo was toppled from power on August 30, 2023 shortly after being declared the winner of much criticised elections that would have seen him extend his 14-year rule as president.

Democratic governance in Africa tends to have failed to produce anticipated gains. This can be seeing from the growing poverty, inadequate infrastructure, high cost of governance, low life expectancy, unemployment, insecurity, rebellious tendencies against the state, low per capita income, inadequacy of modern technology, absence of rule of law, injustice that cress-crossed every part of African territories, all these lead to the frustration of the people and the eventual coup d'etat and taking over of governance by the military personnel.

The study also found out that democracy could not be totally condemned to have failed in all its dictates and tenets, it has also brought about fair development in some African countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and few others. South Africa under democratic government has continued to advance in terms of economic growth and political stability. However, the study revealed that democratic institutions in Africa have recorded more failure than success. This evident in the failure to conduct free and fair election, solve the problem of

unemployment, illiteracy, reduce cost of governance low life expectancy, poverty, prevalent injustice, poor infrastructure and others.

The study found out that the cost of governance, that the amount of fund being deployed to run democracy and servicing the political office holders is no longer sustainable for the system. The is predicated on the fact that democracy in Africa has produced few rich individuals than the richness of the countries as a whole. The practice of democracy in Africa is taking an oligarchy posture. Thereby producing few rich individuals at the expense of the generality of the citizens. This practice led to the frustration of the people and resulted to the aggression in prow that led to military coup in recent times.

The study also finds out that the failure of democracy has indeed remained a cataclysm for military coup in Africa. African political leaders only see their political posts in their respective countries as opportunities to amass stupendous wealth for themselves at the expense of their long-suffering fellow citizens. They continue to trample on the fundamental human rights of the people and incessant amendment of their countries' constitutions to elongate their stay in office.

Conclusion

This study, having espoused the nature of democracy in Africa with the aim to unravelling the argument, that the failure of democracy is a cataclysm that prompted recent surge of military incursion into power in some democratic states in Africa. The paper concluded that frustration arising from insecurity, poverty, high cost of governance, poor governance, failure of democratic institutions, sit-tight syndrome, tyrannical nature of the democratically elected leaders and misplaced priorities of government triggered the recent upsurge in military coups and violent crimes in Africa. The paper noted that there is an outright disconnects and a wide range gap between the people and the leaders of government. This basically is counter-productive to democratic practice and indeed widened the gap and amplifies the question of trust that has been very elusive in Africa. It therefore concludes that curbing the menace of military coups in Africa demands urgent steps to enthrone good governance in Africa's democratic states, reduce cost of governance and promote human right..

Prospect and Recommendations

The paper recommends the institutionalization of governance in lieu of the prevailing personalization of state institutions in Africa. The democratic institutions should be allowed without interference from the state or leaders in power to manipulate their practices and decisions.

Africa leaders should rescind from their sight tight syndrome attitude in government, stop manipulating electoral process and incessant amendment of the constitution to substantiate their stay in office. These practices are inimical to the future of democracy in Africa.

Having noted that the resurgence of military coup in Africa is evidence of democratic decay arising from state crisis with abysmal and marginal level of democratic performance. There is urgent need for democratic reforms to allow citizens of various African countries to regain their confidence and interest in democracy and defend it from reversal.

Lastly, African should design their own style of democracy, to elude the continuous comparism with USA style of democracy. the nature of the democracy that is operative in Africa is in direct contrast to the tenets and features of democracy in saner climes

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