


The Fragility of Democracy in Africa: Are Military Coups D'état a Never-Ending Issue?

Adebukola Olubunmi Ayoola* Solomon Ayantayo Ojo** Oluwaseun Kugbayi***

<p>Journal Volume & Issue: Vol. 5, No. 2 (August, 2024) pp. 80 – 104</p> <p>Received: 15 December, 2023 Revised: 26 July, 2024 Accepted: 25 August, 2024 Published: 31 August, 2024</p>  <p>Copyright: ©2024 by Jimma University, Ethiopia. Under Open Access Journal, the creative common attribute 4.0 international license permits any interested person to copy, redistribute, remix, transmit and adapt the work provided that the original work and source is appropriately cited.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p><i>Some African countries have in recent times been experiencing military coups, with not less than seven occurrences between 2020 and 2023, an act considered not to be unconnected to the failure and fragility of democratic regimes. This study examined the factors responsible for the resurgence of military coups in Africa and the possible end to undemocratic regimes by applying secondary sources of data, including textbooks, journals, newspapers, and magazines. The findings of the study revealed that the failure of democratic regimes is a result of the sit-tight syndrome/mentality of African political elites, unmanageable security challenges, extractive political/economic institutions, the influence of external powers, corruption, and socio-economic disparity, and weak political institutions of African countries. The study concluded that although the only alternative to unseat or displace undemocratic civil rule, military regimes had never fared better, while some have performed even worse compared with the democratic regimes they successfully plotted against. As such, military rule should not be encouraged under any guise, and people should become more active in their democratic participation to ensure solid democratic institutions that can compel whoever is at the helm of governmental affairs to comply with the tenets of constitutional democracy dutifully.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Fragility, Military Coup, Africa</p>
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Introduction

African countries started to experience democracy after independence from colonial rule. Many African countries were colonized by the European powers during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Colonial rule destroyed the traditional political system and replaced it with foreign institutions. In the mid-20th century, African nationalists began agitation for self-rule, which culminated in

*KolaDaisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: adebukola.ayoola@koladaisiuniversity.edu.ng

**KolaDaisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: ayantayo.ojo@koladaisiuniversity.edu.ng

*** KolaDaisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: oluwaseunkugbayi@gmail.com

independence and the introduction of democratic rule. However, for many of them, their independence was short-lived because of military coups which started in the early 1960s. From that period till now, many African states have gone through moments of shifting between a democratic system and militarism in governance. For example, Togo was the first African country to experience a military coup on January 13, 1963. After that, military coups spread like wildfire across the continent. Military coups d'état have been a recurring challenge in Africa's political landscape since the continent gained independence from colonial rule in the mid-20th century. Thus, Africa has been grappling with coup d'état contagion, and the occurrence of this anti-democratic phenomenon is more pronounced here than in other parts of the world. Since 1950, the world has experienced 486 coups, with 214 of the coups taking place on the African political terrain. Out of this, 106 of them successfully overthrew governments, both civilian and military. In addition, out of the African countries, 45 have encountered at least one attempted coup since 1950 (Angalapu, 2023). These statistics indicate the high rapidity of military interventions, which suggest that they were the most common way of effecting a regime change in the past. This made Ogbonna et al. (2023) conclude that the 'military in African states is no doubt a critical component of the political structure of the continent and has become indispensable in analyzing the continent's political ecology.' Thus, the African military remains a major political, cultural, and institutional force in the continent's politics.

However, starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Africa experienced a wave of democratization as many countries transitioned from military authoritarian rule to multiparty democracy (Nwokedi, 1997). This wave was influenced by global trends toward democracy, economic pressures, and domestic movements for political change. This was at the end of the Cold War when, through non-violent revolutions, repressive and dictatorial regimes were replaced by democratic ones. The democratic wave was reinforced by the Arab Spring movement, which started in 2011 in the North African country of Tunisia. The development gave the impression that world society was experiencing an unstoppable wave of democratization, which produced an infectious mood of 'democratic optimism' (Mayall, 2000). It was also informed by the general acceptance that democracy was a better form of government to promote political stability, societal peace, and development. However, much more than that, the upsurge of democratic practice in Africa was motivated by the loss of interest of Western powers in

forceful regime change due to the emergence of a unipolar international system where the ideological competition of the Cold War era had ceased.

However, unlike in other climes, Africa, and especially West and Central sub-regions, this democratic optimism was short-lived. Africa's experience of the high tide of democratization and democratic consolidation went on until 2020 when the continent, especially the sub-Saharan region, began to witness a resurgence of successful military coups in Burkina Faso (January 2020); Chad (April 2021); Mali (August 2021); Guinea Conakry (September 2021); Sudan (October 2022); Niger (July 2023); and Gabon (August 2023). The common justifications given by the coup plotters for intervening center around bad governance characterized by corruption, unconstitutional tenure elongation, election rigging or fraud, incompetence in the handling of security issues, particularly over the fight against terrorism and insurgency, and subordination of the state to the control of France.

It is not a coincidence that the reasons given for staging the coups are not dissimilar from the justifications for similar events in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa. For example, the reasons why the military bloodily terminated the first democratic system in Nigeria in January 1966 were allegations of nepotism, large-scale looting of government treasury (corruption), large-scale poverty of people, and uncontrollable insecurity, among others. Similarly, the late Mohammed Gaddafi came to power in Libya through a bloodless coup d'état on September 1, 1969, overthrowing King Idris I. The coup was motivated by a desire to end what Gaddafi and his fellow officers perceived as corruption, inequality, and subservience to Western powers in the ruling monarchy. It can be observed that these predisposing factors for coups are still being experienced in Nigeria today, particularly in Africa in general. Therefore, since 2020, West and Central Africa have experienced ten attempted coups, which signify a rapid undoing of democratic systems in the region. This attests to the perception that despite the democratization trend since 1990, military interventions in politics have continued to be pervasive in Africa and that the West African sub-region is the predominant center of coups in Africa (McGowan, 2023). These recent military assaults, in many ways, are reminiscent of the military interventions prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa.

Military authoritarianism appearing as an alternative to democracy is an indication of the gradual demise of the latter, which seems so because of the popular support the coup plotters enjoyed in

the countries where they have struck. For instance, in the Niger Republic, to demonstrate their support for the military authority, many people volunteered to be recruited into the army in readiness for ECOWAS' threat to use military force to compel a return of power to the democratically displaced government of Mohamed Bazoun. The support for the juntas is not unrelated to the appalling socio-economic, political, and security situation prevalent in many African countries and which democratic leaders have failed to solve. The people support the toppling of democratic government in the hope that they would be able to bring them out of their misery. The misery is manifested in widespread social unease, galloping inflation, youth unemployment, food and energy crises, and the consequences of escalating climate change. The question is how one accounts for the resurgence of military authoritarianism. In other words, how did a continent that has been experiencing relative political stability and consolidation of democracy for decades begin to experience this anarchy? Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors responsible for democratic fragility in Africa and the possibility of unending military disruption of democratic governance.

Conceptual Discourse: Democracy, Democratic Fragility and Military Coup

In order to have a proper understanding of the concepts of democratic fragility and military coup, as used in this study, developing a precise definition of democracy is necessary. Schumpeter (1994) defined democracy as a system of government in which the leaders are held accountable for their actions and inactions in the public by the citizens, acting indirectly through the competition of their elected representatives. System of government, as used in this definition, means an assembled method that determines the procedures to follow to have access to public offices, the nature of the actors admitted to or excluded from such access, the approaches that actors may use to have access; and the rules to be followed in the making of the generally binding decision. In any democratic setting, the accepted instrument of institutionalization is a written body of laws passed through many enduring political norms and undergirded by a written constitution (Milewicz, 2020).

Kaldor and Vejvoda (2002) see democracy as “a set of formal institutions, a way of redistributing power and a way of life”. Mimiko (2007) further argues that democracy is desirable as it facilitates governance and promotes development, especially in a plural society. It

aligns with human rights and the freedom of the people. These definitions revealed that if the citizens are deprived of the opportunities to actively engage in the democratic process, which involves electing their political representatives in a free and fair manner, such representatives may find it challenging to get the support of the people at the point of policies implementation and programs necessary for development. Babawale (2006) then argues that it is doubtful whether to talk of democracy in the absence of participation, competition, and guarantee of civil liberties (Gberevbie, 2014). In a state where these threats to democracy exist, democracy in such a state becomes fragile. Drawing from the Political Science literature on the transition to and from democracy, these threats that make democracy fragile may be classified into constitutional retrogression and authoritarian reversion (Huq & Ginsburg, 2018).

The democracy of a state can degrade without collapsing. When an elected government enacts constitutional changes that concurrently crush electoral competition, the liberal right of the people to participate, and weaken legal predictability and stability, the democracy of such a state is experiencing constitutional retrogression (Huq & Ginsburg, 2018). In Africa, many democratically elected governments in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s aggregated political powers, crushed political oppositions, stifled media, and modified tenure limits in their constitutions. These are some of the pathways to constitutional retrogression. Ozan and Varol (2015) state that many of these practices are concealed under the ambit of the law. This form of democratic fragility has several nomenclatures, including de-democratization (Tilly, 2003), backsliding (Bermeo, 2016), and democraticship (Scheppele, 2016). Whatever form it takes, its endpoint is a regime that is neither an unfettered democracy nor a pure democracy. Authoritarian reversion occurs when a democratic state transits completely and rapidly to authoritarianism. This sudden transition is usually through a military coup d'état (Borgognone, 2006). Therefore, a coup attempt can be defined as an "illegal and overt attempt by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive" (Powell & Thyne, 2011). It is a forceful seizure of political power by the armed forces of a country, as it recently occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Gabon.

Arising from the foregoing, the concept of democracy, which appears to be the most prominent among the three concepts, is further elaborated to illustrate the extent of its abuse that informs the emergence of democratic fragility and military coups in Africa. Although democracy is an evolving concept, and its application may adapt to different cultural, historical, and social

contexts, it has features that collectively contribute to the functioning and health of a democratic system. These features include popular sovereignty, the conduct of free and fair elections that lead to a regular and peaceful transition of power, political pluralism, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, free and independent press, which facilitates public debate and discourse, accountability of elected officials to the people, independent election body, universal suffrage, and civic participation, separation of powers, checks, and balances, and protection of individual rights and liberties. The attributes of democracy could be more than this, but when a substantial number of these attributes are lacking in a state, it leads to democratic fragility, which can trigger military coups. Democratic fragility refers to the weakness of a democratic system, wherein the institutions, processes, and norms that support democracy are at risk of erosion or breakdown due to anti-democratic factors. It reflects the susceptibility of democratic governance to internal or external threats that can undermine its stability, functioning, and effectiveness.

Triggers of Military Coups

The avalanche of occurrence of military usurpation of political authority globally and in Africa in particular makes it imperative to examine the disposing factors responsible for the phenomenon. Huntington (1957), a political scientist and military strategist, explores the relationship between the military and the political establishment in a democratic society, with a focus on the United States. Huntington argues that a healthy civil-military relationship is essential for the stability and success of a democratic government. Though he advocates a politically neutral military, free from partisan influence, and highlights the dangers of military involvement in politics, he gives insights into factors that can trigger military intervention in politics. Emphasizing the concept of “objective control”, he argued that military intervention becomes more likely when civilians try to micromanage military operations or become too involved in tactical decisions. Secondly, military intervention may occur when civilian leaders lack competence or understanding of military matters. He also argues that a disconnection between the military and civilian leaders may increase the likelihood of military intervention, especially if officers are not well-educated and are not allowed to engage in broader political and social issues. Furthermore, when military officers align themselves with a particular political ideology or party, it can erode the principle of civilian control and can lead to military

involvement in politics. Lastly, Huntington stresses that a breakdown in communication and trust between civilian leaders and the military can create an environment conducive to military intervention.

Ogbonna *et al.* (2023) adduce the psychological nature of Africans, which is a strong predilection for despotism and a sit-tight mentality for political office. Their argument was in response to other narratives blaming Africa's colonial origin as responsible for a military incursion into politics, particularly concerning many incidents of coup d'état across the region in the wake of democratization. The colonial creation of the African Military, which was mainly to achieve colonial objectives, was generally believed to have been responsible for their poor civil relation and thirst for political power. Citing scholars such as Bechir, 1997; Ogueri, 1973; Salihu, 2016; Jenkins & Kposova, 1992; Allen, 2018; Chekole, 2016; Assensoh & Alex-Assensoh, 2001; Ogbonna *et al.* (2023) posit that African leaders themselves are autocratic. Assensoh and Alex-Assensoh (2001) even supported this cause of military coup with the example of the first post-colonial leader of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, with his "Avoidance of Discrimination Bill" and the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) in 1958. This confirms the dictatorial tendencies and extreme repressive approaches to silence opposition. These legislative weapons not only muzzled opposition but also caused authoritarianism through the one-party political system that he established. They further buttress their argument by pointing to sit-tight dictators that dominate several countries in Africa, including Gnassingbe Eyadema, who ruled Togo for 38 years. Robert Mugabe also ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years, while Omar Bongo and his family have made Gabon their fiefdom. This exemplifies the sit-tight mentality of African leaders that they are imbibed with, which draws them to use extreme repressive measures to quash opposition in order to remain in power (Ogbonna *et al.*, 2023).

Another fact adduced to buttress their claim was the monarchical tendencies of African leaders who see power as family inheritance. Even countries with no colonial experience displayed the same attitude. Chekole (2016), in a comparative study of Ethiopia (a country that was never colonized) and Nigeria (a country colonized by Britain), concluded that authoritarianism was already embedded in African nature, and colonialism has nothing to do with it. Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974. He rose to power as Regent Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia for Empress Zewditu from 1916 until 1930. This means Haile Selassie ruled as a regent alongside Empress Zewditu and succeeded her in 1930. He was also dictatorial and autocratic

(Britannica, 2023). Thus, the sit-tight mentality of the African ruling elite, with all their repressive measures, makes military coups attractive. Another justification for military coups is opinionated by Ogueri (1973). He considers military putsch as inevitable when there is the need to protect and promote a state's national interest. He regards military government as an alternative to an irresponsible civilian government. To him, a government is irresponsible if the state it is superintending becomes a failed state. Thus, a military coup becomes inevitable with the presence of any or a combination of factors such as genuine motives for change, rape of the constitution by civilian political elites, and extravagances. Thus, the military forceful takeover of government is justifiable to wrestle the state from maladministration that can endanger its national interest.

Another factor is the international political system, which is defined by polarity from one era to another. Military coups in Africa and elsewhere could be traced to the Cold War era, characterized by the bipolar structure of the international political system spearheaded by the United States of America (USA) and the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), which ranged between 1945 and 1990. The Cold War resulted from ideological differences between the two power blocs and their expansionist tendencies to win the souls of untapped regions of the world, *i.e.*, the colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, many of whom were struggling for self-government and stability for those that newly gained independence. Revolutionary forces were wooed and supported against the sitting government by the two power blocs mainly for their political and economic interests at the expense of the government and the people of those states who became victims of a war they knew nothing about. These new lands became battlegrounds where the Cold War was fought in proxy for major rival powers that dominated the period to exploit the naivety of these people to display their merchandise. At the same time, the USA embarked on a containment policy designed to contain the spread and influence of communism on the rest of the world (Cobb *et al.*, 2020). The Soviet Union, which championed communist ideology, did not slack in telling the world that it is a "better evil" by giving the USA a wild chase and frantically explaining the evil of capitalism to the nations of the world. The Cold War led to the proliferation of proxy wars, and the U.S. and USSR allowed war to break out between two or more groups while taking sides with either conflicting party.

In the process, the U.S. supported right-wing and undemocratic regimes that aligned with her capitalist policy and anti-communist position. To contain communism, the United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), functioned to unseat many governments with "socialist or populist tendencies, even preferring autocratic or military rulers who would promote capitalism" (Cobb et al., 2020, p. 26). It is generally acknowledged and alleged that the CIA had a hand in creating political instability through military coups that occurred in many parts of the world, including Africa (Grieco *et al.*, 2015; Khann & Kumar, 2019). This is one of the factors that prompts military coups. External factors, interests, and agents contributed to inciting military intervention in African politics, where democratically elected governments were overthrown and compromising puppet (military) governments were being installed in the wave of ideological war.

Theoretical Foundation: The State Fragility Theory

State fragility theory is an approach used by scholars to understand and analyze the characteristics and factors that make a state vulnerable to failure or collapse. This theory helps in examining the weaknesses and challenges prevalent in a state that can lead to its inability to effectively govern and provide essential services to its citizens. Therefore, the thrust of the state fragility theory stresses the lack of functional authority of a state to provide basic security within its territory. It highlights the government's inability to maintain the rule of law and uphold justice and fairness (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2022). Opinions differ among scholars on the root causes of fragility and its manifestations. Fragile states share some broad features, including weak and ineffective governance institutions, high levels of poverty and unemployment, a lack of social cohesion, weak resilience in the face of challenges, violent conflicts, and civil wars. Rosvadoski-da-Silva *et al.* (2021) suggest a lack of state legitimacy and capacity, existential uncertainties, and exposure to economic and political shock as the characteristics of a fragile state. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) see a fragile state as a result of the strength of its political regime and capacity. Such a state experiences fragility because of limited institutional and political ability to implement relevant policies to tackle its structural challenges.

Fragility may manifest in different forms and may include social, economic, political, and security fragility. In most of the worst cases, the concept has been linked with violent conflict.

Whatever way it manifests; fragility is generally related to instability and underdevelopment. In a fragile state, the emphasis is on the rule of the might and not on the rule of law (Gardner, 2021). In the strategy for “Addressing Fragility and Building Resilience in Africa,” the African Development Bank sees fragility as the “condition of elevated risk of institutional breakdown, societal collapse, or violent conflict.” In the same way, the World Bank (2012) states that fragile states are confronted with elevated risks that emanate from the interaction of internal shocks and external pressures and the inability of the state and its institutions to mitigate those negative shocks and pressures.

Extant literature shows that Africa, especially its sub-Saharan region, has continued to be characterized by the largest share of fragile states (McKay & Thorbecke, 2019). The factors responsible for state fragility are authoritarian regime style, corruption, weak institutions, political instability, and desecration of the constitution. Many national governments have failed to conduct free, fair, and credible elections, deliver effective and efficient goods and services to the people, and establish just governance and equitable development. Ordinarily, the military, as one of the institutions of the state, is bound by the constitution to use force in defending the state against external aggression. Unfortunately, in Africa, several cases abound where this institution of the state seized power, suspended the constitution, and dismissed the constitutionally elected government. All these are manifestations of state fragility.

The theory is relevant to this paper because it will help to identify, analyze, and explain key factors that engender democratic fragility in Africa despite its decades of practice, which has made it vulnerable to the military usurpation of political power in recent times. This is because the theory underscores the interconnectedness of political, economic, social, and security factors in analyzing state fragility while simultaneously highlighting the need for a comprehensive and context-specific strategy to address these challenges.

Materials and Methods

This article relied on desk review to collect data from secondary sources to examine the factors responsible for democratic fragility in Africa and the possibility of unending military disruption of democratic governance. According to Pickard (2013), a desk review is a method of acquiring

previously published material rather than collecting data directly. Hence, data were obtained from reputable journals, textbooks, reports, newspapers, and websites related to the subject under consideration. The use of these secondary sources of data enabled the researchers to verify information, identify trends, make inferences, and arrive at a reasonable conclusion. This procedure was useful for the overall credibility of the study.

Results and Discussions

Causes of Democratic Fragility in Africa

There are many drivers of coups in Africa. However, within the context of this discourse, the fragility of democracy is considered to be the predominant predisposing factor for the resurgence of military incursion into politics, especially in recent times. This is coming after many years of democratic development in Africa. In other words, this paper argues that the resurfacing of coups in some African countries, which had long been regarded as unfashionable, is because democratic practice is weak and poor. In light of this, researchers examined factors responsible for democratic fragility in those countries that instigate coups d'état and their prospects of being unending. Therefore, recognizing and addressing the factors contributing to democratic fragility is crucial for safeguarding and strengthening African democratic systems.

Sit-tight Syndrome of African Leaders

One of the tenets of democracy is the regular conduct of elections, which allows people to choose their leaders from time to time. However, it is observed that many African leaders are fond of perpetuating themselves in office against constitutional provisions and the wishes of their people. To achieve their inordinate ambition of lifetime occupation of political office, all sorts of tactics are used, including nebulous amendment of the constitution, stifling of opposition parties, manipulation of election results to favor them, and gauging of press freedom. These actions create disenchantment in the polity and prepare the ground for a military putsch. Many past African leaders demonstrated this sit-tight syndrome to the point that their children took over the mantle of leadership after their long reigns. An example is Omar Bongo of Gabon, who ruled for 43 years and was succeeded by his son, Ali Bongo, who was recently overthrown by the military. To illustrate this sit-tight syndrome, some African leaders have been ruling their country for decades: Paul Biya (Cameroon, 41 years); Yoweri Museveni (Uganda, 37 years); Isaias Afwerki (Eritrea, 30 years); Denis Sassou (Republic of Congo, 44 years); Teodoro Nguema

(Equatorial Guinea, 44 years) (See Table 1 below for a full list).

Table 1: Country President and Years in Power

Country	Name of President	Years in Power
Rwanda	Paul Kagame	2000 till date
Republic of Chad	Idriss Déby	1990- till date
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	1993 till date
Equatorial Guinea	Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasog	1979 till date
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	1986 till date
Cameroon	Paul Biya	1982 till date
Republic of Congo	Denis Sassou Nguesso	1997 till date
Togo	Faure Gnassingbe	2005 till date
Republic of Benin	Matthieu Kerekou	1972 - 1991 1996 - 2006
Kenya	Daniel Arap Moi	1978 – 2002
Angola	Jose Eduardo dos Santos	1979 – 2017
Zimbabwe	Robert Mugabe	1987 – 2017
Gabon	Omar Bongo Ondimba	1967 – 2009
Tunisia	Zine El Abidine Ben Ali	1987-2011
Egypt	Hosni Mubarak	1981 – 2011
Libya	Muammar Gaddafi	1969 – 2011
Ivory Coast	Felix Houphouet-Biogny	1960 – 1993
Cameroon	Ahmadou Babatoura Ahidjo	1960 – 1982
Togo	Gnassingbé Eyadéma	1967 – 2005

Source: Authors' Compilation

Their prolonged stay in power implies that they have been perpetrating some illegalities to sustain it and certainly not the popular choice of the people. According to a 2022 poll by the Pan-African research network Afrobarometer, only 44 percent of Africans say elections enable voters to remove leaders that voters do not want (Adetayo, 2023). This shows that few Africans believe that electoral contests usher true representatives of the people into power, negating Abraham Lincoln's popular definition of democracy, which is "government of the people by the people and

for the people." The use of different strategies, including manipulation of elections by African politicians to gain power and to perpetuate themselves in power, is one of the reasons many eligible Nigerian voters have voter apathy. This is because of the perception that their votes will not count. It is reported that many Cameroonians do not go out to vote during presidential elections, which Paul Biya runs because he will always be declared a winner, which explains why he has been in power for the past 42 years.

Therefore, the quest for perpetuity in power by African political elites to the extent of bequeathing it to their children after their demise can best be described as a "Presidential Chieftancism" system of government and not democracy or "dynastic-style politics" and not democratic politics. This is not different from the monarchical rule in Ethiopia. This kind of practice in a supposed democratic regime amounts to a breach of trust of the electorates, which creates a fertile ground for a military takeover of political power from civilians.

Bad Governance

Good governance is a critical component of a functioning democracy and is essential for economic development, political stability, and the protection of human rights. It infers that public resources are used for the benefit of the entire society rather than a select few. It is universally accepted that 'governance' should be 'good' to facilitate the development of people and society at large. Highlighting the key elements of good governance would enable a critical assessment of African states on whether good governance is sufficiently promoted to make military intervention unattractive. According Biswas (2023); UNDP (1997); and Thomas (2021),key features of good governance include: rule of law to ensures that everyone is equal before the law and that legal processes are fair and just; transparency that guarantees public access to information about government policies, decisions, and actions; accountability which means elected officials and public servants are answerable to the public and should face consequences for misconduct or corruption; participation which allows for inclusiveness in the decision-making processes; responsiveness means that governments and institutions should be responsive to the needs and concerns of their citizens; effectiveness and efficiency entails that public resources are used efficiently and effectively to achieve desired outcomes especially through prudent financial spending; equity and inclusiveness seeks to promote social justice and inclusivity allowing all segments of society to have equal access to opportunities and benefits,

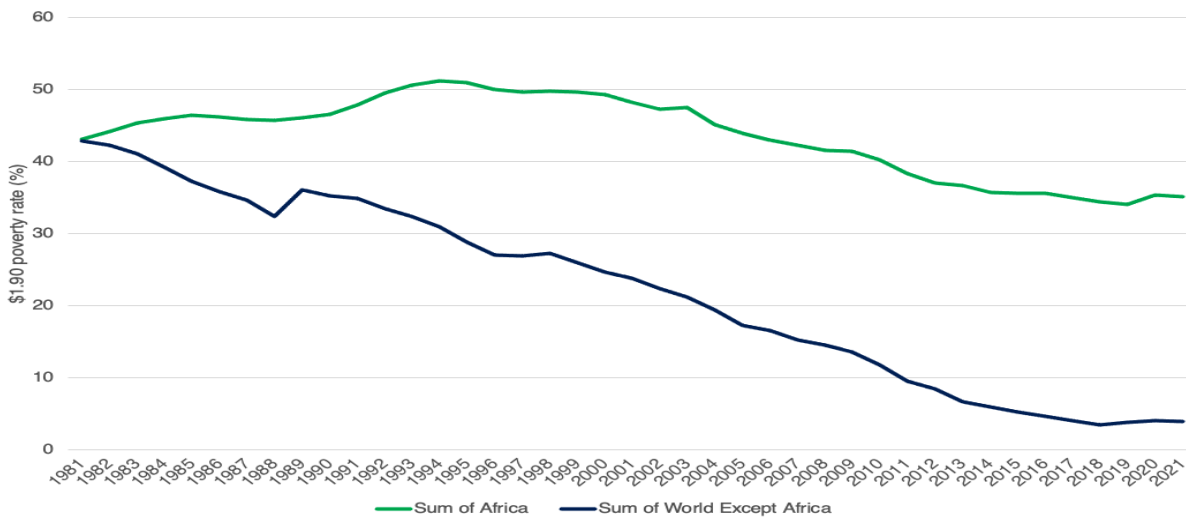
regardless of their background or identity; and consensus orientation which involves seeking consensus and building broad-based support for policies and initiatives, particularly in diverse and pluralistic societies (Narzary 2015; Mangla, 2015). According to Obasesam and Iwara (2021), authoritarian and repressive regimes in Africa give birth to declining living conditions and multidimensional poverty within African countries because these political leaders failed to deliver on their promises of economic prosperity (see Chart 1 for the **poverty rate for Africa and the rest of the world between 1981 and 2021**).

The fact that most African countries are bedeviled with social and political problems of different magnitudes, including weak institutions, systemic disenfranchisement, poverty, corruption/misappropriation of national resources, and gross underdevelopment, is indicative of bad governance, which contributes to the military incursion into politics. For example, according to Nigerien coup plotters, 'deteriorating security situation and bad governance' accounts for the reasons they struck. Therefore, since the opposite of bad governance is good governance, its importance and strong ability to prevent authoritarian takeovers of powers and unconstitutional changes of government is not lost on African leaders. Hence, the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of State and Government, President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria, advised West African leaders to give priority to good governance and collective prosperity of their people at the 64th ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in Abuja recently. According to him,

By providing good governance that tackles the challenges of poverty, inequality, and other people's concerns, we would have succeeded in addressing some of the root causes of military interventions in civilian processes in our region (President Bola Tinubu, December 10, 2023).

The Nigerian leader's expressed view affirms this paper's position that bad governance is a major factor in making coup plots possible in Africa.

Chart 1: US\$ 1.90 Poverty Rate for Africa and the Rest of the World, 1981-2021



Source: Institute for Security Studies (<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-is-losing-the-battle-against-extreme-poverty>)

Unmanageable Security Challenges

Many African countries are grappling with a wide range of security challenges, including banditry, Islamic militancy, kidnapping, electoral violence, farmers and herders polemics, and separatists' agitations such as the one by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Ethiopian federal forces. However, religious insurrection appears to be most pervasive through Islamic militant groups like Boko Haram and Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, Islamic insurgency in the Sahel countries of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and Al-Shabaab based in Somalia but active in some East African countries like Kenya as well as actively involved in the Somali Civil War. It can be observed that most of the security challenges in Africa are intra-state conflict as against inter-state. Thus, many conflicts in the continent are self-inflicted and have taken a heavy toll on human lives and contributed to the socio-economic retardation of Africa. While these issues are inevitable globally, they could be brought to the barest minimum with the security architecture of the state being in perfect control and on top of the game in Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia (George & Kalu, 2023). In other words, while these internally-induced insecurities persist, many African states appear weak enough to contain them, which is responsible for their increase. Meanwhile, George and Kalu

(2023) link these myriads of security challenges to unemployment, poverty, and unfavorable economic situations in these countries, which have prevented regional efforts from yielding the desired results.

These security challenges are rife and uncontrollable in Africa due to the contributory role of the political actors who created many of the terror groups and armed them to intimidate the people into gaining political positions, failure to educate the children by privatizing education, which has now become the exclusive reserve for those that can afford it while the children of the poor are daily recruited for criminalities as their only means of surviving, profiteering from financing war against insecurity as huge amount is spent for procuring arms and ammunition to fight terrorism and other security challenges with no commensurate result. For example, in Nigeria, there were allegations against some top military personnel and politicians that money meant for the procurement of ammunition was diverted or misappropriated, thereby elongating the security challenges. As Obasesam and Iwara (2021) put it, the failure of political leaders to recognize systemic risks like election fraud, terrorist attacks, herders-farmers conflict, armed banditry, police brutality, etc., and address the root causes of all these issues in themselves is a sign of democratic fragility. The issue of insecurity is further worsened by allegations of political exclusion and marginalization by some ethnic nationalities (Rotberg & Campbell, 2021; Beaumont, 2021). For instance, Nigeria is bedeviled with myriads of national identity issues like secessionist bid in the South-East, Oodua Nation in South West, banditry in the North-West, Boko Haram Jihadists in the North East, oil bunkering in the South-South and farmers/herders conflict in the Middle Belt. All these challenges seemed to overlap and were too much for the government to contend with, and there was no possible end to them in sight. Beaumont concluded that the inability of the government to contain or manage the myriad of security challenges is enough reason to diagnose and tag Nigeria as a failed state. The situation is not different in Sudan, Cameroon, Mali, Gabon, Niger, Chad, and other places where the military has now taken over political power because the security situation makes military coups appealing.

Extractive Political/Economic Institution

This has to do with the engagement of African leaders in extracting the states' resources, mainly for self-aggrandizement. Extractive political institutions in sub-Saharan Africa are supporting

extractive economic institutions that failed to create the incentives needed for people within the state to save, invest, and innovate. According to Acemoghu and Robinson (2013), politicians are too happy to extract resources or quash any type of independent economic activity that threatens themselves and the economic elites. They mostly monopolize the economic resource base of the state to their advantage at the expense of the state and the people, *i.e.*, blood diamond in Sierra Leone and Liberia; curse crude oil in Nigeria, Sudan, Cameroun, Angola; uranium in Niger Republic (Ako-Nai & Ayoola, 2013; Yumeen, 2020; Reuters, 2023). They sometimes deliberately destroy law and order and the most fundamental economic incentives, leading to economic stagnation for the populace. Perfect examples are state-sponsored poverty and economic exploitation of the people.

Influence of External Powers

The influence of external powers is both political and economic, which can be termed neocolonialism. According to Kwame Nkrumah, neocolonialism infers that third-world states have their economic and political systems controlled and directed from outside. The outside powers are generally their former colonial states of Europe and their major ally, the United States of America. Many of the African leaders continued to service the interests of their erstwhile colonial masters and the West in general purposely to enrich themselves as well as to retain political power. As Yumeen (2020) and Reuters (2023) separately established, the quantum reserve of diamonds in Liberia was a contributing factor to Charles Taylor's elongated regime as he exploited the state resources to his advantage while he was busy bribing foreign powers to retain control of Liberia till the Volunteered Force took up arms against him. Even in the face of opposition, he recruited child soldiers to fight back and keep the seat of power, not minding the blood of Liberians they were being spilled daily. The West looked on until Taylor's activities became an international embarrassment, and he was forced to seek asylum in Nigeria before he was handed over to the International Criminal Court to face war crimes against humanity. President Mohamed Bazoum held on to power for that long only because he enjoyed external support from France, whose interest he continued to serve as the sole buyer and investor in the uranium reserve in Niger. In spite of his regime's inability to engender the desired political and economic development in the system, France saw nothing wrong with his manipulations of election results to continue holding on to power. Even after the military took over power and

detained Bazoum, France was still calling for his release and return to democracy, all for its economic interest, which was at the detriment of the people of Niger.

The crude oil exploration, production, pricing, and marketing have become deciding factors in Nigeria's political and economic life. From Ako-Nai and Ayoola's (2013) submission, Nigeria contracted external loans at different times and regimes to the point it became a case of debt crisis mainly because of its expanse of oil reserves. The country had to beg its way out of the woods by getting debt relief in 2007 from its external multilateral lenders. One would expect the country to maintain a clean bill of health by succeeding administrations that have contracted so many loans that the debt could be described as unmanageable all because of the oil reserve with a huge infrastructural deficit; hence, the oil is described as a curse instead of a blessing. Moreover, the dollarization of the product's pricing from exploration to production and marketing resulted in inflation in the country, causing untold hardship to the citizens. The deliberate refusal of succeeding regimes to repair old refineries or build new ones was mainly to service external interests and for personal gains. Nigerians now pay through their noses to get the products needed for their daily activities, while many private vehicles have them parked and jumping on public transport for daily survival. There has been a triple increase in the price of petroleum products since the change of regime on May 29, 2023, as President Bola Tinubu announced the removal of fuel subsidies in his inaugural speech. This announcement drastically caused a change and upward review of prices of commodities and household products, while wages and salaries have not been reviewed in the last five years (The Cable, May 29, 2023). The implication of all this is that the powerful West influences many African states' political and economic systems to their advantage and disadvantages of the latter, which significantly contributes to underdevelopment. This engenders disaffection among the citizens, which sets the stage for the upstaging of democratic governments by the military.

Corruption and Socio-Economic Disparity

Corruption and socio-economic disparities are twin issues cutting across almost all the African states. For instance, in Nigeria, since its return to civil rule in 1999, the political elites have continued to dominate the democratic space and consistently violate the fundamental principles associated with liberal democratic systems like competitive elections, rule of law, political

freedom, and respect for human rights. Outcomes of general elections since 2019 continued to erode public trust in the electoral body (INEC) and its ability to organize competitive elections without the influence or manipulations of the ruling class. The lack of a governance system is based on leadership capability; instead, the African system is dominated by individuals who gained power through nepotism, which is against competence (Obasesam & Iwara, 2021). All these are indicators of system failure in Nigeria; the situation is even worse in many other African countries. According to the Global Indicators such as the World Governance Index and Transparency International, many African countries scored very low. Both organizations scored Nigeria low due to poor performance on government ineffectiveness, political stability, the rule of law, and corruption. Nigeria ranked as 25/100 most corrupt countries, 146 in 2019, 149 in 2020, and 150 out of 180 in 2022 (Corruption Perception Index 2022 reported by Transparency International). In the Corruption Perception Index for Africa, Cameroun ranked 24/100, Liberia 26/100, Sudan 22/100, 28/100, Gabon 29/100, Niger 32/100, Burkina Faso 42/100, Sierra Leone 34/100, Rwanda 51/100, Sao Tome and Principe 45/100. The situation is mostly the same across the continent.

Weak Political Institutions

A weak political institution typically refers to a governmental or administrative structure that cannot perform its functions effectively and unfettered. This weakness can manifest in various ways, including a lack of resources, corruption, inadequate legal frameworks, poor enforcement mechanisms, lack of institutional independence, emasculating influence over institutions by political leadership, and ineffective decision-making processes. African states are bedeviled with weak institutions, which accounts for one of the reasons they are not able to neutralize the power tendencies of unscrupulous rulers and overcome the challenges of development and corruption. This is because, before the advent of colonialism, Africa had strong political systems that guaranteed effective checks and balances that denied traditional rulers absolute powers. Such strong institutions were identified as the Oyo Empire, the Bini Kingdom, and the Ashanti Empire, among others. However, in modern times, establishing robust democratic institutions, such as independent judiciary, free media, and independent electoral institutions or umpires, has been challenging in many African countries. Hence, attaining political leadership through fraudulent means such as bribery, voter intimidation, and electoral violence confirms weak

electoral institutions and processes in many African countries (Obasesam & Iwara, 2021). However, common factors identified to contribute to weak political institutions in Africa include:

Colonial Legacy: Many African countries have a history of colonization, during which European powers imposed artificial borders, disrupted existing social structures, and created governance systems that did not necessarily align with the indigenous culture and history of Africans. Therefore, the legacy of colonialism has had debilitating effects on the modern governance structures and political institutions that were bequeathed to Africa in the post-colonial era. Also, the colonial origin of the African military gave them a false sense of superiority. As earlier mentioned, the military during the colonial era was an instrument of domination and oppression created by the colonial administration to achieve their exploitation agenda in the colonies. The orientation was to make these native recruits perceive themselves as superior to their native kinsmen, whom they harassed and forced to do the bidding of the colonial administration. In the post-colonial era, the colonial orientation became a dominant factor in civil-military relations across Africa. The superiority complex propels the military to want to seize power at the slightest opportunity with the mentality that they are better at the job.

Imposition of exogenous political system: Related to the colonial legacy is the imposition of a foreign political system on Africa at the inception of colonialism. Before colonialism, Africa had a political system with strong and resilient institutions that were too strong for a ruler to undermine for self-interest. Many modern African leaders are not familiar with the foreign mode or concept of democracy and being made to jettison the African system largely contributes to the poor way they operate it. Another factor connected to this is a foreign religion, which gives room for grace and mercy, unlike traditional religion, which meets instant judgment on offenders. For instance, the Yoruba traditional system of administration during pre-colonial times recognized the place of the gods and severe punishment or repercussion of any maladministration on his part and would not dare the consequence. Also, the structure of the traditional system allowed for checks and balances whereby the council of chiefs and the people could call the king to order or force him to commit suicide, *i.e.*, Alaafin of Oyo who can be forced to commit suicide by his council of chiefs, in case of any grievous offense.

Corruption: Corruption is a pervasive issue in many African countries that undermines political institutions' effectiveness. Corrupt practices, such as bribery, embezzlement, and resource diversion from public treasury, breach services and erode public trust in government institutions. African political elites view their occupation of political posts as a window to amass stupendous wealth at the expense of their people, the majority of whom live below the poverty line. They devise various means to exploit the people by creating agencies with false claims to alleviate poverty and suffering of the people with dubious intentions. All these are perpetrated with impunity and with no iota of accountability.

Consequently, the process of dispensing public goods is compromised, which leads to the weakness of the institutions responsible for it. Many of the anti-graft agencies created to fight corruption have themselves become corrupted. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria is 20 years old and has not had less than seven (7) chairpersons since it was commissioned in April 2003. Five out of these chairpersons have been accused of corruption and subjected to trials in the law court. The story is not different from that of its sister agency, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Corruption has become synonymous with African leaders from East to West and from North to South. Apart from those countries that recently experienced coup d'état, many Presidents of African states have appeared in the news for corruption allegations and trials since they gained independence. For instance, Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo D.R., Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Charles Taylor of Liberia, and Jacob Zuma of South Africa, to mention a few. Some of them were reported to have become richer than their country. The irony of the matter is that many of them seized power by coup d'état with the excuse that the civilian regimes they forced out of governance were corrupt. They become more corrupt and unaccountable since the military regime rules by decree and not by the constitution. The other arms of government are completely paralyzed. Some also transmuted to civilian rulers by the power of the gun to retain power. Many were eventually chased or forced out to asylum and made to face war crimes.

Weak Rule of Law: The rule of law is crucial for the functioning of political institutions. In many African states, there are challenges in implementing and enforcing laws consistently, leading to a lack of accountability and a perception that political elites are above the law. There is usually a lack of separation of power among the arms of government, eroding the political system and requiring oversight functions for quality performance. The judiciary and legislative

arms become tools in the hands of the executive instead of providing checks and balances for the system according to the constitutional dictates. This factor promotes a poor governance system, leading to poor leadership capability, and many African states are dominated by individuals who gain power through nepotism rather than competence (Beaumont, 2021).

Moreover, they continue to manipulate the system to retain power by further weakening the institutions involved in the process. For example, in Nigeria, many people often decline to participate in elections mainly because they perceive that the Independent Electoral Commission, the judiciary, and security agencies have failed severally to enable credible elections. This trend is also common across Africa as political leaders continue manipulating elections to retain power. Of particular reference are Niger, Gabon, Sudan, Mali, Cameroon, and Togo, some of which just experienced military takeover. Therefore, weak democratic institutions emanating from the poor observance of the rule of law are essential reasons for military intervention in African politics, contributing to failed or fragile African states.

As confirmation that weak political institutions are a major political problem in Africa, Barack Obama, former United States President, advised African leaders in 2009 in Ghana to strive to build strong institutions rather than strong rulers because strong institutions are the bedrock and pillars of democracy and good governance. This shows that weak institutions are a bane to development in Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite decades of practice of democracy in Africa and its attendant benefits, it is evident that democracy has failed to achieve its expected gains. The recent resurgence of military coups in some African countries affirms this position. However, the factors that caused this development are noticeable in many African countries, suggesting that their militaries can also strike. An attempt has been made in this paper to unravel and analyze the disposing factors. Sequel to the identified causal factors and in order to promote an enduring democracy in Africa, it is recommended that African leaders should dutifully comply with the tenets of democracy and, in the same breath, demonstrate good governance. In addition, military rule should not be encouraged under any guise by the people of Africa themselves but rather become more active in their democratic participation to ensure strong democratic institutions that can compel whoever

is at the helm of governmental affairs to comply with democratic tenets. Furthermore, it is recommended that international organizations like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should act decisively against any African leader seen to be attempting to prolong his stay in power through such means as manipulating elections or amending the constitution (Constitutional coup). Lastly, African political elites in various countries should endeavor to manage their political systems in purposeful and people-oriented ways that would make military adventurism into the political space odious and unwelcome to their people.

These recommendations are apt because military rule is not the best alternative to democratic government. From the benefits of hindsight, while they are often initially welcomed and eulogized on coming to power, their scorecards often show failure and guilt of the allegations they lauder as justification for their unconstitutional breach. Besides, military regimes are often characterized by political repression, draconian degrees, denial of peoples' fundamental rights, gagging of the press, disrespect to the judiciary, military brutality of innocent citizens, disregard for the rule of law, and poor management of the economy, thereby perpetuating poverty. Conclusively, the military form of government is not a suitable alternative to civil or democratic rule.

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