



Critical Assessment of Military Interventions in Governance in West Africa: Identifying the Root Causes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores critical factors of military interventions in Governance in West Africa. The study uses case studies research design and interviews as a method of data collection to examine critical factors that cause military interventions in governance in West Africa. The findings show a lack of democratic governance and unemployment as factors responsible for Military intervention in Governance in West Africa. Consequently, the study found that Military coups continue to be on the rise in West Africa with the sub-region witnessing 5 successful coups from 2020 -2023. While the study acknowledges the significant rise of military intervention in governance in West Africa, the study in contrast found that military intervention does not necessarily provide any sustainable alternative for democratic governance and development in West Africa. The study concludes that military intervention in governance leads to further underdevelopment in West Africa and negates the democratic values of multiparty democracy and periodic elections. The study recommends strengthening of principles of democratic governance and enhancing economic opportunities for its citizenry as a means to control incising military intervention in West African governance.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, Military Coups D'Etat/Military Intervention,

I. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the root causes of military intervention in governance in West Africa; which in the context of this study also refers to military coups d'état. The Article also scrutinizes the implications of military interventions in governance on the development of West Africa. Venn (1986) contends that in post-independent Africa, the army played an insignificant role in politics. He argues that the army in post-independent Africa was to defend against external attack and maintain internal peace and order. According to Venn, only a few countries in Africa gained independence with the help of the army. Afolabi, (2009) also agrees with Venn that the involvement of the army in governance was due to several factors, including the transfer of power to inexperienced hands, both in the army and in the political arena. Military coups took place in Africa as early as 1952, when the late Colonel Nasser and other officers toppled the Egyptian monarchy. He noted that the first coup in West Africa occurred in Togo in 1963 when the army seized control and assassinated the Head of State, President Sylvanus Olympio. Recently, there has been an upsurge in coups in Africa, the latest being the Republic of Gabon. Pye (1966) argues that the military was the most modern organization in developing countries because it had technical training and a rigid organization. However, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the military began to intervene in governance in Africa because of the lack of democratic governance and economic opportunities.

Scholars have agreed that the military intervention in governance in Africa is based on the failure of the African states to ensure democratic governance and provide economic opportunities for the citizens. The African Union in the Agenda 2063 confirms that the root cause of military intervention in governance in Africa is due to bad governance and lack of economic opportunities for citizens. AU through the Agenda 2063 promised to work with African governments and the Regional Economic groups to strengthen democratic governance and widen economic choices for the African people through fostering regional cooperation and trade. The African Union adopted a series of frameworks to respond to military interventions in governance and other forms of unconstitutional change of government. AU relies on the Constitutive Act, the Peace and Security Protocol, the Lome Declaration, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Good Governance. These instruments provide a response mechanism for the African Union following a military intervention in governance in any African Country. Scholars have argued that the majority of the military intervention in governance in Africa occurs in the Western part of Africa. Many of the reasons advanced by scholars for the rising military intervention in governance in West Africa are attributed to a failure in governance, the growing gap of social and economic inequality in the sub-region, and the influence of France's Neo-Colonialism in the sub-region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has

adopted a protocol on good governance and democracy principally to respond to the root causes of military intervention in governance in West Africa. The protocol obliges member states in West Africa to promote good governance and democracy and prohibits any significant changes in the Electoral laws of member states at least six months before the election. ECOWAS condemned coups and imposed sanctions as a means of deterrent. Despite the tough stance of ECOWAS against Military interventions in governance in West Africa, the rate of unconstitutional change of power remains high on the sub-region. Mushoriwa (2023) contends that from 2020 to 2023 the African continent has witnessed 8 successful military coups, six of these coups occurred in West Africa. The most recent was in Niger and Burkina Faso. The objective of this study is to understand the reasons for Military intervention in governance in West Africa and the implications for West Africa's Development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Military Intervention in Governance

African Development Bank (AfDB, 2012) contends that a military intervention in governance is a sudden often violent overthrow of a government by a small group of military, police, or security forces. AfDB argues that military interventions in governance result in the illegal replacement of the existing government personnel or constitutions and radically alter the state's fundamental social and economic policies. The African Union's Constitutive Act condemns unconstitutional changes of government. Article 3(g) obligates the AU to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, and good governance. According to Jibrin (2022) from the foiled attempt to overthrow Guinea Bissau's current president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, to Burkina Faso's successful coup, in which President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was deposed by an army led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba, West African States continue to be burdened by military coups on the sub-region. A military intervention in governance according to Webster (2024) is an illegal and sudden overthrow of a government by a group of military leaders. The intervention is usually carried out by a small group of people who have access to the military's resources, and their goal is to replace the existing government. According to it, it is successful if the coup leaders can establish their dominance and the incumbent government is unable to resist.

Thompson (2010) points that scholars have attempted to explain why military takeovers occur in civilian-led governments purporting to be democratic. His studies led to two schools of thought. According to him, the first group of scholars emphasized the state's socio-political environment. Scholars such as Thompson (1975) argue that military intervention in governance is most likely to occur in states lacking institutionalized political cultures, which also suffer economic hardship and social division. Other political Science Scholars such as Janowitz (1977) point to the patriotism, discipline, professionalism, and cohesion found at the heart of military service. He argues that these factors eventually compel soldiers to intervene in governance to rid their state of inept and corrupt civilian governments. The issue of justification for military interventions in governance in Africa has been a subject of debates and disagreements over time. Kieh and Agbese (2004) contend that the military's justifications for coups are anchored on the performance failures of the government that are the target of the coup. They stated that Military officers leading the coups usually depict themselves as responsible and altruistic patriots out to save the country and its constitution from the misrule of the ousted government.

2.2 Theories of Cultural Pluralism and Multipartyism

Jackman (1978) attributed the military interventions that took place in West Africa to three broad reasons, namely social mobilization or modernization; cultural pluralism; and political party systems and mass participation. He argues that social mobilization and dominant ethnic activism have destabilizing consequences for African countries. He argued that the multiplicity of political parties in Africa can be destabilizing while agreeing that single-party dominance also hurts post-independence governments in Africa. Jackman's conceptualization is that both multipartyism and the dominant ethnic politics in Africa contribute to Military involvement in governance. McGowan and Johnson (1984) disagree with Jackman, they argue that states with relatively dynamic economies that have maintained or restored some degree of political participation and political pluralism have experienced fewer military coups as opposed to states that restricted political participation. According to McGowan and Johnson (1984), lack of democratic governance and political accountability is attributed to the continuity of military intervention in governance in West Africa. Collier and Hoeffler (2007) argued that the military intervenes in governance mainly for reasons of personal greed; they argued that the military are being motivated by the hope to gain power and control over the state. They posited that in countries with a low coup risk, governments respond by reducing military spending, whereas in countries with a high coup risk, governments tend to increase military spending. Luckham

(1994) argued that the multiparty political systems inherited from colonialism provided fertile grounds for coups in Africa, Souaré (2007) differs with this theory. He argued that Nigeria and Niger West Africa's most affected by successful coups had very different colonial pasts. He noted that Cape Verde has been coup-free while Guinea-Bissau the other Portuguese colony in West Africa has experienced three successful coups. Souaré's argument is supported by the fact that Liberia and Ethiopia, which were never colonies, have both witnessed military coups.

2.3 The Theory of Neocolonialism

Zeigler (2021) argues that African leaders do not have political or economic independence. He noted that most coups in Africa are attributed to the influence of colonial masters on the continent. Nkrumah (1965), argues that Neocolonialism underlines both the transfer of political power from the European colonizers to African leaders and the persistence of foreign control of African economies. He claims that the essence of neocolonialism is the trapping of the sovereignty of African states by the imperialists. Nkrumah (1965) argues that Neocolonialism is visible in how former colonizers, have undermined Africa's political stability through coups. Langan (2018) argues that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), masterminded the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966 because they considered him the greatest threat to their interests. Chiwanza (2019) contends that France has been accused of being linked to the killing of at least 22 African presidents since 1963, including Burkina Faso's Thomas Sankara. Many African Scholars argue that given the longstanding link between foreign powers and insecurities in Africa, both local and foreign actors are considered to have a footprint in the current wave of military coups in West Africa. Melly (2021) posits that Mali's current military regime initiated a move to hire Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, which has been accused of serious human rights abuses in Africa. The critical question is whether the Russian mercenaries and other foreign groups were involved in the coup that toppled Mali's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in 2020. Langan (2018) contends that Neocolonialism helps to understand how both foreign and local actors come together to fuel military intervention in governance in Africa. Most West African States continue to depend heavily on external support, including military and economic aid, for their survival. Scholars of African studies argue that foreign powers find it relatively easy to fuel political and socioeconomic problems, including coups in Africa, whenever this will help advance their interests.

III. METHODS & MATERIALS

In this study, I used the qualitative research method and employed a case study as the research design. The selection of this design is based on the fact that it has been much-admired by many social science scholars as a dominant tool in the field of social science to study human phenomena. I selected a case study research design because it provided me the opportunity to explore multiple phenomena in the context of military intervention in Africa using a variety of data sources in Africa relating to Military intervention. The study also used in-depth interviews with a cross-section of 15 respondents in the Gambia from civil society, government, and security. The study also reviews journal articles and uses the descriptive method as the data analysis style.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Reasons for Military Intervention in Governance in West Africa

Table 1

Reasons for Military Intervention in Governance in West Africa

Question	Results	%
What do you think are the reasons for Military Intervention in Governance in West Africa?	Lack of democratic accountability	46%
	Lack of Inclusive Development	30%
	Change of Constitution by the civilian governments	15%
	Corruption & Nepotism of the government in power	9%

The results show that the lack of democratic accountability on the sub-region constitutes a major reason for the frequent military interventions in governance. The findings of the interview conducted for 15 respondents in the Gambia, one of the West African countries that witnessed military intervention in governance in 1994 show that 46% of the respondents opined that military intervention in governance in West Africa occurs because there is a general

lack of democratic accountability in West Africa. They noted that the rule of law is not respected in many parts of the sub-region. The findings show the reason for military intervention in governance in West Africa is that civilian leaders have often perpetuated themselves in power leaving no room for any meaningful democratic transition. The finding revealed that lack of democratic accountability constitutes one of the reasons for military intervention in West Africa.

The results also show that 30% of the respondents noted that military intervention in governance occurs because of the lack of inclusive development for the citizens. 9% of the respondents noted that nepotism in the governance sector is also attributed to the reasons for military intervention in governance while 15% attributed the cause of military interventions in governance to the unlawful changes of the constitution by the civilian leaders in power. These results are in line with the larger intellectual thinking on military intervention in governance in Africa. Charles's (2016) conceptualization of military intervention in governance in Africa is in line with the findings of this study. The literature on military intervention in governance claims that corruption, lack of transparency, and accountability in resource distribution are linked to military intervention in governance in Africa. The literature points out that African leaders allegedly focus on amassing wealth for themselves and their families. The reviews of the literature noted that the masses in Africa are deprived of their deserving share of the 'national cake'. The results of both the literature and the field data show that unemployment and lack of democratic governance on the continent create political instability in Africa which provides fertile grounds for military intervention in governance in West Africa.

4.1.2 Military Intervention in Governance in Africa Since 1950

Table 2

Military Intervention in Governance in Africa Since 1950

Attempted	Successful	Failed
214	106	108

Source: Powell and Thyne (2023)

The table shows that Africa accounted for the largest incidents of military intervention in governance with 214 attempted coups and 106 successful attempts. The result shows that out of the 54 African Countries, 45 have experienced coup attempts. With the exception of Senegal and Cape Verde, the 13 other countries of West Africa that formed ECOWAS have all experienced military intervention in governance.

4.1.3 Number of Successful Military Intervention in Governance in West Africa 2020-2023

Table 3

Number of Successful Military Intervention in Governance in West Africa 2020-2023

Countries	Year	Status
Niger	2023	Successful
Burkina Faso	2022	Successful
Mali	2020	Successful
Mali	2021	Successful
Guinea Conakry	2021	Successful

Source: Author Compilation from Literature

The table shows that 5 successful military interventions in governance in West Africa occurred in the space of three years from 2020-2023. The results from the field aligned with the larger Scholarship of reasons for military intervention in governance in West Africa. Asare-Nuamah (2023) reasons that the lack of democratic accountability on the continent accounts for the rising coups the sub-region is faced with. The findings from the respondents also revealed a need to relook into what is driving the wave of coups and how West African leaders and their citizens can chart a path for inclusive growth and development while sustaining democratic consolidation on the continent. The results from the literature and the field agreed that the concepts of governance and democracy have been poorly implemented in many West African countries without recourse to the contexts and realities of the sub-region over the years. Mwai's (2022) view corroborates with the view of the respondents in this study. The study shows that given the

local and foreign pressure to strengthen democracy, some West African leaders tend to assume that democracy is all about holding periodic elections. The findings revealed that elections in most of West Africa are pegged as the main feature of a democratic state irrespective of how they are conducted; the literature revealed that other crucial aspects of democracy and governance generally receive little attention. The findings revealed that some of the recent military interventions in governance in West Africa are greeted by jubilations by the masses showing how elections allegedly do not reflect the democratic will of the Citizens in some West African countries. The results show that the rule of law, inclusive participation of citizens in policies, and the advancement of the people's well-being and human capital development are critical to eliminating military interventions in governance. The findings show that the absence of democratic governance in most West African states accounts for the continuity of military intervention in governance.

4.1.4 Implications of Military Interventions in Governance for West Africa's Development

Table 4

Implications of Military Interventions in Governance for West Africa's Development

Question	Results	%
What are the implications of military intervention in governance in West Africa?	Promotion of underdevelopment and inequality	25%
	Promotes Dictatorship and controlled citizen participation in governance	37%
	Promotes conflict and violence	19%
	Promotes financial crisis of the state	19%

The results show that 37% of the respondents noted that Military intervention in governance in West Africa promotes dictatorship and controlled citizen's participation in governance. 25% of the respondents noted that military rule further perpetuates underdevelopment in West Africa. 19% claim that military intervention in governance in West Africa promotes conflicts and financial crises of states on the sub-region. The study found that military intervention does not provide any meaningful change in the development paradigm for West Africa. The results show that the military themselves are corrupt. The findings show that they come to power under the pretext of fighting corruption but end up being more corrupt and draconian than the ones they overthrow. The finding shows that in most of the countries where the military intervened in governance, they often promised to rid the country of corruption and hand over power soonest. Yet the findings show that the contrary often occurs and they stay in power for decades. The findings show that Yaya Jammeh who overthrew the government of President Jawara in 1994 in the Gambia, promised to rid the country of corruption and go back to barracks after six months but the study found out that he stayed in power for 22 years causing gross human rights violations and amassing wealth for himself.

The Literature also shows that Military interventions in governance in West Africa are affecting the financial strength of the African Union for Africa's development. The findings from the literature revealed that military interventions in governance have serious implications for the financial sustainability of West Africa. The findings show that the African Union provides for a compulsory tax on goods imported into a member state from a non-member state. The finding shows that the member states contribution is projected to finance 100% of the AU operational budget. The findings revealed that as of 2022 nonpayment of taxes of countries under AU sanctions constraints development programs of the AU for Africa. The findings show that from 2020 to 2022, Mali, Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Conakry have all failed to contribute their tax obligations to the AU the non-contribution of these States reduced the statutory contributions to the AU budget. Military interventions in governance in West Africa undermine the principles of good governance, democracy, and constitutionality. It has a ripple effect, destabilizing the entire sub-region and making it more difficult to achieve peace and development. To control Military intervention in the governance in West Africa requires forward thinking and sound policies. The AU should foster social cohesion and cooperation among individual states. The AU and ECOWAS should strengthen democratic governance and strong institutions because a military takeover in one country can have a spillover effect on the sub-region.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Despite the efforts by the AU and ECOWAS, military intervention in governance in West Africa is on the rise. To put an end to this requires pragmatism by States, the AU and ECOWAS. The AU's principle of non-indifference and the ECOWAS protocol of Good Governance and Democracy should be enforced to the letter in



member states. The AU and ECOWAS should not only resort to cohesive diplomacy on countries that experience Military intervention in governance they should further limit them to all opportunities and development programs of the Unions and its partners until such time that they resort to constitutional order. To ensure the effectiveness of this approach on member states, the AU and ECOWAS should institute the same toughness as they would when militaries intervene in governance in Africa to any civilian who perpetuates themselves in power through alteration or changes in their national constitutions.

5.2 Recommendations

Greater coordination is required by the AU, ECOWAS, and states in West Africa to address Unemployment and bad governance which are major causes of military intervention in governance in West Africa. The African Union and ECOWAS should institute early warning systems in countries in West Africa that will ensure that any likelihood of military intervention in governance is addressed on time. Countries in West Africa will need to embrace citizen-led development and provide a sustainable path for national development and job creation for the youth and women. States in West Africa will also need to introduce term limits in their national constitutions that will prevent anyone from perpetuating themselves in power.

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