

Democracy and Resurgence of Military Governance in Africa: Burkina in Prospect

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Abstract

Democracy is a system of government that is people centric. It exists to bring succor to the masses, give hope to the poor and use it dividends for the growth and development of the people. It has succeeded in countries like the United States and since Africa countries begin practicing it to date; the progression of this well praised democracy is seemingly low. The authors interrogates the resurgence of military governance in Africa in light of failure of government over the years to promote even development and grow human capacity in Africa using Burkina Faso as a current case. The paper relied on the use of secondary method of data collection. Good governance theory was adopted to analyze the thought. The scholars suggest that since the country of Burkina Faso has advanced under military leadership, bad economy among others led to the coup. It was suggested that, for military resurgence in Africa to end, all democratic states leaders must be intentional and deliberate in providing real and true leadership so they can build hope, faith and trust in the hearts of the masses to believe in democracy rather than focusing on military government like Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have done.

Keywords: Democracy, Resurgence, Military, Governance and Burkina Faso

Introduction

Democracy remain the best form of government any state can practice if it principles and tenets are well or fully implemented to transform the state, develop the nation and help the citizens achieve their dreams and aspirations with much ease (Morlino, 2004). The current challenge with Africa democracy is lack of seriousness of the leaders to its true implementations of its tenets which has attracted the military juntas again into power with the policy of stabilizing the states they occupy. In Burkina Faso currently, there is a popular saying in the streets about the president Ibrahim Traore that says, "*he the leader of the country did not come like others to steal the money of the country or loot it dry like others before him have done, but he come to work and develop the country*". The saying is evident in the visible and transformational leadership of the military leader.

The people of Burkina Faso clean and kiss the picture of the president in the streets. He was at the inauguration of current Ghana president; he got the highest ovation and stole the show in the midst of his democracy practicing Africa leaders and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria who doubled as ECOWAS chairman. Why did Ghanaians and other Africans choose to hail a military dictator over the democratic leaders? Certainly, there must be reason (s) for such action.

As Traore lead Burkina Faso, many Africans study him as a model for good governance due to his outright simplicity and commitment to the transformation of his country. The military leader of one of the Sahel states is seen by many Burkina babes as a unique and inspirational leader whose heartbeat reflect his good thoughts for the growth and development of the state he is leading, he is not stopping there but extending his goodwill in leadership to other Africa states as Mali and Niger (shabbier & khan, 2025).

Democracy in Africa over the years have been greeted with obnoxious activities like, mass looting, insensitivities of leaders towards the plights and needs of the people, general wellbeing of Africans are neglected and elites kept getting wealthiest in the midst of abject lack and wants facing the people, chaos and conflict, seat tightness of leaders, endless crisis, hyper indebtedness, poverty, inequality, unemployment, complete underdevelopment, high reliance on the global north or the west on policies, program, directions and leadership prospects, domination of minority ethnicities and tribes (Baker, 2000).

Furthermore, lack of clear ideologies, rigging of elections, godfatherism, vote buying, vote selling, corruption and corrupt tendencies, illiteracy of the people, poor infrastructures, lack of blueprint for transformational growth, weak political systems, retrogressive leadership styles except for very few countries, poor electoral system, multiple currencies usage amounting to 33 out of the 54 countries in Africa which shows divisiveness, absence of balance trade and progressive trade system, deadly mass migrations of Africans through the seas to Europe in search of greener pastures due to absence of good governance, lack of value adding to the abundant mineral resources.

Years after most African states like Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, among others adopt democracy. There is really nothing transformational about the citizens and country's wellbeing locally, nationally and internationally. Pitiabile is country like Rwanda that has done extremely well under a semi dictatorial ruler-ship (Abdou, 2015). With the positive lessons coming from the Sahel landlocked country of Burkina Faso, it will not be surprising to envisage or predict that many countries if caution of retrogressive leadership style instead of progressive leadership moves is not taken in earnest, to stabilize Africa leadership prowess, most African state maybe considering military leadership instead of wallowing in the muddy waters of democracy that leads to underdevelopment.

Conceptual Clarification of Some Terminologies

In a critical discourse of this nature, it is very imperative to conceptualize some major key concepts in relations to the topic under review. Among these concepts include, democracy, resurgence and military governance respectively.

Democracy

Democracy which started in Ancient Greek city state Anthem was derived from the Greek words "Demos" meaning "people" and "Kratos" implying "rule". Thus when put together, democracy in Ancient Greek means "rule by the people (Cambridge Encyclopaedia, 1990). Democracy is not for instance, rule by the elite, even when representatives elected by popular suffrage have formed part of the political elite. Democracy is not essentially rule by elected representatives. Democracy is rather essentially rule by the representatives of the people. Central

to the concept and practice of democracy therefore, are the wishes and the will of the people. Thus, democracy in the people's reckoning means improvement in their circumstances. Awotokun (2004) for instance has contended as follows: By democracy I do not mean something as vague as 'the rule of the people' or 'the rule of the majority'; but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, that is, the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permits public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers. Laski (2008) posits that the democratic form of government is doubtless, a final form of political organization, in the sense that men who have once tasted power will not without conflict, want to surrender it. The issue of whom the power would have been surrendered to, however remains outstanding. He further refers to the primacy of the people in the democratic concept.

Governance

The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Simply put "governance" means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government that is under discussion. In rural areas, for example, other actors may include influential land lords, associations of peasant farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions political parties, the military, paramilitary and democratic governance respectively.

Military Governance

The Cambridge dictionary refers to military governance or rule as involves soldiers occupying positions of government and exercising authority and influence in the state. Governance is seen as the physical and abstract activities of the government that bring good growth to the state and dividends to the citizens. Military governance on the other hand simply means the rulership or leadership carried in a state under the watch of the military leaders or dictator. Recent examples of such are found in countries like Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso which represent the state under review in this paper.

Resurgence

According to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary (2025), It mean an increase or revival after a period of little activity, popularity or occurrence. This refers to the act of resurfacing of something that has disappeared or faded away previously. In the past, military rule was outdated in the 54 countries in Africa. Probably, due to failure of democratic leadership to develop the continent through it policies and program, the military leaders are back taking over powers forcefully from the elected but not active leaders under democratic governance.

Research Methods

In order to describe the connection between democracy and resurgence of military governance in Africa, the researchers used a descriptive study methodology. The study materials were generated using secondary sources, such as books, journals, and other online resources that were

published and pertinent at the time relevance to the issues of transformational governance in Burkina Faso and reflect lack of national growth in most democracy practicing states in Africa. The materials generated were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Good Governance theory as propounded by the World Bank is adopted as framework for analysis in relations to issues of resurgence of military rulership ravaging Africa despite the availability of democracy in the continent. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), section 14(1), stipulates that Nigeria is a state based on the principle of democracy and social justice. Again, it stipulates that the primary purpose of government should be the security and welfare of Nigerians in order to guarantee the majority of Nigerians decent living standards which any political leadership that derives its mandate from the people ought to subscribe and preserve. Therefore, for there to be good governance in Nigeria or any African state the following Nine (9) principles or items must be readily tangible, visible and real for the good and benefits of the citizens; Proper participation, rule of law, strategic vision, transparency, consensus, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and real accountability.

Governance theories have to do with the various perspectives of governance and how they evolve. Good governance theory develops from a set of principles or policies first introduced by the World Bank in relating with and in assisting developing or third world countries. The World Bank usually requires good governance practice, among others, as a condition from the developing countries. Good governance is about how the public sector in third world countries can be developed. It has been realized that a modern form of government is not just only about efficiency, that governing is also about accountability between the state and its citizens (Bjork and Johansson, 2001). In sum, the theory of good governance is created to reflect all the principles enunciated above and many more according to Minogue, Polidano and Hulme (1998).

In view of the foregoing and in line with the World Bank principles and policy interventions in third world countries, good governance involves an efficient public service, an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts and responsible administration of public funds. Other requirements for good governance include an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government and a pluralistic institutional structure. Apart from the above, good governance is predicated on three segments of the society which have direct effect on governance as highlighted. The type of political regime, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of the economic and social resources with a view to development, and the capacity of governments to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented (World Bank, 1992).

From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Very few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality. It is evidentially clear that for democracy to be acceptable in Africa completely against the current military rule resurgence in the Sahel region. Countries practicing democracy must be honest in implementing it core

components that will bring development to the people and growth to the nation when military rule will not be fancy by Africans both at home and in diaspora.

Democracy in Africa

According to Coulibaly and Traore (2017), the question of democracy in Africa is a debate that divides very schematically political scientists because, it is when it comes to the identification of the beginning of democratization in the continent that the description of the level of advancement in its practice or even the nature of democracy that the differences arise. The practice of democracy in the Africa's context in their views ranges from misunderstanding, chaos, violence, conflicts, problem of adaptation and multi political parties. These realities are the common features of Africa democratic expedition which contributed to the resurgence of military rule in the three Sahel states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, most recently, the state of emergency declared by Nigeria's president in Rivers state where military is in control now. Thirty-five (35) states and FCT are having civilian elected and appointed leaders while one state out of the thirty-six (36) states is under military governance in March, 2025.

In the view of Kingsley (2016), the solution to Africa problems are in two fold, good governance and prosperous population will solve all its current and future challenges. The worry now is, has Africa leaders under democracy show good faith over the years to have decent and educated population and have they improved on the area of good governance. These same critical issues contributed to the resurgence of military rule in some parts of Africa since the democratically elected leaders are playing or sleeping instead of solving Africa's endless problems as their counterparts in other states are doing. Some of them are even calling on military to take over their states on their own volition.

According to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria, "democracy in Africa is failing, he noted that democracy currently practiced in Nigeria and Africa has failed to meet the need of the people. Western model of democracy does not align with African values and needs, and democracy in Africa has failed because it is not African. He refers to current democracy as government by the few, for the few against the larger number of the people because their interest is not put into consideration" (2025). This is another reason why states practicing democracy in Africa must wake up and put the tenets of democracy to the fore in earnest so they can discredit military resurgence completely in the continent.

Burkina Faso Two Years of Military Governance

The transmogrification of Burkina Faso in the past twenty-four (24) months of President Ibrahim Traore's magnanimous leadership is extremely evidential in all ramifications. He has rebranded the image of the nation and made Burkina babes globally to be proud of their country and have real and true renewed hope in the system and institutions of their state. His national interest policy has given clear good direction to his foreign policy decision of not taking from the west or relying on the global north as the norm has been in the past especially from his predecessors. The leader of the country instead of becoming a strong individual as the traditional military dictators in Africa are, he decided to rather build strong institutions that will benefit his people and make posterity to be kind to him as a remarkable leader. The following are the things he has achieved visibly, tangibly, feelably and touchably as commander in chief of Burkina Faso, (AIB Media, 2025).

1. Burkina Faso's GDP grew from about \$18.8 billion to \$22.1 billion. That is an additional growth of \$4 billion without borrowing or worshipping the west.
2. The military leader has rejected loans from international monetary fund (IMF) and the World Bank stating that Africa doesn't need the loans and that Africa doesn't need the World Bank, IMF, Europe or America to survive.
3. He reduced the salaries of ministers and parliamentarians by 30% and increased that of the civil servants by 50%. While country like Nigeria failed to do same or do something similar to help the civil servants.
4. The president have cleared or paid off all loans he inherited accumulated by his predecessors over the years. Instead of endangering the country deeper in debt, he rather salvages it from debt.
5. The leader of the country has taken agricultural product processing seriously by establishing two mega tomato processing plants, the first in the country and one of the best in West Africa sub region.
6. The military leader in 2023 inaugurated a state-of-the-art gold mine to enhance local processing of gold in the country. He stopped the export of unprocessed gold to Europe.
7. He built additional cotton processing plant in the country to augment the processing of cotton in the country and create job opportunities to citizens.
8. The construction and opening of the first ever national support centre for Artisanal cotton processing.
9. He banned the wearing of British legal wigs and gown in local courts and replaced it with traditionally made gown in Burkina Faso.
10. He has distributed over 400 tractors to improved agriculture in the country. He also gave farmers 239 tillers, 710 pumps, and 714 motorcycles to boost production and support rural stakeholders to farm with much ease. The president also provides seedlings or seed to farmers.
11. Burkina Faso has increased in its tomato product from the previous 315,000 metric tons in 2022 to current 360,000 metric tons in 2024. This is a huge feat.
12. To salvage the image of the military to be self-reliance, he banned French military operations in the country. This has put an end to over reliance on foreign military. He also expelled all French troops whose boots are on the ground in his country. Again, the leader Traore has invested million dollars in acquiring heavy military arsenal for the armed force ordering them to prepare ahead for war because we live a world revolving around conflict.
13. The leader of the country banned French media in Burkina Faso to give the media of the country right to grow and become more effective and efficient.
14. Road construction in the rural to link to urban areas is currently ongoing.
15. Burkina Faso is the third largest producer of onions in West Africa, and second largest exporter in the region producing 400.000 tons and it became the 9th largest producer in Africa soonest.
16. After about 10 years violence jihadist attack in the country that has claimed over 26,000 lives, the military leader is set to form a new rapid response forces, comprising of 14,000 soldiers and sounds of civilian support personnel top confront the deadly jihadist headlong to end or curtailed their operation.

Dimensional Lessons on Military Resurgence

The worst of democratic leadership is the best of military rule. Supporting military takeover in Africa is not the intension or focal of this paper from the lessons learnt so far on what the military ruler is doing in Burkina Faso, the thought and postulation of Alexander Pope comes to mind “for forms of government let fools contend for what is best administer is best”, (Shan, 2016). The democratic leaders mustn’t give Africans chance, room or leverage to begin to us the availability of good leadership in Burkina Faso to begin to look towards military governance as a better option against democracy which clearly reflects the government with the mandate and orientation of the masses or citizens. Relating this discuss to what is happening in the Federal Republic of Nigeria where the President under democratic leadership just brought the military to takeover Rivers state has given credence and acceptance to the popular quotes by Nigeria’s past military dictators that stated thus; “when civilians falter, only soldiers can restore order”. In Burkina Faso, the civilian administration actually falter and Ibrahim Traore took over power.

It is clear that for democracy to soar in Africa and other parts of the globe, those leading the democratic states must take their roles and responsibilities very seriously to make military governance less attractive. The civilian administration or democratic leaders must stop inviting the military to governed as the case is in Rivers state Nigeria where the president willingly seek the services of the military on issues he is capable to handle with utmost presidential powers and diplomacy. With the current development in Nigeria where the president brought in men in uniform to governed the state of Rivers, can we gladly hold the opinion that the states “the worst of democratic rule is the best of military rule?”, Chabal, P. (1998).

Projection for the Future of Africa via Diminishing lens of Africa Democracy

The civilian administrations in Africa must desist from making military rule attractive by their actions and inactions. Actions through direct invite of the military by the democratic elected leaders to takeover states or regions under conflict as the president of Nigeria did on 18th of March 2025. Inaction by failing to bring good governance top the people through proper development of the state and bringing dividends of democracy to the citizens hence, making the military to get a chance to step in to bring order and development to state when the civilian falter.

To uphold, strengthened and entrenched democracy in West Africa, Africa and the globe in general, the elected leaders must learn to work for the citizens, stop looting the commonwealth of the nation, bring lasting development and economic growth to the state and make citizens have faith in democracy through proper, free, fair, credible and acceptable elections. Then democracy will take root and have solid foundation in the continent without any consideration for military takeover or state of emergency in the continent.

The African Action Congress (AAC) party in Nigeria wrote that Mali, Burkina Faso will be laughing at spineless ECOWAS Chair Tinubu declaring ‘military rule’ in Rivers state (Sahara reporter, 2025). This expression further call for democratic leaders to lead by example and stop making military governance to look attractive in any possible way as the president has showcased it in Rivers state Nigeria.

Conclusion

The worst of democracy is said to be the best of military rule. Recently, democracy in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa seems more authoritative than military government. There is need for the handlers of democracy to make democratic expedition, journey or sojourn an admirable ventures across Africa. Citizens must be respected, rule of laws must be followed, human rights must be followed in at all times, constitution and constitutionalism processes must be abided to. Seat-tightness or seat-tight syndrome must end.

ECOWAS states must keep showing good examples to states under military rules to make them not to take advantage of disagreements between them to remain adamant in transitioning to democratic governance.

The future of democracy is in the hands of democratic states and the end of military governance in Africa is also in the hands of democratic states because, their good examples extols and entrenched democracy in Africa and their inactions or negative actions attract or invites military as the case is in the three Sahel states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger respectively.

Recommendations

- i. Democratic states should practice the real tenets of democracy as expound by the Greeks in the ancient city states.
- ii. Democratic states in Africa must consciously, intentionally and deliberately bring dividends of democracy to their citizens to make military governance none attractable in all fronts and ramifications.
- iii. ECOWAS and AU should be strengthened to provide better leadership in Africa to limit the popularity of Alliance for the Sahel States (AES) with their headquarters in Niger.
- iv. Democratic states must be united in all fronts better than the Alliance of the Sahel states in other to foster unity within them and make democracy saleable in the continents.
- v. Democratic leaders must end corruption and make looting of public funds a history in other to make the citizens see the light in democracy and view it as the best form of government it is.
- vi. Free, fair, credible, transparent and acceptable elections should be conducted across all democratic states in all sense of fairness to limit military intervention in democracy due to undemocratic elections.
- vii. Democratic states must end all forms of conflicts, chaos and insecurity ravaging their states in other not to attract the military into politics.
- viii. Cutting alliance from colonial masters like Spain (Hispanophone), France (francophone), Portuguese (Lusophony) and British (Anglophone) should be a major target of democratic states in other not to give the military boys or junta from thinking or attempting taking over power.
- ix. Countries as Nigeria heading ECOWAS leadership should stop inviting military into it politics in other not to make the military feel that the saying “when civilians falter, the military come in to restore order” gain popularity.
- x. Democratic states like Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya etc. must show good big brother examples to smaller states practicing democracy in other to give them good sense of direction or feel wanted.

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