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# MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*The post-independence period in the West African countries, specifically the late 1950s upward, experienced serial military coups and counter coups. This development may not be unrelated with the self-seeking nature of the politicians; they were power hungry and ambitious, thus, were indicted in military coups and counter-coups. Since the army was ill-equipped and inexperienced in governance, the sub-region has been generally backward. The main thrust of this paper is to examine the rise and development of military coups in West Africa especially with a view to determining the highs and lows of military coups and how they affected political stability or otherwise in Nigeria. This is evident in the recent coup that occurred in Niger Republic on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 2023. Secondary sources were relied upon; and a historical methodology was adopted. Findings indicate that the failure of government in a country is largely responsible for military coup; the incidence of military coup in one country is likely to instigate military coup in neighbouring countries. This paper further argues that the Niger coup came in the wake of recent coups in nearby countries such as Guinea, Mali and Sudan.*

**Keywords:** *Military Coup, Insecurity, Regional Integration.*

## INTRODUCTION

With the attainment of independence by West African countries in the 1950s and 1960s, new hopes swept through West Africa as nation after nation attained self-government. This excitement however, was not to last long as so many West African countries were to later find out. The post-independence era found many pledging West African countries groping in the dark for stability and direction. Soon, many governments found out that the new state of nationhood meant more than just the creation of a national flag, the composition of a national anthem and the election of a President. The military which the nationalist politicians had grown to despise and mistrust during the pre-independence era had to be molded and blended into the new national image.<sup>1</sup>

The newly independent West African Nations took over what was essentially colonial armies. In the majority of the cases, the army was usually small and ill-equipped. This obviously called for instituting visible changes to reflect a more national character. However, as the military was struggling to attain a national character, in order to gain national acceptance, the politicians were becoming more self-seeking, power hungry and ambitious. Others were out experimenting on new and foreign ideologies in the name of African Socialism.<sup>2</sup> Some of these governments started openly courting the Eastern bloc for advice and guidance. Nepotism, corruption, unemployment and crime rates were on the increase. These were the kind of situations to be found in Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea and other West African countries when their governments fell to the military.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1963, disgruntled soldiers assassinated Sylvannes Olympio, President of the Republic of Togo, and set up a civilian government under Nicholas Grunitzky. The shock wave of this event had not receded before the military supplanted the civilian government in Congo-Brazzaville in August 1963 and that in Dahomey two months later. The governments of Upper Volta, Nigeria and Ghana were toppled in quick successions by the military in early 1966.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, military coups have occurred so frequently in West Africa, that they have lost their capacity to shock. The recent coup in Niger republic on July 26, 2023, in which the country's presidential guard detained President Mohammed Bazoun, and the presidential guard commander, General Abdourahmane Tchiani proclaimed himself the leader of a new military Junta is the latest of such many coups in West Africa.

The West African sub-region comprises of sixteen countries, and has had the highest rate of coup activities in Africa. The sub-region alone has experienced over a hundred military coups, which is about half of all reported coups in Africa.<sup>5</sup> The Federal Republic of Nigeria makes nearly half of the population of West Africa.

The Atlantic Ocean forms the western and southern borders of the region while the northern border is the Sahara Desert. The eastern border runs from Mount Cameroun to Lake

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<sup>1</sup>Chidume, C.G. *Military Coups in West Africa: The African Phenomenon that is Self-inflicted*. Int'l Affairs and Global Strategy, [www.jiste.org](http://www.jiste.org)

<sup>2</sup>Chidume, C.G. *Military Coups in West Africa: The African Phenomenon that is Self-inflicted*. Int'l Affairs and Global Strategy, [www.jiste.org](http://www.jiste.org)

<sup>3</sup>Chidume, C.G. *Military Coups in West Africa: The African Phenomenon that is Self-inflicted*. Int'l Affairs and Global Strategy, [www.jiste.org](http://www.jiste.org)

<sup>4</sup>William, T. *Government and Politics in Africa*, London: MacMillan, 1984, P.152

<sup>5</sup>Source, I.K. *Civil Wars and Coups D'etats in West Africa*, Lanham, M.D: University Press, 2006, P.96

Chad.<sup>6</sup>Cultural boundaries are reflected on the modern borders between contemporary West African nations, cutting across ethnic and cultural lines, often dividing single ethnic groups between two or more countries. However, the birth of discrete borders between these countries rest with the former colonial masters of West Africa, namely Britain, France, Portugal and Germany.<sup>7</sup>

### **Coup d'état and its Typology**

According to Ben Barks, a coup d'état is a sudden, often violent overthrow of a government by a small group of military, police or security forces. It is the violent or non-violent overthrow of an existing political regime by the military.<sup>8</sup> It results in the illegal replacement of the existing government personnel or constitutional relationships, and may radically alter the State's fundamental social and economic policies.

If the small group's struggle to depose the established government fails, (which generally takes no longer than a week, it is considered an attempted intervention or "coup attempt".<sup>9</sup> Another form of extra-legal military or para-military infiltration in political affairs is called "coup plot". In such a case, the population only finds out about it later on, from announcements by the legitimate government that a coup plot has been uncovered and prevented.<sup>10</sup>

Some coups are also referred to as "palace coups". These are usually non-violent coup d'état carried out by people who were already part of the group in power before the coup.<sup>11</sup> Military coups that are provoked by a nation's commanding officers are known as either "Veto" or "Gaurdian" coups d'état.<sup>12</sup> Veto coups are prompted by social changes that directly threaten the existence of the military and its allies. These are coups where the military intervenes in order to rescue the State from civilian mismanagement.<sup>13</sup>

### **Historical Development of Military Coups in West Africa**

In West Africa, there have been two categories of military intervention into politics. The first of the wave of military coups coincided with the first two decades of independence in the 1960's and 1970's when senior officers often masterminded military coups.<sup>14</sup> The second wave of military coups occurred in the 1980's and 1990's, and in contrast to the first wave, they were in many cases instigated and led by junior officers or non-commissioned officers (NCOs). These coups are called breakthrough coups or coups from below.<sup>15</sup> This second wave of coups was set in motion as a result of class polarization within the army and the broader society, resulting in class strikes particularly in the military due to poor salaries.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Jean-Marie C. Eyal. *Preparing for the Future of West Africa in the Year 2020*, Paris, OECD Publications, 1998

<sup>7</sup>Jean-Marie C. Eyal. *Preparing for the Future of West Africa in the Year 2020*, Paris, OECD Publications, 1998

<sup>8</sup><https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

<sup>9</sup>Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>10</sup>Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>11</sup>*American English Dictionary*

<sup>12</sup>Adekeye A. & Ismail, O.D. *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*, Lynne Rienne Publisher Inc. 2004, P.147 In: *Impact of Military Coups 15. D'etats on West Africa*, <https://www.amazon.com>

<sup>13</sup>Adekeye A. & Ismail, O.D. *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*, Lynne Rienne Publisher Inc. 2004, P.147 In: *Impact of Military Coups 15. D'etats on West Africa*, <https://www.amazon.com>

<sup>14</sup>Adekeye A. & Ismail, O.D. *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*,

<sup>15</sup>*ibid-*

<sup>16</sup>*ibid-*

The period between 1960 and 1970 and slightly beyond has generally been called the decade of coups in Africa. Once coups started in Africa, they became like a wild African bushfire. They spread through the entire sub-region at an alarmingly high speed. They went through the national borders as if these boundaries did not exist anymore.<sup>17</sup>

While a significant number of successful coups occurred in the immediate post-independence era, the 1970's and 1980's were marked by a plethora of both successful and failed coup attempts. The rise in the failure rate of coups during the 1970's and 1980's can be largely attributed to the fact that most African nations had been independent for considerable period of time. This allowed them to have established political systems in place, and so are able to successfully withstand military coup attempts.<sup>18</sup> The 1990's and 2000's on the other hand witnessed a decrease in the number of both successful and failed coups, with about half of African countries being coup free. This can be attributed to a number of reasons, ranging from foreign powers guaranteeing stability in some countries, to established regimes being equipped with measures of systematic legitimacy that discouraged praetorian assaults from the armed forces.<sup>19</sup>

### **Factors Responsible for Military Coups in West Africa**

One of the fundamental factors behind frequent military coups in West Africa according to Ohene, is a tolerance for military coups. Here, the West African regional group, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) bears some blame for the legacy of coups in the region. When ECOWAS was formed in 1975, the majority of its member States had military Heads of State, and a new coup leader was therefore warmly welcomed at meetings without anyone batting an eyelid. However, in recent times, ECOWAS has changed a lot, and has come out strong against the coups in the region.<sup>20</sup>

Another factor responsible for frequent coups in the region is that instability breeds instability. Duncan acknowledged, instability can be contagious and spread across borders. Examples are Mali and Cote d'Ivoire which share a common border. They experienced a spasm of violence when incumbent President, Laurent Gbagbo lost to Alassane Qattara and refused to step down.<sup>21</sup>

Also, the army can stage a coup because having control of the weaponry, it has the capacity for organized violence as was the case of Togo and Chad illustrated at the time when military interventions occurred. The size of the army, either absolutely or in relation to the civilian population is not normally a factor as was the case of the very small number of officers and men engaged in the Nigerian coup of January 1966. The absence of physical obstacles is usually an advantage for a small force.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, coups are usually undertaken by those who have operational command, such as battalion commanders. However, more senior officers may soon be brought in both to minimize the disruption to the army's internal command structure and to give respectability to

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<sup>17</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeger 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>18</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*,

<sup>19</sup> *ibid-*

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com> - why are there so many military coups in West Africa, retrieved June 4, 2021

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com> - why are there so many military coups in West Africa,

<sup>22</sup> *ibid-*

the regime. This happened in Ghana in February 1966 and Nigeria in both January and July 1966.<sup>23</sup>

There is also the fact that West African coups are typically army coups, the Ghanaian case of a counter coup in 1979 and a coup in 1981 led by an Air Force officer (Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings) did not break this pattern since soldiers were among the armed services personnel involved.<sup>24</sup>

However, some of the military coups during the early years of independence were inspired by ideological motivations. The desire to radically change the social base of their countries away from status-ridden oligarchies to embrace democracy and the rule of law induced some military leaders to intervene in political affairs. A notable example is Captain Thomas Sankara, who led a coup d'état in Burkina Faso in 1983 with the clear desire to establish a just reformed and prosperous society.<sup>25</sup>

The bipolar struggle between competing ideologies during the Cold War era heightened political tensions and scaled up military conflicts in the newly independent African States. Given the weak institutional and productive capacities of majority of West African countries at that time, the two major super powers (USA and USSR) were able to influence governments towards "Military Keynesianism" and its attributes of increased military spending.<sup>26</sup> As many West African leaders engaged in military adventures simply to divert attention away from failed domestic policies, the level of political conflicts escalated sharply.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, there is the psychological factor, that is, once the barriers which deters the military from intervening has been broken in one state, it may be broken in a neighbouring state. The military, having intervened once in a state, may be disposed to intervene again. Dahomey (now the Peoples Republic of Benin) which experienced six coups in less than Ten Years, is the prime example of this phenomenon.<sup>28</sup>

## Overview of Military Coups in Selected West African Countries

### Mali

The wave of democracy in West Africa in the 1990's and 2000's in places such as Mali, Benin, Ghana and Nigeria led to the perception that the military had relinquished its hold on West African politics to the civilians, and subjected itself to civilian control. However, events in some of these countries like Mali and also Chad have proved the very opposite as the military in these countries have re-emerged.<sup>29</sup>

The sudden overthrow of a democratically elected government in Mali in the spring of 2012 by a small group of military insurgents is symptomatic of the re-emerging pattern of coups d'état which have hit West Africa in recent years. In March 2012, after enjoying 20 years of constitutional democracy, Mali briefly fell into the control of a group of middle-ranking soldiers. The country at that time was tragically divided between the Tuareg and

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<sup>23</sup> William, T. *Government and Politics in Africa*, London: MacMillan, 1984, P.152

<sup>24</sup> William, T. *Government and Politics in Africa*,

<sup>25</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>26</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>27</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: *Military Coups in Nigeria*, Wikipedia

<sup>28</sup> William, T. *Government and Politics in Africa*, London: MacMillan, 1984, P.152

<sup>29</sup> Aing, K. & Birikorang, E. *Negotiating Populism and Populist Policies in Ghana, 1949 - 2012* In: Emma, B. *Coups D'états in Africa - A Thing of the Past*, Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre, 2013

Islamist rebel groups taking control of the North, and the joint-junta new civilian government struggling to unify the country. The coup was immediately met by international condemnation, sanctions were imposed by her neighbours and there was the loss of northern Mali to Tuareg forces. The coup however, proved short-lived. On April 6, 2012, the Junta agreed with ECOWAS to step down in exchange for an end to sanctions, and handed back to power to the transitional government led by Dioncounda Traoré.<sup>30</sup>

In August 2020, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was removed from power by a group of military officers, this followed months of unrest in Mali, President Keita later announced his resignation saying he did not want to see any bloodshed. He was criticized for failing law and order and mismanagement of this country's economy. Nine months later, on 24 May, 2021, the Malian army led by Vice President Assimi Goita captured President Bali N'daw. They announced that the President had been stripped of his powers and that new elections would be held in 2022. However, on 7 June, 2022, the military announced the transition to democracy will be delayed for another two years,<sup>31</sup> however, as at the time of writing this paper, no election has been conducted.

### **Burkina Faso**

This country has not witnessed a peaceful transition of political power for decades since its independence. It has experienced ten coups and coup attempts, which is the highest in the West Africa sub-region. On October 15, 1987, a bloody coup was organized by Captain Blaise Compaore against incumbent far-left President, Captain Thomas Sankara, a proponent of Pan-Africanism and sometimes referred to as Africa's Che Guevara.<sup>32</sup>

Another major coup attempt occurred on 16 September 2015, when members of the regiment of Presidential Secretary, a controversial autonomous military unit, detained the country's transitional president, Michel Kafando, Prime Minister, Yakoubu Isaac Zida and numerous members of the cabinet. The transitional government was formed in the wake of the 2014 Burkinabè uprising, when a popular movement overthrew the longtime President, Compaore. However, the military junta, headed by General Gilbert Diendere, failed to consolidate its authority and faced protests as well as intense pressure from the international community, and eventually from the regular army, to restore the transitional government.<sup>33</sup>

Another coup d'état took place in 30 September, 2022, removing interim President, Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba over his alleged inability to deal with the country's Islamist insurgency. Damiba himself had come to power in a coup d'état just eight months earlier in January 2022. Captain Ibrahim Traore took over as interim leader.

The January 2022 coup had been motivated by the Burkinabe government's inability to contain the Jihadist insurgency in the country. The coup was initially welcomed by many in Burkina Faso, as the previous government had been deeply unpopular due to its failure to deal with the insurgency. However, the new regime was also unable to defeat the rebels, and

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<sup>30</sup> Habiba, B.B. & Mthal, N. *Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups D'états Never Ending Phenomenon*, AFDB, September 2012

<sup>31</sup> Hassan, I. & Felix, T. *Military Interventions in Africa: An Overview In: Politics, Africa*

<sup>32</sup> Hassan, I. & Felix, T. *Military Interventions in Africa: An Overview*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid-*

even lost more territory to Jihadists and other militants. This led to the September 2022 coup.<sup>34</sup>

### Chad

Chad is another recent example of military interventions, in West Africa. The Chadian President, Idriss Deby died on April 20, 2021, from wounds sustained in the Frontline of fighting against a rebel group. Soon after his death, the military swiftly took over. They immediately installed his 37years old son, Mahamal Idriss Deby, a military Commander as interim president. They also appointed a civilian Prime Minister, Albert Paducke.<sup>35</sup>

Chad has been on the path of perpetual political instability. In Chad's post independence history, all transfers of power has been by force. Idriss Deby himself came to power as a rebel and presently, the Junta is faced with an armed rebellion of at least four rebel groups. However, the Chadian military is often praised as one of the most effective fighting forces in the West African region.<sup>36</sup> Aside the recent military coup in Chad, the country also witnessed two military coup d'états in 1975 and 1990. There were also coup attempts in Chad, which took place in the year 2004, 2006 and 2013 respectively.<sup>37</sup>

### Niger

On 26 July 2023, a coup d'état occurred in the Republic of Niger when the country's presidential guard detained President Mohammed Bazoun, and presidential guard commander, General Abdourahmane Tchiani proclaimed himself the leader of a new military Junta.<sup>38</sup> This was the fifth military coup d'état since the country gained independence from France in 1960, and the first since 2010.<sup>39</sup> The coup was widely condemned by the United States and the country's former colonialist France, as well as the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States).

The coup also came in the wake of recent coups in nearby countries, such as Guinea, Mali and Sudan in 2021, and two in Burkina Faso in January and September 2022. This has led to the region being called a "coup belt". It has also led to the 2023 Nigerien crises.<sup>40</sup>

Niger is a member of ECOWAS, which has already suspended Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso from membership due to successful coups in recent years. Bola Tinubu, President of Nigeria was appointed Chairman of ECOWAS on 9 July, 2023. He has warned that they would not allow another coup in the region and would take up these issues with the African Union and Western Countries. ECOWAS has threatened the use of military interventions but diplomatic solutions are also being looked into.<sup>41</sup>

### Nigeria

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<sup>34</sup> Ruth, M. *Gunfire is Heard in Burkina Faso Capital, Kindling Fears of a Coup*. *The New York Times*. 30 September, 2022, Retrieved 25 August, 2023

<sup>35</sup> <https://theconversation.com> - Chad's covert coup and the implication for democratic governance on Africa

<sup>36</sup> <https://africancentre.org>. Daniel Eizenga: Chad's Ongoing Instability, the legacy of Idriss Deby, *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies*, May 2021

<sup>37</sup> <https://en.m.wikipedia.com> - category: Military Coups in Chad

<sup>38</sup> *BBC, Niger soldiers Declare Coup on National Television*. 26 July, 2023. Retrieved 25 August, 2023

<sup>39</sup> *Timeline, A History of Coups in Niger*. *Al Jazeera*, 27 July, 2023. Retrieved 25 August, 2023

<sup>40</sup> *Al Jazeera, Niger's Bazoum held by Guards in Apparent Coup Attempt*. 26 July, 2023. Retrieved 25 August, 2023

<sup>41</sup> *Okafor, C. We will not tolerate coups in West Africa – Tinubu*, *Premium Times Nigeria*. Retrieved 25 August, 2023

The army wielded power in Nigeria between 1966 to 1999. There was almost no interruption apart from a short-lived return to democracy between 1979 and 1983.<sup>42</sup> According to Stollum, "military coups and military rule became a seemingly permanent feature of Nigerian politics".<sup>43</sup> There was a recurring pattern of coups and counter coups which were getting increasingly authoritarian and corrupt.<sup>44</sup>

## **Notable Coups in Nigeria**

### **The 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966 Coup**

First among the Coups in Nigeria was the January 1966 coup which was carried out by mostly Igbo army officers including major Kaduna Nzeogwu, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna among others.<sup>45</sup> The casualties of the coup included the Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Western Region, Samuel Akintola among others.<sup>46</sup>

### **29<sup>th</sup> July, 1966 Coup**

In July 1966, the military in Nigeria staged another coup, which is popularly known as the Nigerian counter coup of 1966. This coup brought Major-General Yakubu Gowon, who succeeded Aguiyi Ironsi to power.<sup>47</sup>

### **1975 Coup**

General Gowon was ousted in a palace coup on 30 July 1975 and this brought the then Brigadier Muritala Muhammed to power as Head of State.<sup>48</sup>

### **13<sup>th</sup> February, 1976 Coup**

Popularly and erroneously known as the "Dimka coup", this bloody and aborted coup led to the assassination of General Muritala Muhammed.<sup>49</sup> Upon General Muritala Muhammed's death and the foiling of the coup, then Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo became the Head of State.<sup>50</sup>

### **31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983 Coup**

The Nigerian military coup of December 31st 1983 was led by a group of senior army officer, who overthrew the democratically elected government of President Shehu Shagari. Participants included Major General Ibrahim Babangida and Muhammadu Buhari, Brigadier Ibrahim Bako, Sani Abacha and Tunde Idiagbon. Major General Muhammadu Buhari was appointed as Head of State by the conspirators.<sup>51</sup>

### **23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1985 Coup**

This was a palace coup led by then Chief of Army Staff, Major General Ibrahim Babangida who overthrew the administration of Major General Muhammadu Buhari.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Nigeria: Return to Military Rule, county studies, May 2020*

<sup>43</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups, Westport, Praeges 1998, P.40 In: Military Coups in Nigeria, Wikipedia*

<sup>44</sup> Chuka, O. *African Democratization and Military Coups,*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid-*

<sup>46</sup> First, R. *Power in Africa, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970*

<sup>47</sup> Omolgui, N. *Special Branch Report: Military Rebellion of 15th January, 1966, Ganji.com, 2020*

<sup>48</sup> *Nigeria: Return to Military Rule, county studies, May 2020*

<sup>49</sup> *Nigeria: Return to Military Rule, county studies,*

<sup>50</sup> [www.waado.org](http://www.waado.org), May 2020, "Col. B. Dinka Failed Coup Attempt of 1976 in Nigeria"

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid-*

<sup>52</sup> First, R. *Power in Africa, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970*



### **Alleged Vatsa Coup of 1985**

Hundreds of military officers were arrested, some were tried, convicted and eventually executed for conspiracy to overthrow the Babangida administration.<sup>53</sup> The conspirators were alleged to have been led by a major General Mamma Hiya Vatsa.<sup>54</sup>

### **1990 Coup**

Major Gideon Okar staged a violent and failed attempt to overthrow the Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida.<sup>55</sup>

### **November 1993 Coup**

Facing pressure to shift towards a democratic government, Babangida resigned and appointed Chief Ernest Shonekan as Interim President on 26 August, 1993. Shonekan's transitional administration only lasted three months, as a palace coup led by General Sani Abacha overthrew the interim government in November 1993.<sup>56</sup>

### **Impact of Military Coups in West Africa on the Security of Nigeria**

The impact of military coups on Nigeria has been generally disastrous. In the majority of the coups that have occurred, the military has deemed it a natural and patriotic obligation to rescue the country from total collapse and thereby restore lost national prestige. All these coup d'états in the guise of national interest and patriotic duty, more often than not turned out to be more corrupt, oppressive and inefficient than the civilian governments they deposed. The traditional agricultural based economy in Nigeria was abandoned and the country became dependent on exports of oil which due to mismanagement and frequent fluctuation in oil prices led an unstable economy. The instability and dissatisfaction caused by these policies is one of the causes of the consistent pattern of coups that have taken place in the country.<sup>57</sup>

One of the prices Nigeria is paying for coups and military rule is political instability. Military coups are a great threat to political instability in Nigeria as they have socio-economic developmental implications. Apart from keeping away foreign investors from Nigeria, political instability makes government policies unstable, and gives Nigeria the character of an unserious and unpredictable nation among the comity of nations. Thus it is not only Nigerian drug peddlers, and internet fraudsters that have given the country a bad image abroad. The worst damage with economic, legal and political implications was done by the military through the incessant coups and prolonged undemocratic rule.<sup>58</sup>

Military coups bring about the suspension of the constitution, and so the rule of man replaces the rule of law. Since law is the ultimate source of justice, a society ruled by soldiers can hardly be said to have justice. The situation systematically forced out reputable Judges of honour from the Nigerian Judicial System, leaving many who did not know law. Besides, the soldiers were not trained or experienced in the process of governance. This had its implications for good government. The retrogressions witnessed in key sectors of natural life today, especially in housing, health, education, agriculture, economy, human rights,

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<sup>53</sup> *Nigeria: Return to Military Rule, county studies, May 2020*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid-*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid-*

<sup>56</sup> <https://apps.dticmil:> *The Impact of Military Coups in West Africa*

<sup>57</sup> Richard, T. *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, Rough Guide Ltd, New York, 2008, P.5

<sup>58</sup> Richard, T. *The Rough Guide to West Africa*,

investment, employment *etc.* are producers of prolonged military dictatorship and mismanagement.<sup>59</sup>

The civil service today stands politicised and corrupted due to several years of military rule. Due to their material and political gains under military regimes, some civil servants even preferred military governments; some others embezzled public funds because they were not sure of their job security as they could be retrenched prematurely by the military government.

Military coups are the greatest threat to democracy in Nigeria because they terminate the development and internalisation of democratic culture in the people. Thus, each time a new republic is started, the politicians begin to learn about democratic tenets and practices. The nullification of the June 12 Presidential election results, adjudged the most free, fair and peaceful in Nigeria's history demonstrates the assertion that the military is an obstacle to democracy in Nigeria.

Military coups and military rule have worsened Nigeria's ethnic and religious cleavages and plunged the country into several avoidable crises. The Nigerian civil war fought for one and a half years (July 6, 1967 – January 15, 1970) and in which about 3,000,000 lives were lost and property worth millions of Naira destroyed was a product of the 1966 coup and the intra-military wrangling and struggle for power from 1966 – 1967. The war set the country several decades back and it solved no problem other than stopping Igbo or eastern secession. Insurgency and terrorism as we have it in Nigeria today, also emanated from this problem.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, several years of military rule have destroyed the moral base of the security, and turned the nation's value upside down. Today, education, good name, hard work, recognition of honest achievements no longer count, what counts now is money and riches got by hook or crook. The military suppressed the intellectuals which climaxed in the sacking and later unsacking of all lecturers in Nigerian Universities in 1993 by the General Ibrahim Babangida regime because the lecturers insisted the government respects the 1992 agreement it signed with ASUU.

However, the impact of military coups in Nigeria is not completely negative; the military has made some positive contributions to Nigeria's development. Examples include the creation of states from 4 regions of the first republic to the 36 states we have today, as well as the introduction of youth service corps to promote unity. The military governments in Nigeria also carried out the expansion of infrastructure especially under General Gowon's administration, as well as local government reforms, especially the granting of autonomy. There was direct federal grants and creation of 589 local governments by the government of General Babangida. The regime of General Buhari also saw the establishment of iron and steel industry, dynamic foreign policy and expansion of universities. Moreover, it was also the military that introduced the 6334 system of education in Nigeria.<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When the West African countries who were former colonies of European powers began to gain independence from their colonial masters in the early 1960's, the educated class

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid-*

<sup>60</sup> Richard, T. *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, Rough Guide Ltd, New York, 2008, P.5

<sup>61</sup> Richard, T. *The Rough Guide to West Africa*, Rough Guide Ltd, New York, 2008, P.5

eventually dominated and controlled the political landscape of their respective countries. The educated elites representing their country's leadership with inherent authority over the military rarely used the armed forces for the intended purpose for which they were created. As a result of the military being used as an instrument of war against their own citizens coupled with political misrule, the military soon began to seize and control State power through military coup d'états. There were however, disagreement and dissatisfactions within the rank and file of the military which led to counter coups and more often than not, civil wars. As a result of these, the West African sub-region's socio-economic and political constitutions have been devastated for the past three to four decades, from which they are yet to recover. In Nigeria for example, military coups and counter coups have resulted in endemic problems like corruption, political instability, disunity, insurgency and terrorism. Nevertheless, the military has made some positive contribution to Nigeria's development. These include the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps and the 6334 system of education.

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