

## POLITICAL CRISES IN NIGERIA'S MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines political crises in Nigeria's military intervention in the country's politics.. The paper also analyses the causational factors of military takeover and impact of such in a country once called the "Giant of Africa." The paper adopts a qualitative approach using both content and historical analysis to analyze secondary sources gathered on both democracy and military government as they affected governance and political crisis in Nigeria. The study analyzed the history of military rule in Nigeria and interrogated the crux of the military institution. It further analyzed the peculiarities of each of the military regimes. The study also examined the post-military era in the country. This study empirically examined the history, role and impact of the military rule in Nigeria by analyzing the various military regimes as against the general judgmental submission of military rule in the country. The paper provides some plausible recommendations that will be of particular benefit to Nigeria.*

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**Keywords:** Crises, Military, Intervention, Political, Democratic Failure

### Introduction

Nigeria is now enjoying the longest period of civilian rule since independence in 1960. The first civilian republic ended in a military coup in 1966, ushering in a devastating civil war and several more military governments. In fact, during the 33-year period from 1966 until the fourth republic came into being in 1999, civilians only governed for four short years. Historically, therefore, the dearth of democratic experience has created enormous challenges to institutionalizing democracy in the Nigerian fourth republic. Nonetheless, it is critical to recognize the fact that the trend over the past decade, and especially since 1999, is modestly positive. Evaluating the trend line of Nigerian democracy requires a critical yet realistic perspective about the many barriers confronting Nigerian democrats (Dawood, 2015). Nigeria is one of the most populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated population of 200 million. She gained her independence in 1960, after about 60 years under the British colonial rule. The country's journey to nationhood was heralded by high hopes and development prospects having discovered crude oil in 1954. More so, Nigeria is endowed with high human and vast material resources across the country. Unfortunately, almost 60 years of her post-independence history, Nigeria has remained a third-world country struggling with developing problems ranging from democratic consolidation to political uncertainty, insecurity and insurgency, ethnic agitation, poor infrastructural development, high rate of poverty and unemployment, among others.

Some scholars, political elites and citizens have continued to blame the military as the cause of the challenges contending with national development and integration (Ekeh, 1998; Agagu & Ola, 2011). They argue that the military's intervention in the country's politics shortly after

independence and its long years and style of governance of almost three decades are largely responsible for the problems bedeviling the country. Contrarily, some scholars argue that the military as a governmental institution left some gains for the country despite its undemocratic rule (Fawole, 2019, Adekanye, 2003).

It is interesting to note that the role of the military in Nigerian politics has been a recurring discourse among scholars, the political and governing elites, the military and citizens even after two decades of post-military rule in the country. The phenomenon of military rule in politics did not begin in Nigeria although it is now considered a thing of the past because the military's involvement in politics is regarded as an aberration and undemocratic. Most third world countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have had their share of military rule. However, the consequent impact of military rule on the Nigerian political scene has continued to generate debates owing to its long stay in power, the involvement of retired military officers in post-military rule and the country's inability to consolidate her democracy after two decades of uninterrupted democratic experience.

For almost 30 years out of the first 39 years of her post-independence history, the military was in charge of the leadership of the country. These long years of the military participation in the Nigerian politics has made the debate of its role and impact ever relevant in the country's quest for development, integration and democratic consolidation. There were eleven coups, both successful and otherwise, within this period in Nigerian history. Ekeh(1998) argues that it will be naive to believe that the mere act of holding elections will usher in a new era of freedom for the country after three decades of military dictatorship. He further mentions that these decades have left behind an infamy curse that Nigeria will wrestle with for years and possibly decades to come. It may not be absolutely correct to say the long years of military rule in the country were either a curse or a blessing because every system of government usually has its merits and demerits. This study empirically examined the history, role and impact of the military rule in Nigeria by analyzing the various military regimes as against the general judgmental submission of military rule in the country.

### **Methodology**

This work adopts a qualitative approach using both content and historical analysis to analyze secondary sources gathered. Therefore, secondary data were basically used in this research work. Information was accessed mainly through web search and data such as related works, local and international journals.

### **Conceptual Interpretation**

Democracy is a form of government, in which the supreme power of a political community rests on popular sovereignty. According to Oyovbaire (1987) democracy is a system of government which seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through collective initiation, and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegates authority to agents to implement the broad decisions made by the people through majority vote. As a principle of governance, democracy has been examined in both classical and contemporary contexts. In classical context, democracy is linked with the small city state of Athens in Greece, where all adjudged male adult citizens were allowed to directly participate in decision-making and implementation. Political philosophers articulated this form of democracy as a revolutionary antidote to dictatorship, monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy and feudalism (Isekhure 1992).

However, with the growing complexity of modern states in terms of vast territory and population, the classical democracy has become infeasible. Thus, in contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of popular will of the political community through elected representatives. The contemporary democracy according to Raphael (1976) rests on “representative government.” Here the ordinary citizen comes into the process only by casting vote in the favour of a representative or broad policy of a party.

### **Conceptualization of Military Intervention**

In the context of this paper, the term militarism refers to the phenomenon in which the military elements have displaced the erstwhile civil authority in governance, and thereby conducted the affairs of the state in military fashion. Militarization on the other hand, relates to the processes in which the civil populaces, who are being ruled by military elements, imbibe the principles and practices of military organization displayed in governance. These values and norms seeped through the permeable membrane between the barracks and the civic culture and diluted the latter, leading to the acculturation and manifestation of military posture in democratic settings.

### **Theoretical Frame Work**

This study adopted Game theory. “Game Theory” is relatively not a new concept, having been invented by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in 1944. Game theory is an autonomous discipline that is used in applied mathematics, social sciences, most considerably in economics, as well as in biology, engineering, political science, international relations, computer science and philosophy. Game theory is the mathematical study of strategy and conflict, in which an agent’s success in making choices depends on the choice of others. It was initially developed in economics to understand a large collection of economic behaviors, including behaviors of firms, markets and consumers. Game theory has been used to attempt to develop theories of ethical or normative behavior as well. In economics and philosophy, scholars have applied game theory to help in the understanding of rational behavior. Game theory is the theory of independent and interdependent decision making in organizations where the outcome depends on the decisions of two or more autonomous players, one of which may be nature itself, and where no single decision maker has full control over the outcomes (Kelly, 2003).

Applied to the context of this work, it can be argued that today’s practice of democracy is anti-tenets of the ideological foundation of democracy, in Nigeria and most of Africa, the ethos of the system which supposed to serve as the fabrics upon which the system flows have now taken zero-sum pattern, anyone can play with the system and like the game theory, if they are able to take away with it they do. For them, the systems exist to benefit them, their goons and cohorts. That’s why the authors of this paper argue that, whether military rule is gone forever in Nigeria, would be a function of how democratic and accountable the present democratic exercise is. It would also be a function of how fast the politicians learn the practice of democracy; least the value of the past military would continue to haunt Nigeria.

### **Military Intervention in Nigeria**

**Military Intervention** Four years after independence, Nigeria had a democratic election in 1964 and installed a parliamentary system of government led by Tafawa Belewa and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Anugwom (2001) posits: Since independence, the military has dominated Nigeria’s

politics and can be held responsible for the political instability, economic and social underdevelopment of the nation. It is important to note that apart from the first republic in 1963 that came into existence as Nigeria got their independence from the British, the military has acted as both the midwife and the destroyer of democracy in Nigeria, with the election conducted democratically in 1979, the military has displayed a markedly half-hearted effort to install democracy in the 1990's while terminating such steps in mid-stride in 1966, 1983 and 1993. Nzeogwu's Coup of 1966 General Ironsi who was a senior officer to Major Nzeogwu and also an Igbo brother assumed the leadership posited that the military government of the republic of Nigeria wishes to state that it has taken over the interim administration of the republic of Nigeria following the invitation of the council of ministers of the last government for the army to do so. It is worthy to note that the coup witnessed so much bloodshed and this also abrogates the epitome of fundamental human rights upon which democracy is built. One of the major things the regime will always be remembered for was the change of the country's political system to a united centralised system. The regime altered the existing political structure in the country.

General Gowon's emergence as Head of State was through a counter bloody coup and unusual of military practice not being the most senior officer at the time. The survival of the Nigerian State as a single indivisible entity was paramount. From 1970, survival was no more an issue, rather, national reconciliation and development became the focal point of the administration. The regime had lots of money to spend as a result of the rise in fuel price in the international market and high demand of Nigerian oil by the Global West. General Gowon's regime achieved much in terms of development. They built roads, dams, bridges and made electrical installation across major cities in the country. The regime hosted lots of African events and was a strong voice in the fight against Apartheid in South Africa. Nigeria's visibility and impacting the comity of nations was high and felt during the regime. After successfully fighting the civil war without foreign aids, Nigeria was unanimously elected the chair of ECOWAS in its 10th anniversary in Addis Ababa against its tradition. Nigeria sponsored and took up issues on the African continent and bankrolled them. In an attempt to counter the declaration of the Republic of Biafra and prevent the 30-month civil war, the regime split the country into 12 states. One of the regime's lasting legacy is the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps. The General Gowon military government was not free from alleged corruption and mismanagement of the country's economy as revealed by the Great Purge carried out by the successive military government.

General Murtala Mohammed became the third military Head of State through a palace coup that ousted the General Gowon administration. The coup became necessary, according to the coupists, after General Yakubu Gowon's government failed to return the country to civilian rule as promised in his independence speech of 1 October, 1972 and also due to the mismanagement of the country's economy. His administration was short-lived in a bloody aborted coup led by Lieutenant Colonel B.S. Dimka on 13 February, 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo his deputy took over power as the fourth military Head of State and continued the programmes of the regime to the end. General Obasanjo introduced discipline into the country's workforce through his concept of 'Low Profile' to curb excess spending in government as witnessed under General Yakubu Gowon's regime. The regime appointed the Constitutional Committee that produced a new constitution and adopted the presidential system of government for the country in 1979. The 1979 Constitution has been a model for subsequent constitutions in the country. The regime made Nigeria proud and gave her a voice in international politics. General elections were held at various levels across the country as the climax of the administration's five stages transition

programme. On 1 October, 1979, the country returned to civilian rule ending the first coming of the military into politics after 13 years. The country witnessed dynamic leadership and actions guided by the overall concern for national interest and consideration for justice, peace and stability under the regime (Peretei, 2004; Adeniyi, 2010; Etebom, 2015; Fawole, interview 2019).

Major General Muhammadu Buhari's emergence was seen as a huge blow to the new democratic government as his coup removed a civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1983. General Buhari who became the new Head of state, launched a "war against indiscipline" which actually met with initial approval, but its repressiveness brought to the end of the popularity of this administration as it was overthrown in another military coup that brought General Ibrahim Babangida on the sit of power in 1985. The regime will also be remembered for the harsh provisions of Decrees Number 4 and 13. There were high level and gross abuse of human rights under the Buhari led military administration. However, the inflexible style of discipline and high-handedness, coercion and arbitrariness of the administration led to its being ousted in a palace coup code named 'the Coup of the Generals' which saw only the Head of State and his Deputy/Chief of Staff, Major General Tunde Idiagbon removed from office on 27 August, 1985. It is on record that Major General Buhari's emergence as Head of State was the most heralded in the history of military rule in the Nigeria.

When General Babangida assumed office in August 1985, he saw corruption as a legitimate tool of governance and used it extensively to shore up support. The regime of Babangida came up with an agenda of returning power to a civilian administration but the truth was that the regime in earnest was not ready to relinquish power as the administration embarked on political maneuvers to keep hold of power. Hutchful (1998) buttresses this argument thus: The transition to democracy was preceded by attempts at military reform, the military regime also retained tight control over power, permitting no discussion or input by the civilians. The domain of military reform was seen as the exclusive preserve of the military hierarchy. The process of self-reform allowed the military to retain the initiatives on the part of in-coming civilian governments, and to incorporate the interest of both regime and institution into the reform process. Uncontested control over the military was also seen as necessary for keeping the democratic movement in check and preventing the possible unraveling of the carefully calculated transition.

The annulment of this election's result threatens the political stability and unity of Nigeria. As a measure to reduce tension that gripped the country, General Ibrahim Babangida stepped aside and handed over the power to an Interim Government led by Ernest Shonekan but this was seen by many as a gimmick because four months later, another military took over in November 1993, and this time, led by General Sani Abacha. Frankly, it's clear that a great percentage of military leaders who have tasted political power hardly relinquish same. In their quest to remain in the office, they have humiliated both political leaders and human rights activists, while many were held in detention without trials and many fled to exile.

### **Post-Military Era: The Fourth Republic**

The influence of the military is expectedly still felt in all facets of governance in the country. When the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, the military had been in charge for 29 years out of the 39 years of its existence as an independent entity. Furthermore, the second coming of the military lasted for 16 uninterrupted years. All these years of influence cannot be



wished away. Most of the political elite in the fourth republic cut their political tooth during the military regime. This, to a large extent, has affected their political orientation and disposition to politics.

The military elite accumulated a lot of wealth during their long stay in government. Adekanye (2003) argued that in 1999, when the country returned to civil rule, all the senior officers and Generals retired by President Olusegun Obasanjo were young millionaires. At the time President Obasanjo retired the military officers who held political offices or served during the military era, most of the retired officers were in their forties and fifties. They could not sit down and watch the polity doing nothing. They had interests to protect and it would be difficult to achieve that outside politics. While some went into business, others saw politics as an avenue to further exert their influence. They joined politics, contested, sponsored candidates and bankrolled elections. The military was largely responsible for the emergence of General Olusegun Obasanjo as President in 1999. From 1999 till date, retired military officers have been actively involved in Nigeria's politics. The military has produced Governors (Prince Olagusoye Oyinola, Osun State; Jonah Jang, Plateau State), Senators (Senator David Mark, a two term Senate President), Ministers, amongst others. They are playing major roles in business, politics, nation building and peace in the country. The retired military officers have also held sway for 14 years out of the current 21 years in the Fourth Republic. (Etebom, Ihemeje&Fagbohun, 2014) The influence of the retired military will continue to be felt on the Nigerian political scene for a while; although, their influence will wane and fade off with time. This will be so because most of the influential retired military officers and former military leaders are leaving the political stage due to age and eventually, death will come at different times. The Nigerian political space will then be open to those whose lives and wealth have nothing to do with the military rule. It is imperative to mention that retired military officers, like other citizens, will continue to participate in the country's politics but will not command much influence and wealth like the former Heads of State and political office holders during military rule. It is not likely to have another former Head of State contest for Presidency after General Buhari's tenure in 2023. The two most important roles being played by the military elite in the democratic process of the fourth republic has been participatory and advisory beside its constitutional obligation.

### **Causes of military intervention in Politics: Third Nigeria perspective**

It is very difficult to specify the causes for political military intervention. Maniruzzaman (1987). Says "the supremacy of politics and social control over the armed forces have not worked well in practice in a large number of developing countries. It has been tried here to point out indifferent causes for military intervention. These are given below (Islam, 2009 and Dawood 2015);

#### **Low Degree of Social Cohesion:**

Presence of low degree of social cohesion makes the political institutions weaken. Social cohesion is a term used in social policy; Sociology and Political Science to describe the bonds or "glue" that bring people together in society, particularly in the context of cultural diversity. One of the dimensions refers to the positive interactions, exchanges and networks between individuals and communities or "active social relationships." Such contacts and connections are potential resources for places since they offer people and organizations mutual support. Social dimension of social cohesion is that social integration of people into the mainstream institutions of civil society. Lack of these dimensions weakens the social cohesion and for that raises the

military to intervene. Huntington ( ) said “the wealthy bribe students riot, workers strike, mobs demonstrate and the military coup.”

### **The Existence of Fratricidal Class:**

Newly born independent countries of the developing countries and its societies basically are divided into different classes. There rise two classes” especially. Elite classes and lower classes. Small number of elite class rules the lower classes. To create unstable situation fratricidal group exist in politics and create violence. These types of violence and tension are common scenario in developing countries. Thus, here create a space for military to intervention.

### **Small, Weak and Non-Consolidate Middle Class:**

One of the important feature of the developing countries are that the presence of small, weak and non-consolidated middle class. In this region, there are lickings of strong middle class political party and organizations. For that strong military gets chances to cease political authority. Many political thinkers consider military as a new middle class.

### **Lack of Institutionalization:**

Political institutions are organizations which create enforce and apply laws that mediate conflict, make governmental policy on the economy and social systems and otherwise provide representation for the populous. Political institutions include political parties, trade unions, and the courts. The term political institutions may also refer to the recognized structure of rules and principles within which the above organizations operate including right to vote, responsible government and accountability. But theories are not going to developing countries. Huitington and other thinkers said that lack of effective political institutionalization s the strong cause for military intervention.

### **Civilian Intervention in Military:**

Modern military gets huge facilities those other governmental institutions. Usually any government tries to protect military interests. Military is also very aware about their interests. Many developing countries have experienced military intervention.

### **Inept, Ineffective and Corrupt Government:**

Inept, ineffective and corrupted government when lose its faintness and effectiveness cause for the military intervention. African developing countries during 1960 to 1966 were experienced military coup. These types of characteristics of third world countries give opportunity to military to take the authority in governing system.

### **Economic Deterioration:**

Economic stability, inflation, increasing rate of daily accessories and when civilian government cannot control economic deterioration, the various kinds of interest groups under these issue

opposition political parties try to create violence. Thus, there is created unstable and violence situation. These situations give space to military intervention.

### **Role of Super Powers:**

Most of the developing countries derived their independence from the colonial ruling countries. These countries expanded their rule in the third world countries and later these countries known as developing countries as well. But after independent these countries could not be out of influence of super powers. It has been said that superpowers some time support also military for their interest. During the cold war period it had been seen greatly.

### **Study Findings**

We have studied above that military intervention and its political role is totally unexpected. The causes for military intervention in Nigeria are very much similar to the countries of developing countries. All interventions came through the political crisis and similar to this. Military will rule under the civilian authority, it is expected but when civilian authority lost its strength, then military as an organized body comes in front and tries to take role in politics. In our study we see that military itself a nonpolitical organization. In that sense, there should have not any role of military in politics. On the other hand there is a great responsibility of civilian authority to deter the military coup. Civilian authority is the representatives of people; they should do their duty properly. Political crisis are created by the people who are the representatives of civilian authority.

Military interventions and corrupt leaders in Nigerian politics have negated the chances of democracy. From 1960 to 1999, the country recorded six military coups and two of which overthrew democratically elected governments. Majority of the military Heads of state produced in those regimes had no regards for the common man but only came to power for self-accumulation of wealth. Evidence shown in the discussion of this work blamed the military leadership for the situation Nigeria is into today as the country lacks virile democracy. Even democratically elected leaders are not exempted from this mess as Sagagi (2006) described them as having one pattern of thinking and action... to be in power as long as it takes. Nigerian leaders or politicians in general have only one plan, one mission, and one goal; winning an election, settling scores, and (self-enrichment through fraudulent practices).

### **Conclusion And Recommendations**

The long years of military rule in Nigeria and their impact cannot be wished away. The almost three decades of post-independence, during which the military controlled the dynamics of the country defined and shaped the political orientation of the political elite, and also laid the foundation for national interaction and development. It will be absurd to take a definitive position on the long years of military rule in the country. Also, it will be a narrow assertion to draw conclusions based on a regime or an aspect of governance as espoused in the study. There were areas the military were adjudged to have done fairly well, like infrastructural development, state creation and security. Some military governments even performed quite well in economy, foreign policy, among others. In foreign policy, the military made the country proud and gave her a voice in the comity of nations with the exception to the General Abacha's administration. The military could have done more in infrastructural development. In the same vein, the records of the military on human right and corruption were awful and their impact is still being adversely



felt in the country. It is worthy to note that the military governments were actively assisted by civilians and technocrats in running the affairs of the country. They helped in the formulation and implementation of policy which shaped and defined governance in the country at all levels under military rule.

Military rule in Nigeria was a whole mixed bag. The political and economic situation both home and abroad at the time shaped and influenced the various military governments. The disposition of the Heads of State to life and governance was also a major factor under military rule. Although military rule fundamentally disrupted the country's political system and process, its place in Nigerian historical development cannot be overemphasized because of its impact and long stay in power. The study strongly recommended that the political class and elites should not allow a repeat of the country's experience between 1979 and 1983 that led to the second coming of the military in politics. The socio - economic challenges confronting the country should be objectively addressed with emphasis on the alarming rate of insecurity and unemployment in the country. The judiciary should have a constitutional court, whose business should be the expeditious discharge of cases emanating from politics. It is hoped that this is a credible process towards the institutionalization of democracy devoid of military dialectics and the civil societies (defined as the set of intermediate associations, which are neither the state nor the extended family and therefore includes voluntary associations and other corporate bodies) have onerous duty to engage both the government and legislature with enlightened democratic values. This is a means towards the end of military democratic norms.

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