**MILTARY AND ITS INVOLVEMENT IN PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper looked at the structure of the military and how it affected Nigeria's democratic transition. The study explained why several Nigerian republics fell apart and what function the military served throughout these times. Data that were subjected to comprehensive and rational examination proved to the military's involvement as a distracter in the democratisation of Nigeria. By organising and carrying out faulty elections for transition, the military institution represented itself and behaved on most instances as a false defender of democratic ideals. Yet, new information indicates that the military's implementation of these democratic concepts and procedures was frequently flawed and insufficient to support sustained democratic rule. Maleocracy has been typified by most general elections held by the military to transfer control when democratic authority is acquired by former military leaders through stage-managed mechanisms. Although playing a crucial role in maintaining democracy in the nation, the military institution has therefore served as a political organisation where various electoral packaging techniques were learned, and electioneering overtures gained. So, this essay concludes that, since Nigeria's independence, the military has served more as a dispersive force than a consolidating one in the country's democratic transitions and free and fair elections.*

**Keywords: Political transition, Election, Democracy, Military, Dictatorship.**

**INTRODUCTION**

The question of the transition from one democratic elected administration to another has been one of Nigeria's political issues since her independence in October 1960. From 1963 to 1966, 1979 to 1983, 1993, and 1999 to the present, there have been four periods of civilian democratic rule and republics. In 1966, 1983, and 1993, however, these periods were sporadically upended by various military, political, economic, and social factors. The military invasion and coup d'état stand out among these factors because they have continuously weakened the connections between the civilian administrations. According to observations, Nigeria's democratic transition and succession, like that of the majority of developing nations, has proven to be troublesome. An extensive investigation of the military's involvement in democratic transitions is the paper's main point. The crucial issue, however, in Nigeria is: Can the military ever be expected or supposed to play any significant part in establishing democracy? The military as an institution has never been totally free of politics and the responsibility of nation-building, according to the realities on the ground in Africa. This study will focus on whether they have been doing it flawlessly or not, which is a whole other issue.

It is significant to emphasise that Nigeria's journey towards democracy has been rocky. Ben Nwabueze classified Nigeria's democratic transition into five distinct phases, including the "era of colonial autocracy and absolutism," "emergence of constitutional democracy," "return of autocracy and absolutism under military government," and "second coming of military autocracy and absolutism." The military as an institution has never been totally free of politics and the responsibility of nation-building, according to the realities on the ground in Africa but whether possibly by pure providence, they have played a significant role in Africa's nation-building and political transformations. This background of both pessimism and optimism made it necessary to use the figure of speech "oxymoron" in the caption to express the conflicting compatibility between civic and military ties in Nigeria. The Interim National Government (ING) was established in 1993, General Sani Abacha staged a coup in November 1993, and the Babangida dictatorship fell after ten years of military control. These events marked the beginning of the General Abdulsalam Abubakar administration. This was made feasible by General Abacha's death on June 8, 1998, which resulted in the destruction of all installed democratic organisations in place of Abacha era. This led to the concurrent start of a new cycle of transition programming, making democratic changes a lofty goal. In Nigeria, complex democratic transitions have been undertaken, amounting to a political military disengagement over time. Nonetheless, the country needs to have the kind of durable democracy that it deserves given the current state of Nigeria's politics. This study explains the role of military institutions in Nigeria's democratic transition and succession against this backdrop. The following concerns the topic of this discourse: - How important a role did the military play in Nigeria's former republics collapsing? How much of an active role has the military played. The aforementioned has shown that democracy's viability depends on a variety of factors or a combination of factors. No one prerequisite will be adequate or essential on its own, but a collection of enabling factors may be anticipated to improve the chances of electoral democracy surviving. The project, which is the consolidation of democracy, is more challenging in certain situations than others and faces considerably more significant hurdles in some compared to others. The social sciences are tasked with identifying these conditions and subjecting them to a comparative study of the nation's democratic regimes.

**Organizational Character of the Military vis-a-vis Democracy**

The rise of the centralised nation-state gave a standing army its principal justification. Like to other state institutions, the military is a tool used to further the purposes and objectives of the state. The military stands apart from other professions because to a few fundamental characteristics that are unique to it. The military has some odd organisational traits given that it is a tool for good, was created by order or edict, and exists only to fight and win wars. They have the following characteristics: (1) central command; (2) hierarchy; (3) discipline; (4) internal communication; and (5) esprit de corps, with concomitant seclusion and self-sufficiency. The army is structured under a hierarchy of authority. The hierarchical structure stems from the same sources as the features of centralization. According to Adekanye, paraphrasing Machiavelli, "an army should have just one chief, a higher number is deleterious." This is one of an army's fundamental requirements for fighting as a unit. It must be centralised because it needs a high-level guiding command. Hierarchy is necessary because the command must communicate commands from the highest levels to the lowest. The depersonalization of the soldier is a symptom of the state of unquestioning obedience, which results from the centralization of authority in the pyramid structure, obligation to obey, and discipline.

**Crisis in the First Republic, military invasion, and shift to democratic rule**

The first republic of Nigeria essentially fell apart after the split within the Action Group (AG) political party, which is centred on the Western area, and the inconsistent census. The results came to a deadlock due to the widespread and pervasive electoral fraud that rendered the elections useless (Arikpo, 1967). Notwithstanding how serious the 1964 federal elections were, Arikpo said that they were nothing compared to the subsequent 1965 Western Region election, where voters practically doused opponents in petrol and set them on fire. The police appeared helpless as the electors took the laws into their own hands. Following the occurrences, Nigerians thought that the military was the only institution in the nation that could put an end to the political stalemate and restore political stability and order as well as popular trust (Ojibo, 1980). On January 15, 1966, there was a military coup d'état, during which several important Nigerian political figures and senior military commanders were killed. Owolabi identified various faults in the democratic succession or transition to civil government that the Muhammed/Obasanjo administration designed and accomplished (1992). The conception of the transition planning was one of these shortcomings that stood out. Without establishing a strong economic basis, the plan emphasised on the political components of the transition, making it nearly difficult for the next civilian authority to fulfil its electoral pledges. Moreover, there was the entire absence of any preparations for involving the populace, especially those that aim to foster the new democratic culture necessary for the survival of the next administration.

**Beginning and fall of Nigeria’s Second Republic**

The National Party of Nigeria's (NPN) Alhaji Shehu Shagari's proclamation and subsequent installation as the Federal Republic of Nigeria's Executive President, which was not universally embraced by the populace, marked the start of the second republic. The resentment is especially obvious among those who thought that the military was not entirely impartial in the Obasanjo regime's transition plan. Many began to question the legitimacy of the democratically elected government of the second republic since the transition programme created and carried out by the previous Military administration was perceived as a plot to change the government (Haruna, 1988). Alhaji Shagari was perceived by many Nigerians as moving too slowly in comparison to Prof. Awojobi referred described as "the military's dynamism" (Afenaga, 1980). By 1981–1983, it had gradually become apparent that the principles of liberal democracy and federalism, upon which the second republic had been based under the transition programme, had severe flaws. Stalemate and the paralysis of the legislative process were unavoidable when there were glitches in the political system. The second republic's arrival had led to great expectations for politicians, but they fell short. Hence, the political environment following the election led to the predicted rise in public support for a coup that halted the expansion of the second republic, which ultimately brought an end to the civilian administration in the second republic.

**Modes of Democratic Transition**

The transition to democracy in Africa is typically connected with one of two major definitions in the transition literature that is currently available. In one sense, transition refers to a fundamental or qualitative change in the state of being of the relevant entity, such as the revolutionary overturning of established social structures and relationships in favour of a significantly different and typically qualitatively superior network of ideas and symbols. In this perspective, transition is a "epoch-defining experience" and possesses features that inevitably lead to a clear shift of Episodic transitions are the second way that the idea of transition is used in literature. Transition in this sense entails a change in leadership, or portions of it, with or without substantive socio-political reconstruction. This idea of transition involves either grafting new values onto an existing social order or, even worse, a resistance to new values in defence of the same old disliked and improper behaviours and behavioural patterns. 32 The two main viewpoints on transition that were previously analysed suggest that they differ in breadth and intensity. The extent to which a transition package pervades and transforms (or has the potential to infiltrate and transform) every facet of organised life in society sparks heated intellectual debate as a result. The point that must be highlighted and stressed in this perspective is that, despite the qualitative differences between the two broad notions of transition, none is mutually incompatible, precisely because society itself is typically in a permanent state of change.

Consequently, the most innovative transition plan may have certain components of fusing traditional and modern structures and ideals. The persistence of previous patterns and public views of their relevance and effectiveness will play a factor in determining whether old values are duplicated and strengthened or neutralised and abolished in the new age. In Benin, the transition from the Sovereign National Convention went quite well. Nigeria should use the Evolutionary Top to Bottom kind, according to the military.

**The brutal Journey to the Fourth Republic**

The third republic of Nigeria and its shortest-lived "quasi-civilian" administration came to an end under Abacha's rule. The regime ensured that a military government was reconstituted, that all democratic institutions were destroyed, and that the ING was replaced by the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) and Federal Executive Council (FEC). The timeline for the military's political disengagement was alarmingly vague in Abacha's initially stated aim. To fulfil the long-standing demand of pro-democracy groups to call for a National Conference, he put up the machinery for a promised constitutional convention. Those who anticipated him to name Chief MKO Abiola as the nation's president were understandably disappointed by the establishment of a new transition by him.The widespread sense of despair over the failure of a transition project that had cost an estimated N30 billion could hardly be overcome by Gen. Abacha's efforts to win public support for his coup (Suberu, 1997), and some of the enraged third Republic Senators believed he was hiding behind justifications. Unfounded claims claimed that the then-military head of state funded the registered political parties (NCPN, GDM, DPN, etc.) only to run for self-succession. In the end, on February 27, 1999, he was shown to be sincere in upholding his mandate and sceptical of all odds by conducting a presidential election without incident. Gen. Abubakar's historic and audacious move on May 1999 27th signalled the successful end of his military government and the start of the fourth republic.

**General Sani Abacha’s Transition Programme (1993-1998)**

In a case brought by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presumed victor of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, a Lagos High Court ruled on November 17, 1993, that the Interim National Government (ING), hastily established by General Ibrahim Babangida's government, was unlawful. General Abacha then conducted a coup d'état, overthrowing all the democratic institutions still in place thanks to the ING and returning the nation to a full-fledged military dictatorship. Only those who engineered the ING's existence were certain of when they would put an end to it, just as its predecessor, the Babangida administration, had taken advantage of the public's desire for the institutionalisation of democracy. The ING had been pretending to be in charge since August 26th, 1993.This was also used by General Abacha, who pledged (or lied) that he would call a Sovereign National Convention (SNC). The conference did address important issues on governance, democracy, and the national questions and offered solutions to them in order to appease pro-democracy forces in the country who are still adamantly committed to actualizing the annulled presidential election result despite its credibility issue. On July 27, 1995, the government received the proposed constitution that the conference had produced. A rotating presidential system, a multi-party system, the establishment of the Federal Character Commission, and a new income allocation system emphasising the derivation principle were among the noteworthy changes of the confab that helped to stabilise the quaking federation. The proposed constitution was studied by the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), the junta's top decision-making body. According to several reports, the military council deemed it wanting and decided to put it up for public discussion. To facilitate the process of power sharing among the six zones into which the states were divided, some of the recommendations included the institutionalisation of a plural executive consisting of a president, vice president, and prime minister, as well as the restriction of the rotating presidency system to an experimental period of thirty years. These integrating processes, which were regime innovations, have also received thorough discussion elsewhere. The world community denounced the well-known environmentalist's legal murder. Many labour, pro-democracy, and human rights activists were imprisoned in addition to the Ogoni Nine murderers (CDHR, 1997 Report). Assassinations of pro-democracy activists in situations that showed politically motivated removal were the most hazardous aspect of official persecution.

**THE “SAINT” AND “DEVIL” IN THE MILITARY TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC SUCCESION AND CIVIL RULE IN NIGERIA**

A reasonable conclusion that might be drawn from the historical analysis of the military's participation in Nigeria's political transition from the first republic to the "third republic" is that the institution of the military influences Nigeria's political landscape in both good and bad ways. Similar claims and evidence have been made about other state strategic and policing agencies, such as the police, during elections and in a developing democracy (Roberts and Obioha, 2005, Slingers and Obioha, 2015). Their beneficial roles in resisting long-term military rule and self-military succession should not be taken for granted, despite the enormity and persistent negative roles in undermining newly installed democratic administrations or military-civilian transitions. Specifically, the military's function during the First Republic may have had some justifications for staging the 1966 coup, among them purging Nigerian society of corrupt, tribalistic and nepotistic government, even though democracy was still being tested and would have been supported and encouraged to grow at the time. However, many political and social analysts view First Republic as essentially disrupting a fledgling first independent government in 1964. Notwithstanding the military institution's above-mentioned disruptive roles in political transition and the succession to democracy, the institution's individual members, particularly retired officers, have made considerable contributions to Nigeria's actualization of democratic succession. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Mohammed/Obasanjo and Obasanjo/Yar Adua governments in the democratic succession. In addition, the institution of the military and its personnel, including the head of state and other people, deserve praise for their contributions to the political/democratic transition under Gen. Abubakar's rule in 1999. A quick analysis of the situation revealed that Gen. Abubakar's administration's discussions with retired army generals, former military leaders, and police chiefs, among others, whom he entertained and informed throughout his government, contributed to the success of his transition to civil rule in 1999 (The Guardian, 1998: 4).

**MILITARY IN DEMOCRATIC SUCCESSION AND STABILITY IN NIGERIA FOURTH REPUBLIC AND BEYOND**

Observation has demonstrated that the voters' perception of the political effectiveness of elections and implicit belief in their capacity to affect political change through the constitutional means or process are key factors in the success of democracy. This dream came true on May 27, 1999, when Retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, the fourth civilian president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, took the oath of office as leader of the Nigerian Federation. Notwithstanding some reasonable objections, the general populace in Nigeria applauded the development. The key subject of concern is how the military institution would function in this fourth republic. Another concern is how much the military men participated in and were under Obasanjo's presidency and beyond. Are they committed to the current leadership? In the context of these questions, negative answers indicate some issues, whilst favourable results imply development and stability in the political system. Top military officials have reacted in a way that is consistent with expectations placed on them. From the fourth republic to the current government, they have been obedient, involved, and submissive to democratically elected civilian administrations. In a hypothetical situation, the finances that the former generals could consider using to support military coups are now directed into the fight for democratic influence and power. Also, due to the placement of retired generals in numerous democratic administrations starting with the fourth republic in 1999 and continuing through the current administration under retired Gen. Buhari, it appears that there is more security in stabilising and supporting the development of Nigeria's democracy. The fact that the background has been present in Nigerian politics from 1999 to the present (2016) lends considerable validity to the ongoing support the military has given Nigerian politics. If nothing else, sustaining the present tide of popularity would go a long way towards establishing democratic administration that might be free from the suspicion of a military takeover.

**CONCLUSION**

The evaluation of the data obtained attests to the military's dual function in Nigeria's democracy effort as a sustaining force and a diversion. This is a result of the perception that the military might have staged a coup d'état rather than allowing the embryonic democracies to develop and mature at different times and stages. The incidents in 1966 and 1983, where the military thought they could purify the polity and restore democracy but afterwards failed to deliver the goods, hint to the aforementioned. On the other hand, the military has advocated for and carried out democratic ideas on occasion, portraying itself as their keeper. But, history has shown that these democratic tenets and structures established by the military are frequently flawed is insufficient for an erratic democratic government to prosper on. Since 1999 till the present, the military has also supported Nigeria's democratic endeavour as an institution and a group of individuals. Ample proof of former military generals' engagement in and investments in Nigeria's democratic government has been used to support this assertion. This argument is supported by their dedication, involvement in politics after leaving the military, and determination to continue playing a role in the democratic movement. But, as we have shown in this work, there has always been a transition without a transfer of power. The military made empty gestures and empty speeches about the need for democracy, but it hasn't done anything to really promote democracy and provide the circumstances essential for a stable and long-lasting democracy.

In Nigeria, the military has been active in ensuring electoral security while simultaneously working to strengthen the Police's position in maintaining internal security whenever the Police was unable to handle major civil crises that sapped its resources. Since 1999, the military has been increasingly professionalised; since that year, they have at least abstained from upsetting the political order, which has helped to maintain the fledgling democracy. The publication has highlighted the problems in practically all of the military-supervised political transitions, exposing the military's hypocrisy in being given a task that it is not equipped to complete on its own.

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