

# ECOWAS and Democratic Reversal in West Africa: Re-visiting Military Incursion on the State Leadership

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## Abstract

This paper explores the major impediments to democracy in West Africa as some states are trapped in a reversed democratic experience where the military have consistently made efforts to take over power. It examines the character and nature of democracy in West Africa using system theory as a tool of analysis. It also assesses the role of Economic Community for West African State (ECOWAS) in promoting and protecting democracy in West Africa considering various interventions and conferences held to safeguard it. Methodologically, it employs the use of descriptive analysis relying solely on secondary information for data generation and articulation. It discovers that despite all the efforts ECOWAS is making, African leaders are not living up to their mandate. It is in line with this that the research states that the problem remains a systemic one. It thus, recommends that there should be a concerted effort to commit concerned bodies into employing legal means in addressing similar reversal whenever it occurs.

**Keywords;** ECOWAS, Democracy, Democratic Reversals, Military Coup d'état, West Africa.

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, there has been a global desire to adopt democracy as the standard practice among nations. The desire has created in the minds of the people an unimaginable appetite to adopt it and have it hit the ground running. Its basic principles include; economic liberalism, good governance, protection and promotion of human rights of which according to western view remains the tonic of development within the globe, etc. African states are not left out especially those in the West African sub-region. This explains why there is great agitation from many nations to have their states democratized to reflect the interest of the masses.

Against this backdrop, many countries especially the developing states are trapped in the web of crude form of leadership, highhandedness and wholesale defalcation and other forms of negativity associated with bad governance. It thus, presents us with a viable reason why political instability is still prevalent in the western part of Africa, caused by the act of mutiny as were seen in Mali and Guinea Bissau and terrorist incursions in Nigeria by the Islamic fundamentalist, Boko Haram sect over the years (NNHRI, 2012). These acts have in many ways affected the process of democratization in West Africa where there are military interventions in politics, causing a reversal on the process of democracy. The experiences of Mali and Guinea Bissau have created an atmosphere of uncertainty among the various states located at the West African sub-region. Most recent are the Burundi and Burkina Faso experiences of September 2015 where such practices still threaten the corporate existence of African states.

It is on that basis that Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) formed in 1975 for economic reasons advanced its frontier beyond economic and military tact towards the promotion of democracy in West Africa. Since the prevalence of these political infernos and adventurism, there have been series of conferences, summits (even extraordinary) and meetings by Heads of States within the region to fashion out lasting solution to the problem and culprits brought to book. To this end, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mrs. Salamatu Hussaini Suleman in 2012, stresses the need for the institutionalization of democracy and the rule of law in the region and charged the NNHRI to remain steadfast on its fundamental principle of reporting human rights issues in member states (Network of National Human Rights Institutes, 2012).

Recently, the experiences of Guinea Bissau, Burundi and Burkina Faso took a dramatic turn by resurrecting and identifying the various weaknesses that are characteristic of African states. It provoked a critical thought on the drive and excessive involvement of the military in national governance and administration of the state.

Without belabouring the obvious, this study questions the rationale behind the various incursions on democratic practices in West Africa which has continued to pose a reverse on the state of African nations. What role is

ECOWAS playing towards ensuring that democratic values are established in West Africa against the increasing spate of mutiny and terrorism in West Africa? It also examines the character of leadership in West Africa and their various manifestations.

In response to the above stated questions, this study is x-rayed in segments to provide a logical basis using appropriate framework of analysis to articulate the obvious associated with the negative character of African states and their various manifestation. Finally, in the conclusion, meaningful solutions to the problems are drawn for onward application in addressing similar situation.

## 2. Character of African State and Democracy in West Africa

Societies tend to accommodate all forms of abnormalities because what they hold supreme has been taken away from them without their interests adequately represented. Sharing in the situational frustration and betrayal, it has provoked the synergy of the people, thus, violence is down on the road. In part of the response to the constant intervention of the military in politics, lots of reasons are attributed to it. This ranges from corruption, ethnic bias, highhandedness and government non responsiveness to state issues. The practice of democracy has given room for political office holders to hide and execute all forms of social vices. That is why most states in Africa want to be associated with democracy in order not to attract wrath of the West who are the major proponent. If one tries to liken this assumption with what transpired in Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso, etc., one will understand that the root cause of the mutiny and civil disorder in most of the West African states finds expression in the character of African state which according to Ake in Nwoye (2001:139) is negative. This is simply because much of what is uniquely negative about politics in Africa arises from the character of the state, particularly its proneness to abuse and lack of immunity against it. Ake (1996: 7) contends that such character rules out politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness, brigandage and extremism for the simple reason that the nature of the state makes the capture of state power, irresistibly attractive. The winners in the competition for power win everything, the losers lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing, nothing, better than winning. Thus, everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics which does not know legitimacy or legality, only expediency. This politics is not conducive to political stability, the rule of law or to democracy, because it is constituted as warfare. Nwoye (2000: 71) in agreement with Ake's view posited that Africa's protracted crisis of development has very strong historical root in the form of colonial legacy and also partly self-inflicted. To a large extent, Nwoye (2000: 88) blaming the failure of democracy in Africa submits that virtually all explanations of the causes of corruption in developing countries tend to blame the structural weakness and inefficiency of political institutions and national integrity system. They argued that the main causes of corrupt behaviour and practices in less developed countries are traceable to certain factors such as:

- a. Generally, weak and ineffective public institutions that are inefficient, unstable and inconsistent.
- b. Deep and unrelenting parochial relation resulting in ethnic divisions and incessant conflict over the state resources.
- c. Lack of accountable and undemocratic government dominated military and personalised rule.
- d. Weak and very inactive civil society that is largely illiterate and ill-informed.
- e. Poorly structured and bloated bureaucracy that relies more on primordialism than on impersonality, merit and competence.
- f. High skewed income distribution in terms of the gap between the rich and the poor.
- g. Generally uncertain and inclement political and economic conditions resulting in rampant corruption, waste management and official misconduct.
- h. Weak and often inconsistent legal rules, complicated by very poor enforcement procedures

From the position of the afore-state logic which posited nothing but negativity to the system by exposing the weaknesses of the various governmental institution and the unwillingness of the government to addressing the various challenges facing the state. In the same vein Klitgaard (1988) posits that corrupt behaviour is essentially a manifestation of a poorly organized and inefficient political system. Accordingly, the pillars that collectively sustain and support a nation's integrity system are weak and virtually ineffective. These pillars include the executive branch of government, civil society, the private sector, the news media, the auditor-general, the judiciary and the parliament. The extent of their weaknesses when exposed singsongs nothing, but endless disaster for the world by extension.

From the above, it is obvious that the foundational influence of these sub-regional quagmires find expression in the inability of the captains of industries and holders of power to address these crucial maladies. Their desire to

over shoot beyond the financial bounds and accumulate excessive wealth without restriction tells it all. It happens to be the bane of the worrisome situation ravaging the West Africa sub-region and reversing its democratic processes. Again, the issue of seat tight-ism is also a major debacle towards ensuring a reverse on democracy in West Africa (Meredith, 2011). Thus, they have gone long ways into spreading unbearable condition and across the length and breadth of West Africa and giving the helpless citizens the lee way to pursue complex missions of frustration unleashed on their fellow citizens.

### 3.1 Causal discourse and democratic challenges in West Africa

Globally, the concept of democracy appears to be the most cherished broad-based political ideal. Appadorai (1975), Ake (1981), Baker (1995), Kukah (1999), Nwoye (2000) and are of the view that democracy portends popular representation and Bowie and Simon in Ezeani (1998) says that to call people undemocratic is normally to suggest that their political morality is questionable. This simply tells why all government regimes claim to be democratic, though the major expected transformations are never simple, linear processes. The now established democracies of Europe and the United States have arrived at where they are having endured a tortuous process of partial transformations, conflict, slowdowns, and even outright reversals. It is based on this that Ottaway (2000) observes that it should not, therefore, come as a surprise to see many countries undergoing the same travail today.

Despite the demise of socialism as a competing ideology, the road to democracy is proving as difficult as ever. After a decade of transformation, it is clear that many countries will remain very imperfect democracies or even suffer reversals in the foreseeable future. This is normal and it should not be cause for despair. From the above submission, it is obvious that reversals are inevitable in any developing country. This is because the processing of evolving democracy has lots of encumbrances. At this juncture, one may consider it apt to bring to reason the import of the concept in study, so as to posit a holistic comprehension of the demands of the study. According to Huntington (1993) and Osieh (2011), Democratic reversals are the result of several factors, and are a circumstance in which democracy is eroded and flows back towards an authoritarian regime. He rightly opines some causal reasons for democratic reversals. To him, one reason for these reversals is the snowballing occurrences; meaning that one country's actions of reversal set a precedent and may even set a trend in another. Another factor is that as the failures of authoritarian regimes are forgotten, frustration in new democracies may increase. Asia represents a good example of one cultural reason for a democratic reversal. Its Confucianist Culture is centred on the good of the group rather than the individual, and on duties as opposed to rights... finally, the final factor Huntington cites as a cause for reversal is the increase in Islamic fundamentalism. This is a cause for reversal because Islam and democracy rarely go together in practice, if at all in theory.

Across Africa as a whole, over the past decade, democratic processes have made significant headway. Electoral processes, however, have increasingly become catalysts of instability – with divisive electoral laws (often based on the winner-takes-all principle) and polarised political and party systems (often based on ethnic or geographical cleavages) frequently triggering post-electoral violent protests. This is made potentially more dangerous by the fact that gerontocratic African rulers, in power for decades – in Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Uganda – and eager to extend their grip further, preside over an ever-younger population that has very few economic and political prospects (Cristina and José 2014). To further articulate this view, between 1990 and 1996, 37 out of 48 African States in Sub-Saharan Africa held multi-party election. More than half of the elections resulted in a former dictator remaining in office (Meredith, 2011: 717). Meredith in his views went on to posit that by the end of the 1980s, not a single Africa head of state in three decades had allowed himself to be voted out of office. Of some 150 heads of state that had trodden the Africa stage, only six had voluntarily relinquished power. They includes Senegal's Leopard Senghor, after twenty year in office; Cameroon" Ahmadu Ahidjo, after twenty-two years in office; and Tanzania" Julius Nyerere, after twenty-three years in office" (Meredith, 2011: 378-9). In countries ranging from Kenya to Algeria to Gabon, Zimbabwe and Mali, dominant regimes seem to have a vicious lock on instruments of power and are prepared to do anything to retain power (Shinji, 2000).

With the foregoing in mind, it is germane to note that there are other possible explanations to the causal influence of democratic reversals, but from the views of Huntington, it went deep into capturing what is basic about it. Just like his first reason which captured the situation in West Africa and provided a clear explanatory tool for understanding the dynamic of the political situation. If not so, what can explain the spate of mutinous wave in West Africa that involved Mali, Guinea Bissau, Burkina faso; the political aberration in Cote d'Ivoire and Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria otherwise known as Boko Haram. On the possible cause, Marx and Engel (1973) argue that the history of all societies hitherto in existence is the history of class struggle. It has ignited a

class struggle which explains the extent of tension and the dialectical materialism of history spells the reason for the unbridled appetite for power. It is on that that Ake (1981), (1996) contends that too much premium was placed on state power and people are going about it in a Machiavellian unscrupulousness. They make it a thing of warfare and the specialist in warfare came and took over. He argued that because African society is at war, the specialist of warfare, the military, have come to dominate it. That is the objective basis of military rule in Africa as well as the enormous influence of the military even in those African states which are not formally under military rule. The ascendancy of the military is one of the great tragedies of Africa, for the military is nothing other than a highly specialized apparatus of violence. This explains the reason why the military still pay visits to political power especially in West Africa where there is an unchecked system of rule. That is why the system is so porous to any form of invasion. The experiences of Mali, Guinea Bissau and Burkina Faso prove this a truism. That remains the possible reason why democratic reversals are still prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West Africa. In a similar note, Converse and Kapstein (October 4, 2008) in simple terms articulates reasons for reversals in young democracies which is considered very pertinent. They submit that adverse initial conditions include poverty, inequality and fragmentation are associated with the failure of democracy, but the relationship is not deterministic.

Against that backdrop, it has created a source of worries among nations especially, in recent times when democratic practice is at the lips of everyone. To a large extent, it questions the essence of sovereignty and its location in African states. It goes on to question the contract between the government and the governed which finds expression in the periodic elections that produce the peoples' representative that protect and defend their course within the state and outside.

The elite in Africa are burdened with false expectations of being what can never be. Ordinary people in their confusion identify with them, nursing the illusion that they could be the instrument of their deliverance. The unfortunate scenario remains that the power of the elite in Africa will not transform the state progressively or transforms the society to empower the people because they have no interest in doing so. They seek democracy to provide them with false refuge and impede it whenever they can. It becomes pertinent to understand that most of the states in West Africa have not come to grip with adequate knowledge of democracy. That is the reason why we hear terms like nascent democracy, growing democracy, and emerging democracy which is peculiar to developing states especially, Nigeria.

Thus, taking a holistic cognisance of the above argument Ake (1996: 6) notes that

one of the most remarkable features of democratization in Africa is that it is totally indifferent to the character of the state. Democratic elections are being held to determine who will exercise the powers of the state with no questions asked about the character of the state as if it has no implications for democracy. But its implications are so serious that elections in Africa give the voter only a choice between oppressors. This is hardly surprising since Africa largely retains the colonial state structure which is inherently anti-democratic, being the repressive apparatus of an occupying power.

The implication remains that even in bizarre knowledge on the practice; the masses are placed at the receiving end of the whole exercise and to accept the situation as part of life. This has resulted in the masses' confused state of questioning for legitimacy and social contract they enthroned through elections that informed today's government.

### **3.2 Basic assumptions and nature of democratic reversals in West Africa**

Contemporary African states are trapped in the web of political instability occasioned by system malfunction proceeding from weak and poor leadership. The situation has created lack of trust thus, endangering the lives of the citizens. This study evaluates the prevalent political conditions in West Africa, the causes of democratic reversals in some of the West African states like Mali, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Burundi which is in the East Africa, etc.

In recent times, African democracy has been in a tight spot. Senegal, Mali and Guinea Bissau's election in 2012 were seen as tests of political continuity in the region. Senegal succeeded, it stands out proudly as never having experienced military rule; but Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau have taken significant steps backward. These are not isolated cases as there is a long history of coups d'état in the West African region (Ajayi, 2015: 96-99). The reality is that for years, African democracy has been jeopardized by military uprisings still very present in the continent.

In a bid to addressing the causative influence of the various reversal in West Africa, Fessy (March 22, 2012: 3) thus, opines that the trouble in Mali began when hundreds of Malian combatant who had fought to defend the late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, fled back home with weapons at the end of last year and formed the most powerful Tuareg-led rebel group the region has known – the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA). It was said that Mali's Tuaregs have been marginalised by the southern government and have staged several rebellions over the years. It was anger too high. The implication remains that politics of sectionalism and ethnicity were the bane of the democratic consideration.

On what transpired in Guinea Bissau, Ross (March 2, 2009: 2) observes that following the assassination of President Joao Bernardo Vieira and the murder of the head of the army, General Tagme Na Waie, it is not surprising that foreign ministers from the region are heading to Guinea-Bissau. To that, he is of the view that the country has been a destabilising force in West Africa for years. The region has seen enough conflict and is determined to ensure a smooth transition and that no problems spill over the borders. It would be germane to note that Guinea-Bissau was the only country in West Africa to have fought its way to independence. In this situation, it is imperative to note that the type of Leadership in Guinea-Bissau was problematic right from its independence with a protracted ruler which never wished anyone good other conflict after conflict. Likewise, the situation in Cote d'Ivoire could be likened to other cause of political disturbances in West Africa. It stemmed from the refusal of Gbagbo to vacate seat for Quatterra in battle of interest where the latter was labelled western puppet. Thus, this led to the refusal to leave office after the electoral body has declared Quatterra the winner of the election. It latter metamorphosed into a civil war that consumed lives amounting to millions. In a like manner, the situation in Nigeria is a very perplexing one in that it was proceeding from a quarter that is inexplicable when it comes to the havoc it unleashes on the system.

In Guinea, the dictator Lansana Conte died of diabetes on 22 December 2008 after 24 years in office. This left a power vacuum that brought on a struggle for control of the country, which was solved by a coup. Captain Moussa Camara Dadis, as leader of the junta, was also the country's president. A year later, he was wounded during an assassination attempt by his former aide-de-camp. While he left for Morocco to receive treatment, his Vice President Sekouba Kanate, also in uniform, relieved him in leading the National Council for Democracy and Development (Conseil National de la Democratie et du Development, CNDD). In November 2010 elections were held, which were characterized by strong inter-ethnic rivalry between rival parties. It was a clear case of serious breaches on democratization in Guinea (Cristina, 2014).

Likewise in Burkina Faso, similar circumstances somewhat reminiscent of the Senegalese youth uprisings of 2011, Burkina Faso's popular uprising now faces a critical juncture akin to that confronted by the Arab countries in 2011. While the civil disobedience movement has fed the narrative of democratic change in Africa, the political system is structurally weak, and general elections per se will be no panacea for the West African country. The depth of popular disillusionment with Compaoré had been expressed repeatedly in the years and months preceding this crisis. A series of events revealed strong popular opposition to the president's determination to extend his mandate. His various political manoeuvres show that he had been attempting to change article 37 of the constitution without resorting to a national referendum (Cristina and Jose, 2014). The sudden way in which the social disobedience campaign escalated into countrywide violent protests took many by surprise. Yet early warning signals had been flagged up by the International Crisis Group as early as July 2013, with claims that any attempt to amend the constitution could provoke a replica of the 2011 popular uprisings. The political climate was already highly-charged at the start of 2014. In the wake of Compaoré's public announcement of his intention to extend his term in office, the ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) was rocked by a wave of resignations in early January. By mid-January, thousands of Burkinabés were participating in opposition-led rallies across the country, while heavyweight CDP defectors formed a new opposition party – the Movement of People for Progress (MPP) – presenting itself as a credible contender of the CDP's longstanding political hegemony.

([http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert\\_46\\_Burkina\\_Faso.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_46_Burkina_Faso.pdf)).

Furthermore, a deep look into what is obtainable across the length and breadth of West Africa shows that in some of those states that are threatened by reverses in democratic practice are provoked by governmental weaknesses to address minor societal problems ranging from poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, social neglect, and structural deficiencies (Ngara et al., 2014:6). These are no doubt deep rooted in most African states and have continued to redirect the states social values. The recent Burundi and Burkina Faso crises have created serious hiatus on the beam of democratic politics in Africa and over the years the West African states have been the worst hit to that. They have deep impact on the states that are vulnerable to crisis as a result of the afore-

mentioned effects on the masses and the states at large (Bushiam, 2015). Holistically, seat tight-ism of leaders is a major debacle to democratization in West Africa. There are African leaders who have turned themselves into dictators in order to maintain and retain themselves in power tolerate neither opposition nor dissent, rig election emasculate the courts, cow the press, stifle the universities, demand abject servility and make themselves exceedingly rich (Meredith, 2011). “Many dictatorships fell in Africa in the early 1990s as many dictators survived, albeit under different circumstances. Military rulers won presidential elections in Guinea, Mauritania, Equatorial Guinea and Burkina Faso. A new breed of dictators emerged, adept at maintaining a façade of democracy sufficient for them to be able to obtain foreign aid. Even when regime changes occurred, new governments soon reverted to the same system of patronage and patrimonialism run by their predecessor; some quickly lapsed into the same autocratic means of rule. In place of Big man rule came Big man democracy with little different between the two” (Meredith, 2011:410).

In totality, going by the causes of democratic reversals in West Africa, it is imperative to articulate in simple terms that it is a function of weak political system to really address the systemic conflict. Despite the various yawning proceeding from the marginalised quarters, still government has never considered it consequential to address such thus, leaving the quagmire to escalate into a full scale war. It is on this ground that this study adopts systems theory as propounded by David Easton, Robert Dahl, etc. (Gaub, 2003: 113). It simply tries to establish the role of the state which determines the extent of its input which can be in form of demand and support that proceed from the masses. Where the masses feel dissatisfied with the operations of the state, it can agitate thus, putting stress on the system and where it is not well managed, it is capable of pulling down the system. It explains the cause of so many reversals in West Africa arising from sectional and long neglect by government to respond to demands of the people.

#### **4.1 The Role of ECOWAS towards Promoting Democracy in West Africa**

The phenomenon of democratic reversal in West Africa cannot be assumed to be a new practice because in the past years most African states are under different forms of military administration. The formation of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was conceived in line with promoting and protecting West African democracy owing to the consistent internal and external crises facing the sub-region. This made it to move from its economic objectives to mediatory role and military involvement in the political conditions of the states in West Africa. They have succeeded in combating democratic reversals in West Africa through various ways like, its sub-regional court, military actions, mediation and reconciliation roles and defence of democracy through the promotion of human rights (Ebie, 2009: 24). These form the basis of our discourse in this section of study.

For the fact that it has been the singsong of ECOWAS to restore democratic values wherever there is reversals has plunged the organization to adopt military option as a medium generating political compliance. Just as we argued abinitio in this study that democratic reversals are not peculiar to mutiny or military involvement alone, but where there is observance of disorder that threatens the corporate existence of a state of which Nigeria’s case of Islamic fundamentalists and Ivorian democratic somersault also represent. To that end, Sessay (June 3, 2002: 1-3) was of the view that it was in 1999 that ECOWAS embarked in an all important conflict prevention and management enterprise, the adoption of Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace Keeping and Security. This document contained the details of all acceptable method of conflict resolution short of war. It also has the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in 2001, as a veritable instrument for promoting peace and security in West Africa that witnessed two violent and even notorious civil wars within a decade (Liberia 1989-1997 and Sierra Leone 1991-2002). The Protocol is important for a variety of reasons, not the least because it has the potential of impacting directly or indirectly on the ordinary man in ECOWAS member states, thereby enhancing sub-regional peace, security, stability and economic development. The Protocol covers a wide range of subject and is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the Principles, chapter 2 is on the Modalities for implementation, while chapter 3 deals with the General and Final Provisions... in all, the document has eight sections, each of which is devoted to a topical issue in the politics of the sub-region. Thus, Section I is on constitutional convergence Principles, while Section II is on Elections. The rest of the sections deals with the following important issues; i) Election Monitoring; ii) The Role of the armed Forces, the police and the security forces in a democracy; iii) Poverty Alleviation and Promotion of Social Dialogue; iv) Education, culture and Religion; v) Rule of Law, Human Rights and Good Governance; vi) Women, Children and the Youth (Sessay, June 3, 2002). The essence is to aid and promote internal peace and standard of governance so as to help minimise the spate of political violence in the sub-region. In support of the above, Thurston (2012) and Edwards (2015) states that ECOWAS (regional bloc) says it is ready to take various steps: re-imposing sanctions and ordering a military intervention.

ECOWAS' threats should be taken seriously the organization has acted more decisively during Mali's crisis than many...ECOWAS is already moving to send peacekeepers to Guinea-Bissau site of another recent coup.

In a similar note, while receiving Sierra-Leone's Lord Chief Justice Umu Hawa Tejan Jalloh, the ECOWAS President (H.E. James Victor Gbeho) used the opportunity to praise the high level of Cooperation among the organs of the Community and said "it is gratifying to note that in spite of the threats of democratic reversals in some member states that have recently tested the resilience, courage and robustness of our regional institutions, the community institutions, especially this honourable court have discharged themselves creditably in ensuring the restoration of democratic order in Cote d'Ivoire". (<http://www.slhcnigeria.org/?u=news&rU=newsd&evid=45&uTitle=NEWS:%20WEST%20AFRICAN%20CHIEF%20JUDGES%20ASSESS%20ECOWAS%20COURT>). In addition, the Centre also observes with great disappointment and condemns in strong terms the violation of human rights that occurred in Senegal since the Council's decision. In violation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Senegalese Constitution, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, Senegalese police have responded to mass protests by cracking down violently on protesters across the country and banning mass demonstration and meeting contrary to the country's Election Code which allows free assembly of all candidate and voters. It is on that basis that the course of ECOWAS in promoting and safeguarding democracy in West African receives greater attention.

Speaking further, it has not only done justice, but is largely seen by stakeholders as having done justice to most of the cases filed before it. It has also established itself as a resource base, through which the commission gauges the severity and fashions responses to old and emerging human rights challenges such as women and child trafficking, slavery, corruption, poverty, level of political freedom, and issues of environmental rights. The ECOWAS President said the court has made significant contribution to the integration of legal cultures, practices and procedure in Members states. It has also contributed to the development of legal practice by providing an avenue for Lawyers and litigants to seek legal opinions and judgement on issues critical to their well being. Thus, according to Viljoen (2012), (2015) as one of the prominent regional courts in Africa, the ECOWAS Court which sits in Abuja, has jurisdiction over fifteen West African countries and has since 2005 decided several individual rights cases. He goes on to state that ECOWAS has adopted legal instruments which impose democratic obligations on member states while recognising the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights as imperative for achieving ECOWAS objectives.

To that extent, the community court has done this through Land-Mark judgements, against illegal and unconditional acts by Governments of member States, through pronouncement aimed at the protection and promotion of the fundamental human rights of community citizens, by way of judgements upholding regional and international norms, by judgement against environmental degradation and notable judgements bordering on the protection and promotion of the economic, social and political rights of community citizens and the strengthening of the institutional infrastructure of governance and not the least by judgments among disputing community interest and groups, which have helped in restoring peace and order to member states (Sassy 2002 and Ebie, 2009). The recent Guinea Bissau crisis was a surprise to many intellectuals who are positive thinkers and believe that West Africa is on course in their drive to having efficient government that can ensure the enthronement of constitutional democracy. In as much as the government of Nigeria and several other ECOWAS presidents showed their concern, the situation remains a major setback to the promotion and sustenance of democratization in West Africa (Winsor, 2015). The role played by ECOWAS in restoring the interim Government of Burkina Faso after the recent coup provided a springboard on the determination of ECOWAS towards promoting democracy in West Africa.

## Conclusion

Having gone this far in this discourse, it would be imperative to note that West Africa which is the specimen in this study has been in the struggle for many years to have democracy as a standard of practice, but various military involvements and interventions in politics have been the bane of political reproach. It finds better explanation in what was obtainable in the 1990s when virtually all states in West Africa were ruled by the men in Khaki – the military.

It thus, uncovers that the nature and character of African democracy is so strange that its future looks so bleak. The reason remains that weak responses and social neglect from government created burning desire in the masses to demand for a change of government, of which some consider mutiny or military involvement as a veritable option towards overthrowing an adamant regime that is conceived in self-seeking and protection drive. It is at that that ECOWAS took it upon itself to defend the course of democracy in West Africa through several

ways that include court action, military involvement where there is mutiny, promoting and protection of human rights (rights of the citizens) in the West African sub-region. Though similar situations crop up, but their effort in reversing the democratic reversal cannot be underestimated.

Likewise, numerous young democracies have survived in spite of disastrous economic performance. Political institutions play a key role in preventing a return to authoritarianism, but the effectiveness of constraints on executive power appears more important. It discovered that there is a need for greater coordination between democracy promotion and economic development in order to reduce the spate of civil disorder that ravages the political axis of West Africa.

### **Recommendations**

This academic voyage could not be complete without putting up reasonable solutions on democratic reversals in West Africa. It is therefore germane to point out certain key steps that will aid in the promotion and consolidation of democracy in Africa and West Africa in particular. This will go a long way in providing African States with a solid base for the protection of democratic practice that will excite global appetite and jealous. They include;

1. African civil society actors in general and from West Africa in particular in conjunction with ECOWAS are expected to fully and concretely commit themselves to using legal means to ensure rapid re-enthronement of democratic values and constitutional order where unconstitutional change of government has occurred.
2. There is also need to employ the use of the Accra Plan of Action in pursuing the consolidation of democratic gains in West Africa. This centres on meting out due punishment by ECOWAS Community Court to any group that rise against the state, thereby creating civil intolerance.
3. African Leaders should learn to be responsive to the plights of the public and treat them accordingly and take responsibility for their fallibility.
4. There should be adequate involvement of the public in the scheme of governance within the state and make them stake-holders in determining the pace of development in the state thus, change of the present character of state in Africa which is imperative.
5. Also, there is need for strict adherence to constitutional process of power transfer from one government to another through credible election.

Through that way, it is believed that when all these are put in appropriate position, with the synergy of State government, ECOWAS and the citizens of West Africa, much will be achieved.

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