AFRICAN UNION'S SHARED VALUES AND THE DILEMMA OF DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA

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KEYWORDS
African Union, Shared Values, West Africa, Democracy, Military

ABSTRACT
Recently some West African Countries had their democratic governance disrupted in the face of shared values developed and agreed as standard practice for member states of the African Union. Against this background, the paper examined the African Union Shared values and the dilemma of democracy in West Africa sub region. The paper adopted historical and descriptive research method and obtained data from secondary sources particularly Africa Union documents, Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, and other related scholarly journals. First, the study found that AU shared values were developed in their desire of meeting the needs of Africans through the adoption of norms and principles that encourage collective actions and solutions to challenges facing the region of Africa. Second, the study discovered a huge gap in the declaration and policy commitment by leaders of some west African countries particularly Niger Republic, Mali, and others that recently experienced military takeover of governance to AU's Shared values. The gap is primarily caused by autocratic tendencies and political corruption. Its further revealed that the AU is weak to enforces her declaration on democratic governance. If this done, Military intervention will be less likely. The study revealed these through critical analysis of the ingredients of African Union Shared values and its declaration on democratic governance. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others commitment of leaders of the sub region to good governance, justice, rule of law that ensure peace and sustainable development that are antidotes to military disruption of constitutional democratic governance. AU Members should unite in the implementation of its agreed shared values.

Introduction

Anarchy, ethnic cleansing, warlordism, and the disintegration of political communities are some of the defining elements of Africa as a continent due to the awful forces of repression, exclusion, and the division of human and national resources (Osita, 2013). African governments transitioned to democratic governance, which is seen to be different from rule imposed either by force or status, in an effort to overcome the aforementioned issues. The West African subregion had a democratic transition in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a result, the subregion assumed the role of de facto leader in Africa's democratic transition. The ECOWAS protocol on democracy and good governance, A/SPI/12/01, which is additional to the protocol pertaining to mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security, was adopted, making pro-democratic growth in the area very symbolic.

Official recognition for governments and leaders who come to power by unlawful methods is rejected by both the Africa Union and the ECOWAS protocols. But throughout the last three years, a military coup has imprisoned West Africa. Solders have over throne democratic institutions in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger among others. In particular, the Junta takeover of governance in Niger generated corresponding reaction from the sub-region's organization (ECOWAS). The threat of military action of the body, and subsequent sanction gave birth to another dimension reflected in these words;

> *In a joint statement on January 28, 2024, the three countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, all founding fathers of ECOWAS, that witnessed military take announced they were leaving the sub-regional bloc (ECOWAS), because, to them, the body has drifted from the ideas of the founding fathers and the spirit of Pan-Africanism (Nigeria Premium Time, 2024).*

They further claimed that;

> *The body (ECOWAS), having falling under the influence of foreign powers, has betrayed its founding principles. Therefore, the fathers in these countries, mulled a counter-body called "Alliance of the Sahel States" (Nigeria Premiun Time, 2024).*

These countries, though are in West Africa but, are members of the African Union and therefore are equally expected to be committed to the implementation of AU's principles on democracy. The sub-region is going through institutional collapse in its democratic governance practices. And this is because there exist a disconnect between share values and democratic principles.

It's interesting to observe that Western democracies are firmly based in robust institutions of law and governance, and that African democracies embrace this model due to their belief that modernity and democracy are the ultimate goals of human history and that development is merely a syndrome derived from Western experience (Gerald, 1974). The idea is that although democratic practices are ideal, they must take into consideration the common values of Africans. It is impossible to overlook the significance of common ideals in human civilization. This is due to the fact that social relationships are impossible without common ideals, since shared values have been essential to the evolution of the human community—especially that of African States. For example, the African Unity organization—now known as the African Union—was facilitated in its development by common anti-colonial beliefs**.** Thus, African shared values and democratic practice in the continent must be fully interrogated, if the dilemma of democracy in West Africa can be adequately understood. In this context, two fundamental issues which form the focus of this paper revolve around the following questions. First, what constitutes African Union Shared Values and in what sense are the shared values related to democratic practice. Secondly, why is democracy appearing unworkable in West Africa sub region despite its de facto posture in the era of democratic transition in the continent.

The Study Methods

In doing this, we employed Historical and descriptive research method and relied heavily on secondary sources. qualitative research method most appropriate for this study because of the need to collect contextual information. The choice of qualitative method rests on the fact that it enables the researcher to acquire rich and in-depth information

concerning the research question that coup in West Africa is less likely if regional bodies AU and ECOWAS enforces their declarations on democratic governance in member states. The study obtained bulk of the data from secondary sources. AU and ECOWAS documents were consulted, including scholarly journals and textbooks. Materials were also obtained from the website of United Nations especially Geneva Centre for security policy, and Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, Newspaper, particularly Premium Times.

Theoretical framework

There is no doubt that there exists an extensive literature and theories on democracy in Africa but Elite theory is chosen out of the array of theoretical contributions as the most suitable explanatory guide based on its ability to capture the subject under consideration. This is in line with thinking that the elites are in minority in the society, but influences political process and take the bulk of decisions that affect majority of the people in the society. In this context, elites are primarily those that govern (Hughes, 1965). Fundamentally, there is one or more people at the top of every country and government. Government leaders are fundamental to the political and social life of any country, and the structure of institutions greatly influences the stability of the state, the administration, and the efficiency of public authorities. The goal of elite theory is to define and clarify the dynamics of power in modern society. According to elite theory, a tiny minority controls the majority of the power and has a considerable influence on how policies are decided upon and carried out. The three classical elite theorists are Vifredo Pareto, Gaetona Mosca and Robert Michels. This theory provides the interconnectivity in the explanation of the search for political power and governance and this generate conflict and instability.

Conceptual clarification

Sharedvalues:

Michael (1950) defined value as a belief, indicating that something is good, desirable, worthwhile, important and worth striving for. Values operates at both individuals and community levels. At the community or societal level, it is value consensus for integrative functions. This forms the basis of solidarity, unity, cooperation that produce common goals.

For African Union, shared values constitute those norms, principles and practices developed or required to encourage and provide for collectivity, especially in areas such as politics, economics and socio-cultural relations. The target of the African Union shared values, into address challenges that impede the continent's development.

The preamble of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) captured the continent shared values in these words.

> *Inspired by a common determination to promote understanding among our peoples and cooperation among our states in response to our people's aspirations for brotherhood and solidarity, we are convinced that conditions for peace and security must be established and maintained. We are also conscious of the fact that freedom, equality, justice, and dignity are essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African people. Finally, we recognize that it is our responsibility to harness the natural and human resources of our continent for the total advancement of our peoples in all spheres of human endeavor.*

African shared values were also stated in the constitutive Act of African Union. Among others were;

> *Taking into consideration the principles and objectives stated in the character of the organization of African Unity and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, as well as the noble ideals that guided the founding fathers of our continental organization and generations of pan-Africanists in their determination to promote Unity, solidarity, cohesion, and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and African states; Driven by our shared vision of a united and powerful Africa, as well as the necessity of forming a partnership between governments and all facets of society—particularly women,*

youth, and the private sector—in order to enhance solidarity and cohesiveness among our peoples, we are committed to advancing and defending the rights of individuals and groups, preserving national institutions and cultures, and ensuring good governance and the rule of law (AU constitution Act, 2000).

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has also recorded the common ideals across African nations. African leaders acknowledged in this agreement that they had a responsibility to end poverty and promote sustainable growth and development, based on a common vision and conviction (NEPAD, 2001). Furthermore, as said in NEPAD, African leaders reaffirmed their strong commitment to democracy, human rights, good governance, transparency, accountability, honesty, respect for human rights, and the advancement of the rule of law.

African common values were arranged in this way in an appendix to the report that the ministerial committee on the Union administration sent to the Assembly

Individual level consists of the following

i. Basic rights to life, identity and opportunity

ii. Basic freedom of expression and worship

iii. Tolerance

iv. Participation in governance

v. Solidarity with one another in times of joy and in times of sadness.

vi. Dignity and respect

vii. Justice

viii. Sense of fairness

ix. Equality of persons in gender, race, sex

x. Respect for age

xi. Integrity

xii. Community spiritedness

xiii. Self determination

At the state or regional level, comprises

i. Sovereignty and the interdependence of states

ii. Adherence to the rule of law

iii. Democracy and the representation of the popular will

iv. Care for the weakest

v. Economic and social self-reliance

vi. Justice

vii. Law and order

viii. Equity and equality

ix. National determination

x. Solidarity of states or brother's keeper

xi. Stability of enrolment

xii. Security

Having look at African Union's shared values, we now turn to the concept of democracy.

Democracy.

Democracy is a relative and elusive concept that has no universally acceptable definition. One reason for this is that the concept has been compartmentalized. However, we look at it from political perspective, thus, it comprises various mean in the shape of institutional arrangement which enable citizens to control public policy pertaining to the holding of election, and the maintenance of fundamental political liberties.

In brief, the notion of democratic government is anchor on majoritarian decision; the classification version of democracy as demonstrated during the French revolution underscores the imperative of popular power. As popular power, democracy emphasizes the participation of ordinary people or the rank and file in the decision-making process of governance Ajomo, 1996). Democratically, the people are being empower to creating

institutions and structures, design basically to provide policies and programmes that serve the interests of all. Indeed, there can be no good governance without deep seated culture for popular participation. It is only through this, that just, sustainable and inclusive communities can emerge (Akokpari, 2008). As stated in UNECA's document, full requirements of sustainable democracy include some of the features captured in African shared values.

These include

i. Rule of law

ii. Vibrant civil society

iii. Institution of popular election

iv. Independence of the judiciary and legislature

v. Accountability and transparency in governance and service delivery

vi. Existence of opposition parties

vii. Respect for human rights

From the above, the rule of law is in reality an expression of power relations among contending forces in society (Ajomo Ayo, 1996). In democracy, the expectation is that everybody, the leaders and the led, as well as the state are all subordinated to the rule of law, in a way that equity and justice are upheld.

> *The interest of the ordinary people in the rule of law lies in the realization that the exercise of power by the dominant forces, if unchecked by rules and regulations, would lead to granny. Left alone, those who wield power at varying levels are likely to continue to rule as they deem fit.*

From the foregoing, the quality of democratic government focuses on the fundamental that engineer societal developments.

The African Union Declarations on Democracyin Africa.

In attempt to advancing democracy and good governance in Africa, African Union evolved a number of instruments. These instruments among others include

i. Every statement on the political and socioeconomic climate in Africa as well as the significant global shifts that are occurring.

ii. The Cairo Agenda of 1995: A Restart for the Economic and Social Development of Africa

iii. The proclamation of unlawful government changes made in Algiers in 1999.

iv. The 2000 Lome Declaration for an OAU Response to unlawful changes of Government.

v. The AU Declaration from 2002 on the fundamentals guiding democratic elections in the Region.

The objectives of the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance are to:

i. Promote adherence, by each State Party, to universal values and principles of democracy and respect for human right;

ii. Promote and enhance adherence to the principle of the rule of law premised upon the respect for, and the supremacy of, the Constitution and constitutional order in the political arrangements of the State Parties;

iii. Promote the holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalize legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of governments;

iv. Prohibit, reject and condemn unconstitutional change of government in any Member State as a serious threat to stability, peace, security and development;

v. Promote and protect the independence of the judiciary;

vi. Nurture, support and consolidate good governance by promoting democratic culture and practice, building and strengthening governance institutions and inculcating political pluralism and tolerance;

vii. Encourage effective coordination and harmonization of government policies amongst State Parties with the aim of promoting regional and continental integration;

viii. Promote State Parties' sustainable development and human security;

ix. Promote the fight against corruption in conformity with the provisions of the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption adopted in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003;

x. Promote the establishment of the necessary condition to foster citizen participation, transparency, access to information, freedom of the press and accountability in the management of public affairs;

xi. Promote gender balance and equality in the governance and development processes;

xii. Enhance cooperation between the Union, Regional Economic Communities and the International Community on democracy, elections and governance; and

xiii. Promote best practices in the management of elections for the purpose of political stability and good governance (African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, 2007).

In keeping with the goals and tenets of the Constitutive Act, as stated in Articles 3 and 4, is the choice to encourage all parties to uphold the global ideals and principles of democracy and respect for human rights. According to Article 12 of this Charter, State Parties are required to carry out initiatives and programs that support democratic values and practices as well as solidify a democratic and peaceful culture. These initiatives include fostering good governance by guaranteeing open and honest government, bolstering political institutions, fostering a supportive atmosphere, and incorporating civic education into curriculums. The Charter's Chapter 8 outlines penalties for unconstitutional changes of government. Meanwhile, Art. 23 of the Agreement between State Parties states that any illegal means of gaining or retaining power, including putschs or coups against democratically elected governments, mercenary intervention to replace democratically elected governments with armed dissidents or rebels, and the refusal of an incumbent government to cede power to the victorious party or candidate following free, fair, and regular elections, constitute unconstitutional changes of government and will be subject to appropriate sanctions by the Union. State Parties are required by Article 19(1) to notify the AU Commission of upcoming elections and extend an invitation to send an electoral observer mission. Additionally, State Parties are required by Article 18(1) to request assistance from the Commission in the form of advisory services and the development of their electoral institutions and procedures through the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit and the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Fund.

The above provisions, were made because of the high expectation that elected officials would deliver on the dividends of democracy against autocratic governments. From the perspective of ordinary African citizens, it is therefore a situation in which democracy both as a process and an end in itself is yet to prove its efficacy visa vis their experiences before transition to democracy. This beg the question, why is democracy appearing unworking in the sub region even as AU had provided measures to strengthen the system?

Discussion of Findings

Today, it is no longer news that there has been a sustained threat to democracy in West Africa. Some had actually occurred, while rumors and threat to over throne other democratically leaders filter around. For instance, several coup d'états have occurred in this region since 2020. As mentioned earlier, Niger, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali experienced successful coups. In these countries for instance, Human development index scores, shows that except Guinea with annual GDP of $1,500, others had less than US $1.00 a year (Ajala, 2023). The implication of this is that, these countries offered opportunity for insecurity to strive following high level of poverty and perhaps poor human capacity building, especially in adequate educational opportunity. As documented by Ajala (2023), these countries have highest level of violent attacks between 2010-2022. Political leaders in the region fail to address poor economic conditions of their country. Besides the over

whelming feature pointed in the preceding paragraph, each of the four countries, has specific factors that threaten democracy. For instance, in Guinea, resistance to constitutional change to guarantee the incumbent a third term in office offered the military, an opportunity to seize power from an elected government official.

Mali experienced two coup d'etats within nine months' period; August 2020 with president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita ousted by colonel AssimiGoita following Malians protests against parliamentary electoral frauds and insensitivity to provision of public good. The junta formed transitional council, but Goita, the vice president, seized power on within the transitional period, 21st may, 2021 against the 18 months promise of returning power to elected officials. Bah N'Daw led administration was accused of incompetence (Ajala, 2023).

In a related manager, citizens of Burkina Faso felt frustrated and accused the government of corruption, laxity and nepotism. The feeling of frustration caused trust issue, which the military used as excuse for the takeover of governance.

For obvious reasons, Niger's coup was highly surprising. This is because, the country was relatively politically stable, having experienced democratic practice for over a decade. Nevertheless, issues such as the ethnification of governance by the president, presence of large number of foreign troops in the country and the failure of regional organizations such as ECOWAS to take decisive actions against previous military take overs are major factors responsible for the recent coup in Niger Republic. The volatile history and present of each nation are directly linked to the current political situations in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. Up to 40% of Burkina Faso is said to have fallen under terrorist hands, forcing 2,500 schools to shut and forcing over a million people to flee their homes. Even though Mali's contribution is less, both nations are seen to be the main causes of violence in their respective regions because they are trapped in a risky cycle of instability that feeds on itself.

> *In a democracy, the institutions settle conflicts; but, in Guinea and Mali, the state's institutional and legal systems are ineffective. Alpha Conde would not have been allowed to pursue a third term if they had been.*

The ineffectiveness of democratic institutions in West Africa States reinforce increase corruption and by extension, lack of development in the countries that experienced coups. these countries' economics, and acute poverty with rulers and their cronies' wealth accumulated all over the place in the face of vast majority of the people suffering object poverty. This condition to a large extent relates to low level of political culture. As Finer (1962) rightly put it, political cultures involve maturity, development, low and minimal in a descending scale of modernity. In a mature political culture, military or soldiers are only important force in defence policy making. They have no need in political engineering especially taking over governance from elected civilian government. There is low political culture in the region. And where this exist with legitimacy of civilian government almost totally lacking, military intervention is certain. It is a common knowledge that vast majority of the civilian populace lack confidence and trust in government and as observed by Finer (1962). Such situation encourages widespread support for direct military intervention. The democratic dilemma in these countries revealed that:

> *While individual nations across Africa and around the world, together with organizations such as economic community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have been united in condemning the coups large numbers of citizens in all four countries in West Africa have took part in demonstrations supporting the coups (Geneva Centre for Security policy, 2023).*

The people do not feel that the civilian government was in their best interest. Where public attachment to civilian institutions is strong, coup and invariably soldiers will be weak. Demonstration in favour of coup in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea and the called for coup in other countries in the region obviously shows that public attachment to civilian institutions in the area is weak and virtually non-existent. This perhaps explain why Obasanjo (2023) said, western style of democracy has failed in Africa. The continent is weak democratically. The weakness is not because of its potential but because its structure which has impaired its extractive and distributive capabilities endanger democracy. The economy of the region is essentially statist. It is predatory and exploitative by the simple

reason that it is largely in the interest of a tiny minority of political adventurists. In terms of dividends, democracy yields disproportionately to the politically salient citizens and their allies rather than to the ordinary people. No wonder, Obasanjo averred that, western democracy does not take into consideration the interest of the majority of the people. The political elites are representatives of only some of the people and not full representatives of all the people. Given the above, democracy in the region is endanger because elected leaders are failing to deliver quality democratic leadership.

Establishing standards and then regularly enforcing them are two different things. For example, by the time the ECOWAS ultimatum to Niger discreetly expired, several regional military regimes had declared their willingness to back Niger's military in the event of conflict, while other members expressed reluctance. As a result, AU was unable to uphold its proclamation. Thus, the stark contrast between the stated policy commitment to sustainable democratic practice and the statement of principles is one of the greatest hurdles and impediments to the implementation of Africa's shared ideals. As Fred (2013) correctly points out, the majority of the professed ideals in the Union's common values—which are eventually ingrained in democratic norms—end up being empty platitudes that are never put into practice.

The most relevant AU tool for evaluating democratic governance seems to be the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance of 2007. However, it appears that many member states of the AU have been quite cautious in acceding to this instrument, and the reasons are not far-fetched. As at 2012, while 41 out of 53 countries had signed the document, only 17 ratified and deposited the instrument. Therefore, the domestication of this Charter has been problematic.

> *The impression that regional organizations like the AU and ECOWAS are essentially a club of self-serving heads of state and governments that want to stay in power by addressing only the portions of the governance agenda that play in their interest is created by the disparity between popular demands and what these organizations offer on democratic governance*

Thus, democratic leaders, rather prefer personal agenda against public good driven ideology. Personal shared values now occupy prominent place in the practice of democracy in the sub-region, against public shared interests.

Therefore, the futility of the AU shared values in relations to democracy and its principles, are apparently irresoluble conflict that the sub-region is contending with. This is why Gerald 91974) had earlier argued that:

> *Because African institutions are distinct and unfit for Western democracy, it is impossible to understand and practice Western democracy in Africa in a unilineal or teleological manner. Western democracies are thriving because their institutions are practically designed to fit their particular kind of democracy.*

Africans are a different people that require a unique way of addressing their political and economic challenges, the ballot box as an end in itself, not very well applicable to engineer development in Africa. Electoral corruption, weak institutions and the near one-party approach, where the leader, even amidst multi-party system wielded monopoly and absolute power and in fact, presided over the state with a very ambiguous constitution, are just simple fact that the sub region's democracy is in trouble pace.

The weakness of the regional institution especially the African Union, and that of the West Africa Sub-region body (ECOWAS) to secure compliance to democratic fundamentals, and their shared values endanger democracy. There is a highly permissive or discretionary nature of commitments to shared values. Many African country leadership lack the sense of nobleness oblige towards the implementation of the democratic shared values.

Concluding Remarks

This paper explores the African Union shared values and its relationship with democratic governance in West Africa. The paper argued that liberal democracy has inherent requirements that are common to Shared values. However, in the practice of democracy, member states especially those in the West Africa sub region are insensitive to the well-

informed AU declaration of shared values on democratic governance. Yet, AU appear too weak to enforce its principles on democratic government. Military intervention may be less likely if she actively enforces the agreed principles in her declaration on democracy. Where this is not possible, then Africa must develop Afro democracy, that is, to get over unnecessary military intervention, the people may have to devise a home-grown political system that would give political leaders the necessary acceptance, credibility and legitimacy that is capable of ensuring strong attachment of the civilian populace to democratic institutions, making less attractive to the military.

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