

Review Article

'Debris' of Coups D'état: Electoral Democracy, Election Violence, Political Vigilantism, and Elections Securitizations in Africa

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Abstract: Recent warm reception to military takeovers and mongering for coups d'état by citizens in some African nations due primarily to the disillusionment that has accompanied the promise that democracy in a globalized world will lead to prosperity and improve standards of living coupled with the myriad of social, economic, security and political challenges have become of great concerns to scholars, social scientists, advocates, and observers of African democracy. Three decades since the publication of Huntington's famous work, *Democracy's Third Wave* and Prezeworski's recent book "Crisis in Democracy", political observers of Africa's democratic transitions and consolidation are questioning whether recent successful coups and attempts since 2010 in countries such as Mali, Burkina, Faso, Niger, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Gabon, Sudan amongst others raise serious questions about the future of African democracy. The numerous and successful military takeovers across the continent particularly in the West African sub-region raise a myriad of questions as to the direction of African democratic transition and consolidation. These causing many scholars, political analysts, academics, democratic advocates and experts on military takeovers/coup to begin to analyze whether recent happenings on the continent can be characterized as "debris" of coups d'état in the post-independence-democratic transitional era or a reversal of the Third Wave of democracy on the continent. Building upon earlier analytical work on military coups this paper explores the concept of securitization of elections through the recruitment and prioritized treatment of political vigilante groups into the regular and specialized security agencies) as long terms risks for "debris" of coup d'états by adopting elections as a "minimalist" or "electoralist" definition of democracy.

Keywords: Electoral democracy, violence, political vigilantism, securitization, coup d'états.

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday March 14, 2019, a Three-Member Commission Chaired by Justice Emile Short set up by the Vice-President of Ghana, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia with the consent of President Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo presented a detailed report outlining the Commission's findings and recommendations. The Short Commission was set up to make full inquiry into the circumstances and establish the facts leading to the events of an associated electoral violence of a bye-elections at Ayawaso West-Wuogon which witnessed the presence of "masked, heavily built, and hooded armed men" of the SWAT Unit of the National Security engaging in electoral security and deployed to follow-up on intelligence to the effect that certain arms and ammunition stored in a warehouse within the constituency and to intercept and retrieve same resulting in injuries and in some cases, loss of lives. Parts of the Commission's findings and recommendations of the electoral security *inter-alia* included the following: "The maintenance of a safe and secure environment for the conduct of elections is vital for Ghana's democratic governance. Regrettably however, past elections have often been marred by incidents of violence and states of insecurity resulting in injuries and in some cases, loss of lives. It is

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therefore utterly important that the management of elections are promised on the assurance of security and optimal guarantees of safety on electoral grounds for the public to exercise their franchises without any fear”; “The Commission finds, that while there was some semblance of security provided within the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency on the said day of the elections, the otherwise reasonable arrangement was abruptly disrupted by the SWAT team who though were not part of the arrangement, arrived on the scene unannounced”; “The Commission finds, that while there was some semblance of security provided within the Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency on the said day of the elections, the otherwise reasonable arrangement was abruptly disrupted by the SWAT team who though were not part of the arrangement, arrived on the scene unannounced”; “The Commission further finds that the SWAT team which was deployed to the electoral grounds of the La Bawaleshie School Polling station grounds in complete disregard of the officially laid down electoral security arrangement, were officers of the national security establishment”; “Even more crucially, the Commission notes that the remit of the National Security establishment does not include active law enforcement and thus does not justify the use of arms and ammunitions per se. Consequently, as a purely intelligence-led entity whose main mandate is to gather intelligence and coordinate other agencies of state in the execution of a security strategy, the use of arms and ammunitions by the National Security not being under the aegis of the regular police and/or the military is worrisome as it suggests that the national security is a parallel entity that performs regular police work in maintaining domestic security in Ghana. In the minimum, the national security apparatus has been operated as a political appendage of succeeding governments in Ghana and has been treated as such. Their operational officers have often been changed with each change of government and their closeness with the politics of Ghana can hardly be denied. That the National Security establishment is not a regular police force nor are they part of the regular army is accordingly clear. In this regard, the Commission notes that the tendency to give the operatives of the National Security apparatus the appearance of police powers is illegal. Furthermore, the Commission denounces the tendency to put civilians in police or military uniforms to conduct offensive operations holds same illegal” (Short Commission Report, 2019).

Coups in Africa: Resurgence and Post-Independence Explanatory Variables

Coups in Africa are back in the news and on Africa’s security agenda. Within the last three years, eleven coup attempts took place in Africa, seven of them successful coups in Africa- in Chad, Mali and Sudan- as many as last seen in 1999 (Schultes 2022). On April 9, 2008, Uganda circulated a draft statement to the African Union (AU) Council members that addresses the recent resurgence of coups d’état in Africa. Its purpose is to support the AU decision of February 3, 2008 on the “resurgence of coups d’état in Africa. The AU decision expressed concern about the resurgence of coups and condemned those that took place in Mauritania in August 2008 and Guinea in December 2008 and the attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau in August 2008 (Security Council Report 2009). The sudden overthrow of a democratically elected government in Mali in the spring of 2018 by a small group of military insurgents is symptomatic of the reemerging pattern of coups d’état which have hit Africa in recent years (Barka & Ncube 2012). By early February 2022 a successful coup in Burkina Faso and a failed coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau have already taken place (Schultes 2022). Since the years of independence, Africa has experienced more than 200 military coups, counting both successful and failed coup attempts. The political and economic conditions prevailing in different African countries and the foreign influences at work during different periods (post-independence, Cold War eras) have all played a part in fueling conflicts and coups in the region (Barka and Ncube, 2012). The literature and studies on coups in Africa are enormous with different explanatory variables (social, cultural, economic and military) generated in the decolonization period (transition from colonial to independence) which according to Philip Roessler, led to the opening of the center and the emergence of elite accommodation as the dominant institution for managing competition for state resources among rival groups as the metropole no longer provided an absolute security guarantee for African governments. The earlier study proposed a theoretical model that claims the immediate cause of military intervention is lodged in the military clique that decides to plot the seizure of the state. The clique members, however, are influenced by their milieu, the events and people around them. Thus, it was posited that many of the causes of coups hypothesized by others in the 1950s and 1960s literature could not be relevant to the clique’s behavior. While no single socioeconomic or military organization variable could account for most of the variations in coup activity, multiple regressions analysis suggested that military plotters are probably influenced by both the socioeconomic structures and the military organizations of their countries. Coups, then should not be perceived as purely individualistic occurrences (Wells and Pollnac, 1988). In the early post-colonial and post-independence periods, there were a surge in scholarly articles from different theoretical perspectives and frameworks to explain political conflict and the causes and outcomes of military coups d’état in Africa. Habiba Ben Barka and Mthuli Ncube, “Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups D’états a Never-Ending Phenomenon?” presents an analysis of the earlier theoretical frameworks arguing that early work by Jackman (1978) attributed the coups d’état that took place in the new states of Africa from 1969 to 1975 to three broad reasons, namely social mobilization or “modernization”; cultural pluralism; and political factors (i.e. political party systems and mass participation. According to Jackman, both social mobilization and the presence of a dominant ethnic group had destabilizing consequences for newly established states in sub-Saharan Africa. Jackman further argued that a multiplicity of political parties can be destabilizing, whereas single-party dominance has had a stabilizing effect on post-independence governments. However, when interaction with electoral turnout (political mobilization), Jackman found both multipartyism and the dominant ethnic group to have destabilizing effects. Drawing on Jackman’s earlier analysis, Johnson, Slater, and McGowan (1984)

found that ‘states with relatively dynamic economies whose societies were not very socially mobilized before independence and which have maintained or restore some degree of political participation and political pluralism have experienced fewer military coups, attempted coups, and coup plots than have states with the opposite set of characteristics.’ In other words, they concluded that some measures of positive economic performance are highly stabilizing, such as high level of productive employment, robust economic growth, sound export performance (ratio of export imports to GNP), and diversified commodity elections. In attempting to analyze the internal factors leading to a coup, McBride (2004) and Collier and Hoeffler (2007) focused their analyses on the military itself. According to McBride, the military intervene in political affairs mainly for reasons of personal greed, being motivated by the “rents” they hope to extract once they gain power or control the state. Collier and Hoeffler have highlighted the interdependence between the risks of a coup (plotted, attempted, or successful) and the level of military spending at the time. The authors found that in countries with a low coup risk, governments responded by reducing military spending, whereas in countries with high coup risk, governments tend to increase military. Another theory focuses on the colonial heritage of African countries, namely the disparate political systems inherited from Britain, France, and Portugal. While Luckham (2001) and Coleman and Brice (1962) argue in favor of this theory, both Wells (1974) and Tardoff (1993) claim that the evidence does not support this thesis. Souare (2006) also pointed out that the two West African countries most affected by successful coups (Nigeria and Niger) had in fact very different colonial past. And while Cape Verde has been coup-free, Guinea-Bissau- the other Portuguese colony in West Africa-has experienced three successful coups. Souare’s argument is supported by the fact that Liberia and Ethiopia, which were never colonies, have both witnessed military coups, (Barka & Ncube, 2012). Africa’s transition from authoritarianism beginning in the early 1990s to democracy was to usher in a period of building institutions for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for human rights, security, and stability of the state and most importantly, ending the dark days of military/authoritarian rule but that has always not been the case. There has been occasional resurgence of coups d’état in which democratically elected governments are overthrown by the military, thereby revealing severe crises of democracy serving as a means for citizens to make preferences, resolve conflicts and hold political actors accountable through elections. As African democracies pursue a path to democratic sustenance and consolidation with the military forced out of government, the military as an institution cannot be sidelined or undermined or restricted to the barracks to provide security to the state from external threats. However, given the historical role that the military has played in Africa’s state formation and their role as guardians to the democratic transition since 1992, beginning with Jerry Rawlings of Ghana to the present, there will be occasional pockets of what this paper characterizes as “debris” of coups d’état as a result of incumbent governments’ failure to address political crises and conflicts through the established institutional mechanisms, and rule of law, socio-economic challenges that majority of the citizens face and incumbent government’s desire to hold on to power through emergency measures to perceived electoral threats to the state.

Crises in Electoral Democracy in Africa

Democracy is (has) been a contested concept given the myriad of definitions and variations, but what is clear according to Przeworski is that it was born only in 1788, when the first national-level election based on individual suffrage took place in the United States; the first time in history that the helm of the government changed because of an election was in 1801. In Western political systems, Przeworski writes, democracy is about the traditional precepts of citizens’ rights to make political preferences by holding political actors accountable through electoral outcomes and rules of procedural fairness. However, given the crises that democracy has faced in the past in terms of agreeing on the basic predicates of democracy, adding adjectives to democracy has become necessary, as well as defining democracy as serving as a mechanism to processing conflicts. Stephen E. Hanson in a book review of Adam Przeworski’s “Crises of Democracy” argues that Przeworski explores the tension between the power-maximizing tendencies of politicians and the democratic expectations that they “take turns” at rule through electoral processes; the need to understand both the long-term structural factors underlying democratic consolidation and the more proximate institutional and situational causes of political decision making in democratic countries; and the limits to social science prediction in a world where unprecedented changes in global and social contexts can never be ruled out. The author presents findings about the main factors underlying democracy’s survival or failure, although too subtle and complex to be distilled completely by arguing on the positive side that democracies endure when they already survived several transfers of power through the ballot box where strong political parties channel interests into democratic institutions are correlated with democratic longevity. On the negative side, Hanson argues, high levels of economic and social inequality, intense political polarization in which the stakes of political competition seem especially high, and the emergence of large-scale violence and social unrest are warning signs. Thus, the author writes, in the contemporary era, which has been marked by both a serious global decline in the efficacy of established political parties and by increasingly unbridgeable partisan divisions in many long-standing democracies, fears of systematic democratic decline are unfortunately very well founded (Hanson, 2021). Przeworski presents a diagnosis of the crises of democracy by adopting a “minimalist” and “electoralist” definition of democracy stating “democracy is a political arrangement in which people select governments through elections and have a reasonable possibility of removing incumbent governments through elections they do not like (Przeworski 2019). However, in most non-Western political systems, ideal democracy is not remotely approached. In them, professions of the democracy ideal do not conceal political practices that bear the resemblance to the deference to electoral outcomes

and rules of procedural fairness that pass for democracy in the prosperous nations (Higley, 2010). Contrarily, democracy in Africa in its broader context goes beyond the traditional precepts of citizens' rights to make political preferences and accountability from the political elites through institutional mechanisms, but also involves high stakes political control of natural resources and state institutions which serve as arena for the extraction of public resources for private gains and to benefit domestic and foreign solidarities. Since the Third Wave of democracy swept through the African continent, elections have become the measuring yardstick on the progress of democracy on the continent, as more elections are taking place on the continent than ever before. Elections are the only effective device for disciplining politicians: as Dixit, Grossman, and Gull (2000: 533) observe, "The ruling individuals, through elections must foresee an appreciable chance that their power will come to an end... And they must foresee a possibility of regaining power once it is lost. The dream of all politicians is to conquer power and to hold on to it forever. It is unreasonable to expect that competing parties would abstain from doing whatever they can do to enhance their electoral advantage and incumbents have all kinds of instruments to defend themselves from the voice of the people. When the electoral losers discover that the government pursues policies that significantly hurt their interests or values, they become willing to resist the government by all-including violent means as the only effective device for disciplining politicians are elections. In a democracy where "law" rules when politicians and bureaucrats obey judges, and whether politicians do or do not comply with the instructions of constitutional judges is a contingent outcome of their electoral incentives, the rule of law is violated if politicians' actions are motivated by the fear of losing elections (Przeworski 2019:6-20). Given the centrality and pivotal role that elections play in African democracy in terms of legitimacy to domestic (party supporters, undecided voters, the opposition) and regional and international audiences, electoral results tend to have high costs and consequences on the incumbent governments, the opposition parties and their campaign financiers, because the results of elections inflict intolerable costs on the losers. The contentious nature and environment under which elections are held in Africa have in the past and recently created a false sense of insecurity as incumbent governments and parties dreams to conquer power and hold on to it forever to control public institutions which serve as instruments and arena for the extraction of public resources for private gains. Elections have become increasingly stage-managed processes to re-elect the incumbents, hence the notorious longevity in power of African leaders: six of the world's ten-longest-serving presidents are in Africa (while less than three in ten are African), (Ronceray & Byiers 2019). The goal therefore of majority of the incumbent governments are to hold competitive but controlled elections, and the more general policy of the incumbent is to stay in power. Incumbent governments general policy to stay in power are exercised through election securitization, voter disenfranchisement, political violence and intimidation and constitutional amendments that may have long term implications and culminate into "debris" coup d'état contrary to what many scholars characterize as democratic backsliding. Though "more elections are taking place on the continent than ever before (Gumede 2017), Africa is facing a third wave of democratic recession (Luhmann and Lindberg 2019). Elections and Governance-normally commit countries on the continent to electoral democracy (Ronceray and Byiers 2019). Political scientists tend to define democracy in most African countries as "electoral democracies" given that the countries focus exclusively on holding fair, contested elections as a regular basis with universal or near universal suffrage. It is unreasonable to expect that competing parties would abstain from doing whatever they can do to enhance their electoral advantage and incumbents have all kinds of instruments to defend themselves from the voice of the people and to gain legitimacy. The legitimization of audiences as a mechanism plays significant causal parts in a wide variety of mobilization and demobilization in terms of attributions and opportunities through certification (refers to the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims to external authorities by giving weight to an organization or a network of leaders), (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), thereby creating a contentious political environment. The contentious political environments have made elections fail to serve as a mechanism for processing conflicts either when their outcomes have no consequences for people's lives or when incumbents abuse their advantage to the point of making them non-competitive (Przeworski 2019: 171). To make matters worse, in some of these African electoral democracies, the traditional precepts of citizens' rights to make political preferences and hold political elites in the political arena accountable through institutional mechanisms, have been constrained by constitutional violations and amendments by incumbent governments to hold on to power and struggle for control over resources. These measures have contributed to tensions between the power-maximizing tendencies of politicians and democratic expectations through the electoral processes. As a result, many elections are tainted by widespread violence, which undermines democratic practices, denies people their right to cast vote under free and fair circumstances, and unduly affects electoral results (Fjelde & Hoglund 2021) has come under attack by the political class and ruling elites in Africa as a way of consolidating their power, control over natural resources and siphoning the country's resources for their solidarities both domestic and foreign. Electoral violence over the past two decades in some African countries such as Kenya, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and most recently Ghana, and the recent coup d'états in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Sudan highlights a threat to security and stability to the African state and has brought to the fore the fragility of democracy, when institutions of the state fail to address social conflicts which become politically organized and the lingering challenge of elections facing African nations. Several explanatory factors and research studies in the past three decades have been analyzed for large scale electoral violence in Africa ranging from: incumbents proposing referenda or parliamentary votes to change constitutions in a bid to extend their presidential terms as in the case of Burkina Faso 2014 and Burundi 2015; intimidation and insecurity, the main political parties competing to hold ground and make territorial in-roads in

preparation for the next round of national elections election as in the case of Sierra Leone; intra-party politics where party members are involved in a constant struggle to create and maintain the connections that will ensure their progress up the party ladder in the case of Burundi in 2015 (Nordic Africa Institute 2015); violence societies where different forms of violence co-exist, including civil war, communal conflict, criminal violence, or government repression as in the case of Nigeria (Harish and Toha 2019; Staniland 2014; Fjeld & Hoglund 2021). The contentious democratic environments in Africa have culminated into the political elites elevating elections as a threat to the state, thereby securitizing it as a legitimizing discourse and as a special kind of politics that needs to be dealt with at an accelerated pace and ways which violate normal and societal norms to solidify their hold on to power to perpetuate the status quo of playing to their international audience. To make matters worse in some of these African electoral democracies, elections related matters are argued as a priority, urgent, and presented as existential threats to the state that needs to be securitized to enables the securitizing actors to manage to break free of procedures and rules to satisfy both domestic and international audiences.

The Security Debate and Securitization of Sectors of African Society

Though, there is a divide between the deepeners and the wideners about redefining and expanding the definition of security beyond the traditional realist view of military threats, Barry Buzan argues that the concept of security is a contested one due to moral, ideological, and normative elements on agreeing on a fixed definition. The concept of securitizing credited to the works of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever of the Copenhagen School has contributed to security studies in terms of the widening-deepening debate. The concept of securitization is applied as a discursive mechanism to present an issue as an existential threat, which warrants the political elites to make extraordinary decisions and adopt emergency measures to protect the security of the state. Securitizing theory does not take as a given what is being securitized and explores the politics behind the securitizing move. When this happens, we can examine the threats and the politics that have led to its identification as such. This means we also look critically at who is doing the securitizing. We can do this without coloring the lens with the baggage that securitizing an issue brings (Metelits 2016). In the political arena it is very important to ascertain the kind of audience (domestic, regional, or international) that the political elites are presenting the issue as a security threat which warrants emergency measures. The Copenhagen School insists that measures used to address an identified threat must fall outside the realm of “normal politics” if an issue is to be considered successfully securitized (Balzacq, Leonard and Ruziicka 2016; Jenkins 2020). There has been changing perspectives on the conception of security in Africa over the past six decades since most of the countries in Africa gained independence. The changing nature and the formation of the states, the threats to the states, the study, and causal explanations to levels of insecurity on the African continent have become an enigma to experts, mostly from the West. Because of the changing nature of the levels of insecurity on the continent after independence and the post-Cold War era, the concept of securitization of threats emerged in the post 9/11 era internationally from western political figures and policymakers and the mainstream media. Internationally, securitization has been invoked as a justification for bypassing international debate on various sectors of the Africa continent as a security threat to global system. Claire Metelits, *Security in Africa: A Critical Approach to West Indicators of Threats*, 2017, uses the securitization theory to reveal the discursive construction of four “sectors” in Africa that represent security threats: failed states and ungoverned spaces, political instability, Muslim population, and poverty. The author addresses how political figures primarily political figures in the United States securitizes the above four issues by performing speech acts. Such representation of Muslim population in Africa, for example, positions them as threats to the international system, elevating them to the level of urgency and legitimating the bypassing of public debate and democratic processes to address those (Metelits 2016). Western political figures and the mainstream media’s securitization of these sectors as posing threats to global also feeds into the narrative that democracy is under threat. The securitization of these four sectors by the West have put an insurmountable amount of pressure on Africa’s democratic leaders and emboldened the so-called “Strong Men” to be heavy handed in dealing with these securitized sectors to receive the necessary financial assistance, military aid, military training and exercises, military cooperation and setting up of bases in some parts of Africa. Some of Africa’s nascent electoral democracies are now faced with a new kind of security dilemma since the post 9/11 with the resurgence of coups d’état.

Coups D’état in Africa’s Electoral Democracies

Curtis Bell, “Coup D’état and Democracy” 2016, in a literature review of democratic rule and the causes of coup d’état argues that most research on coup d’états draws from the rational choice approach. In this framework, a potential coup plotter anticipates the costs and benefits to be derived from a coup attempt and compares this expectation with continued life under the incumbent. This understanding of coup directs attention to two concepts that form the theoretical cornerstones of the coup literature: the plotter’s satisfaction with the status quo and plotter opportunity, conceptualized as the probability with which a coup attempt might succeed. Scholars disagree about the relative importance of satisfaction and opportunity, but there is broad consensus that coup risk largely reflects a plotter’s interests as codetermined by these concepts. Arguments linking a country’s coup risk to the democratic character of its institutions are typically framed around the effect of democracy on satisfaction, opportunity, or both. Work on plotter satisfaction focuses on the interests of the military elite and assumes that because militaries always have greater coercive capacity than civilian leaders, coup must be understood as the failure of civilians to satisfy their armed counterparts (Finer, 1988;

Huntington, 1957; Nordlinger, 1977; Thompson, 1973). Special attention is given to military corporate interests and the pacifying role of satisfaction-increasing placation strategies such as increased military spending, arms acquisitions, and civilian–military power sharing (Bove & Brauner, 2014; Leon, 2014; McMahon & Slantchev, 2015). Many of these co-opting strategies are at odds with the principles of democratic rule, but civil–military “pacting” was essential to the survival of transitional democracies in Latin America, Southern Europe, and elsewhere (Encarnacion, 2001; O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Rasler, 1996; Roskin, 1978-1979). Others claim dreams of power always provide sufficient motivation for a coup, so coup risk must be determined by the ease with which a coup plot could succeed. These studies of plotter opportunity focus on signs of leader vulnerability, including ethnic factionalism (Jackman, 1978; Johnson, Slater, and McGowan, 1984; Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993), supportive foreign governments (Thyne, 2010), increased public support for coups following coups in other states (Li & Thompson, 1975), leader inexperience (Huntington, 1957, 1968; Little, 2015), and well-funded militaries (Kposowa & Jenkins, 1993). Conditions related to economic crisis, such as slow growth (Johnson *et al.*, 1984; Kim, 2014; Luttwak, 1969; O’Kane, 1993), commodity price shocks (O’Kane, 1981, 1993), and poverty (Londregan & Poole, 1990; Powell, 2012), are prominent in this vein of research. This argument, derived largely from Luttwak’s (1969) “handbook” on coup d’état, links coup to economic performance via public opinion. Coups are more likely to succeed when the public will accept the new regime and acceptance is more easily achieved when the public lacks strong allegiance to the ousted incumbent (Casper & Tyson, 2014; Galetovic & Sanhueza, 2000; Wig & Rod, 2014). Many have used an identical logic to claim democratically elected leaders should be less vulnerable to coups because they are perceived to be more legitimate than non-democratic leaders (Finer, 1988; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Lindberg & Clark, 2008; Luttwak, 1969). This literature proposes both positive and negative causal links between democratic rule and incentives for coup plotting, though most work emphasizes pacifying conditions. Democratic states are less likely to purge or “coup-proof” their militaries (Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012) or deploy soldiers in conflicts they are unlikely to win (Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Desch, 2002; Reiter & Stam, 1998). Military elites who see themselves as “guardians” of the state sometimes express an interest in democratization (Nordlinger, 1977) and the occasional organization of free-and-fair elections immediately following a successful coup implies elites may be less motivated to overthrow democratically elected governments (Marinov & Goemans, 2014; Thyne & Powell, 2014). Common soldiers’ welfare is usually greater under democracies, which provide more public goods to those outside the ruling circle of elites (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003). However, these plausible sources of military satisfaction may be offset by the greater separation of civilian and military institutions, which can increase fears of marginalization where militaries have had a larger governing role in living memory. Democracies also allocate a smaller percentage of their budgets toward defense spending (Albalade, Bel, & Elias, 2012; Bove & Nisticò, 2014) and it is not clear that the generals and high-level elites with the greatest capacity to organize coups are better off in democratic systems where transparency and institutionalization inhibit the private goods and rent-seeking enjoyed by those in non-democracies (see Slater, Smith, & Nair, 2014). Statistical analyses of the historical record do not bring much clarity to the democracy–coup relationship. Much of the literature treats coup as a problem for dictators and studies coup in the context of non-democratic states (Bove & Rivera, 2015; Svobik, 2009, 2012; Wig & Rod, 2014), and the cross-national quantitative literature on democracy and coup has yet to reach any consensus. Lindberg and Clark (2008) examine Africa from 1990 to 2004 and argue democracies face a lower risk of suffering a coup attempt, but their analysis includes no control variables for other plausible explanations for this correlation, including disparate levels of economic development and political stability. In a more expansive analysis of global coup activity spanning 1950 to 2010, Powell (2012) evaluates regime type with Polity IV scores and finds democratic states to be only slightly less prone to coup attempts than semi-democratic or “anocratic” states, but no less likely to suffer a coup than full-fledged autocracies. Vreeland (2008), among others, warns that findings based on this popular regime type index could be driven by the fact that it arbitrarily codes anocratic regime scores for states suffering major political crises and severe political instability. Consequently, a statistically significant relationship between coup and anocracy/semi-democracy could evince a relevant regime type effect, or it could simply reveal that states embroiled in turmoil are more likely to suffer coup attempts. In a large global sample, effects attributed to democracy could also be caused by any of several latent factors that differentiate the well-developed industrialized democracies from the large group of non-democracies that tend to be poorer, less stable, and more prone to foreign intervention and political interference (Bell, 2016).

Election Securitizations as an Explanatory Variable of Debris of Coups D’état

As Huntington’s *Third Wave of democracy* in the early 1990s was greeted with euphoria with promise that liberal democracy will contribute to the building of institutions to resolve conflicts peacefully, for citizens to choose and hold their leaders accountable for their policies to promote economic growth, development and prosperity to improve the standard of living of citizens on the African continent. However, there is another school of thought that holds that many of the citizens on the continent are disillusioned about the promise that democracy in an age of globalization has led to prosperity and improve standards of living. This pessimistic democratic view is expressed by Stephen Hanson’s earlier review on the negative side of Przeworski’s findings about the main factors underlying democracy’s failure. One can argue that based on Hanson’s assertion, elections as a key element for promoting, and sustaining democracy in a globalized economic system has failed as a mechanism for processing conflicts either when their outcomes have no consequences for people’s lives or when incumbents abuse their advantage to the point of making them non-competitive.

Przeworski's diagnosis of the crises of democracy by adopting a "minimalist" and "electoralist" definition of democracy where people select governments through elections and have a reasonable possibility of removing incumbent governments through elections they do not like, has also become a means of legitimization, where incumbent governments engage in election securitizations (taking emergency measures by presenting elections as existential threats to the state) to hold on to power. The imminence, proximity and secrecy of the threat, coupled with its incredibly high costs, have forced rulers to be on the defensive always and adopt a set of "coup proofing" techniques, contributing to what Migdal describes as the "politics of survival" (Roessler 2011; Horowitz, 1985; Migdal, 1988). Securitization theory has been used primarily to understand the strategic use of security in liberal democracies and has consequently been criticized for being constrained by a "Westphalian straitjacket" (Wilkinson 2007; Jenkins 2020). However, it is increasingly being applied to more diverse context, including authoritarian, illiberal, and hybrid regimes (Mabon and Kapur 2018; Jenkins 2022). While it can provide a very useful framework for understanding how security operates in such contexts, for the concept to travel effectively, some of the components need to be reconsidered or clarified. Of key relevance to the study of elections in sub-Saharan Africa are the issues of differentiating "emergency measures" from 'normal politics' and identifying the audience and their role (Jenkins 2020). In the context of African elections, given that political violence before, during and after elections are ephemeral and creates a false sense of insecurity, the concept of securitization is/has been employed as a measure to protect the state from existential threats to both domestic and international audiences. The concept of securitization is invoked as a justification for the partisan recruitment of securitizing agents (political vigilante groups) with loyalty to the incumbent government into the security agencies as a control mechanism over the apparatuses of repression to instill fear, intimidate and constrain the opposition thereby undermining independent institutional framework which deviates from the ideals of free and fair elections. These securitizing agents (political vigilante groups which is the focus of this paper) that are recruited into the security agencies not based on merit or/and recruited and treated as specialized paramilitary groups to serve the political interests of the incumbent governments' desire to hold on to power. The politicized and meritless nature of the recruitment of these securitization agents have a wider geographical and historical perspectives in undermining the central authority or threaten the long-term security of the state. Vigilantes, according to the International Crisis Group, "Double-Edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-Insurgencies" in a report to examine cases of vigilante groups formed in response to insurgent threats as opposed to lawlessness refers to members of civilian defense groups, community forces and civilian militias, which are formed to protect their communities from non-state or state actors or to combat insurgents. This term, widely used in the African context, is not meant to imply that their activities are illegal, even though they initially might have lacked state authorization. Vigilante groups have formed and continue to exist in weak African states where governments are unable or unwilling to protect civilians from security threats ranging from large-scale insurgency, to political or ethnic violence, to low-level banditry. The nature of the threat shapes the kinds of activities that vigilantes undertake, whether counter-insurgency roles typically played by the military or more policing-type duties. Yet, regardless of circumstance, the phenomenon of vigilantes faces an essential problem: states too weak to provide security on their own are most prone to enlist non-state armed actors and delegate some local security functions to them, but also most likely to lack resources and capacity to control vigilantes and prevent them from abusing power for their own individual or group interest. Typically recruited from local communities, their members' likely share the same ethnic or political identity, collective interests and threat perceptions, raising the odds that they will act as local militias – potentially more powerful than state authorities – and pursue narrow ethnic agendas; a short-term necessary evil that could pave the way for longer-term conflict. A solution for states in dire need of backing, vigilantes too often take advantage of their newfound capacity – and compensate for inadequate support and resources – by seeking to maximize their power and wealth through extortion, kidnapping, and other violent abuses. But there are positive lessons to be learned too. Vigilante groups can be far more effective than state actors in providing local security. They generally enjoy greater legitimacy by community roots, and can be more efficient in identifying, tracking and combating insurgents thanks to their familiarity with local languages, geography and culture. Successfully managed by state authorities – and international actors – they can enable national leaders to forge lasting political pacts with provincial elites and bolster state legitimacy among local communities. In short, and while African and international policymakers rightfully may be concerned that empowering non-state forces will undermine the state, vigilantes also can serve as valuable intermediaries between local communities and central authorities. The report examines four cases in sub-Saharan Africa: the Kamajors, who fought in Sierra Leone's civil war (1991-2002); the Arrow Boys of Teso, who confronted the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in eastern Uganda (2003-2007); the Zande Arrow Boys, who battled the LRA and later rebelled against South Sudan's Dinka-led regime (2005-present); and the Civilian Joint Task Force, which has worked closely with the armed forces and police to counter Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria (2013-present), (International Crisis Group, 2017). Previous studies (Asamoah, 2020; Bob-Milliar, 2014a; Gyampo *et al.*, 2017; Rasmussen, 2020) have not reached any consensus as to the understanding of vigilantism. Generally, vigilantism is claimed to be primarily a violent, extra-legal action by a group of persons (Abrahams, 1998). Vigilantism is also identified as a manifestation of formal institutional failure (Johnston, 1996: 221; Pratten, 2008; Smith, 2004). Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1976) placed vigilantism under the category of establishment violence. Others argued that vigilantism concerns an "informal political sector" (Abrahams, 1998: 76) or informal involvement of neo-traditional actors (Moumouni, 2017) in governance (Kyei and Berckmoes, 2020). There is a growing trend in sub-Saharan Africa countries, where these vigilante groups are/have been mobilized into the political

space and to participate in the democratic governance structure, hence the term “political vigilantism”. Justice Richard Kwabena Owusu Kyei and Lidewyde H. Berckmoes, *Political Vigilante Group In Ghana: Violence and Democracy*, 2020, in examining the approaches of political vigilante groups as political actors that engage in political mobilization and participation iterate that it has been argued that political vigilantism needs the existence of the state for it to function; as such, political vigilantism cannot exist in a stateless environment (Abrahams, 1998: 16). Some have argued that political vigilante groups do not fight the state with the aim of creating an autonomous polity, but against marginalization in the distribution of the endowed state resources as promised by modern democracy (Caldeira and Holston, 1999). Moreover, political vigilante groups are said to rekindle the social contract the state has with its citizens in Hobbesian fashion (Abrahams, 1998; Goldstein, 2003). The authors argue that political vigilantism is a mark of refusal on the part of some of the citizenry to accept the political exclusion enforced on them by the state. Kyei and Berckmoes conceptualize political vigilantism as the activities of political party members or sympathizers aimed at claiming their own political interests or those of their political parties, potentially through force and/or violence. Political vigilante groups, we propose, may be conceptualized as small groups affiliated with political parties that strive to improve their access to resources while operating in the political field. Political vigilantism in sub-Saharan Africa has received significant attention in the literature, though attention has been largely limited to the violence and their manifestation as state failure (Asamoah, 2020; Bob-Milliar, 2014a, 2014b; Pratten, 2008; Rasmussen, 2020; Smith, 2004). For instance, in the study of vigilante groups in Nigeria, Pratten (2008) and Smith (2004) underlined the violence that emanates from the activities of the vigilante group called Bakassi Boys. Asamoah (2020) and Daddieh and Bob-Milliar (2012), in their work, questioned the sustainability of political vigilantism in Ghana’s democracy. Nonetheless, a few studies have explored the non-violent engagements of youth groups in the political field. Fleisher (2000) noted that state-sponsored vigilantism in Tanzania provided services that were beneficial to both the local community and the government. Chisanga (2018) discussed how, in Zambia, youth groups in political parties are prepared technically to promote the ideals of their political parties, while Kyei (2020) identified the political mobilization activities of political vigilante groups in Ghana (Kyei and Berckmoes, 2020). The gravest dangers are posed when vigilantes pursue their own political-ethnic agenda; lack strong command and control structures, enabling battlefield commanders to promote their own interests; are largely unsupervised by either local or national authorities; or are ignored, unrecognized and cast aside once their military utility has expired. Support by an outside power against the wishes of the central state also increases the risk that vigilantes will fuel greater insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2017). Though, vigilante groups are not a new-phenomenon in Africa’s weak states, their increased mobilization and participation in the political space (providing electoral security) especially without a sustained plan of action for demobilization at a time that there is a resurgence in coups across the Africa continent should be of great concern with respect to the gains made since the early 1990s transitions to democracy and at a time where there are western narratives about competition between authoritarianism and democracy and global and domestic security of the state.

In conclusion, the concept of election securitization as threats to the state invoked as a justification for the partisan recruitment of securitizing agents (political vigilante groups) with loyalty to the incumbent government into the security agencies as a control mechanism over the apparatuses of repression to instill fear, intimidate and constrain the opposition and hold onto power thereby undermining independent institutional framework which deviates from the ideals of free and fair elections shows a discernible pattern of events that could help predict what this paper characterizes as “debris” of coups d’état that are most likely occur to Africa’s electoral democracies.

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