

Military rule

Government, Army



Many third world countries have been under military rule from time to time, for many years. The reasons behind this are many, and are complicated and interconnected. A military dictatorship gets established when political power rests with the military. Developing countries are so called because they are still in the process of development. These areas of development include economy, financial planning and budgeting, setting up of a working administrative machinery, a working constitution, a functional system of government, a system of institutions of education, a system of health, so on and so forth.

Altogether, developing countries lack a lot of basic tools needed for proper functioning of a country. Civilians in general are disillusioned with life. There is widespread poverty and illiteracy. Flaws in the working of the system ultimately result in major problems for the common man. Neither is the health system strong, nor the education. The government usually does not provide for even the basic needs. People generally have large families, with no regular source of income. Since literacy is low, most people have confounded and obscure views, and do not understand the working of the system.

People get frustrated, and blame the government for not providing for them. As public support begins to crumble, the administration gets weakened. In developing countries, politics is frequently a monopoly, handled by the rich few. Laws and rules can be bended and twisted as desired. And so this 'feudal' system of government results in economic and social collapse. Crime rates go on increasing, along with a host of other illegal activities. In the absence proper jobs, ordinary people turn to illicit ways of obtaining money.

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These are just some of the main problems. In case of a threat from another country, or a natural disaster, or food shortage, matters get worse. Often governments succumb to ill advised measures. And so goes on the cycle. Military rule comes in the absence of a strong government. There are many inter-related factors behind the prevalence of military rule, especially in third world countries. A weak civilian government can be disbanded easily, without much force. Historic examples of military rule include the Greek 'Sparta [7]'

The ideology behind military rule is one based on discipline – the one thing a developing country lacks. Militarism is generally the belief of the far-right [7]. Under military rule, everything is under strict control of the army, and civilians are subservient to it, whether they like it or not. Civilian rule on the contrary advocates complete freedom, along with organized plans for social and economic development and establishment of diplomatic relations with other countries [7].

Militarism can also mean Martial Law [7]. When a normal judicial system is replaced by military rule, it is called martial law [7]. It is used mostly by authoritarian governments [7]. Earlier, it was imposed in times of war, or territorial occupation, to deal with trials of prisoners and soldiers [7]. It was also used by those countries with expansionist and imperialist policies [7]. Today, in developing countries, it is the easiest tool to bring a distraught and a disorganized society under control. Martial law trials are short, and usually severe when compared to normal court trials [7].

Many countries have now shifted to another system, in which a country is said to be in a 'state of emergency,' in place of martial law [7]. Martial law also gives the government the liberty of detaining anyone it thinks is a threat to national interest or security, even without adequate proof. Media and press freedom is also under strict control. The few leading the hegemony can make decisions without hindrance, keeping the public and its opinions at bay.

Under military rule, a country's population has no say in any matter whatsoever. Without a parliament, all decisions are directly made by the autocrat and his collaborators, without the approval or disapproval of ministers. Think a little deeper, and it seems as if a country comes to an economic and social standstill if under military rule. This is exactly what most developing countries go through. One coup after another and the country lags behind even in the basic amenities of life.

Egypt, for example, has been under martial law on and off from 1952 [7]. Gamal Abdel Nasser was the president of Egypt from 1956 until his death, in 1970 [7]. Algeria spent three decades under military rule (1965-1994) [7]. Mohammad Al-Gaddafi has been the de facto head of Libya since 1969. Nigeria has also been caught up in a tangle of coups. Adebowale, in his work criticizes the way military coups took to power, squandering money on lavish cars and houses, and turning into multi-billionaires overnight [10].

He also goes on to say that " Nigerians are mute because they are terror-stricken and know no other state [10]." He also states that " Several human rights activists continue to be unjustly detained [10]." Countries like Somalia,

Sudan, Liberia, Philippines, Thailand, Ghana, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Gambia have also been under military control often. Maureen Aung-Thwin criticized the undemocratic manner in which politics was run in Burma [9]. Uganda spent a decade under the rule of one man – Idi Amin [1]. As opposed to this, almost no first world country has been under military rule since almost 20 years.

Military governments also justify themselves by claiming that it is important for political stability [7]. Military regimes tend to portray themselves as neutral and unbiased [7]. Though not always, military rule tends to have little respect for human rights, and often use force to silence their political opponents [7].

Another key factor is the convenience of having a military leadership, as opposed to the effort required for an elected one. Public choice can be conveniently ignored and new laws can be easily imposed. The general public is weak, with little or no voice of its own. With widespread illiteracy, public opinion can be suppressed, bribed, or even forced. The general public in developed countries, on the contrary is much stronger and aware of their due rights.

Hunger for power and money make the entire system corrupt and fraudulent, with innumerable loopholes. With an influential background, anyone can come to power. High posts like those of governors and chief ministers are based on favoritism rather than open merit. Countries currently under military rule include Thailand, Myanmar, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan and Fiji [7].

If loosely stated, the three key factors behind prevalence of military rule in developing countries are the hunger for power and money, a large but weak civilian population, and convenience for the army. With just one man to make decisions, it gets very convenient for military personnel to run the country.

In the end, it is the normal civilian population which suffers. In hopes of better prospects, people look forward to young and dynamic leaders, but in reality, the nation continues to live under a rigid and a totalitarian leadership. It is a widely believed notion that civilian rule is always better, long lasting, and makes a country prosperous. With free and fair democratic elections, the people themselves choose their leader, and so, everything falls in place, and the country can look forward to a brighter future.

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