

Regional Security and State Stability in West Africa, 2011 - 2023

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ABSTRACT

Regional security and state stability are critical concepts in today's global security system, emphasising the importance of preserving peace, governance, and economic development within a specific geographical area. The study examined regional security and state stability in West Africa from 2011 to 2023, a period marked by significant political instability, military coups. The study aimed to analyse the impact of these factors on the overall security and stability of the region, with a focus on the role of regional organisations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in managing these challenges. The study adopted the regional security complex theory as the theoretical framework. Regional security complex theory posits that security interdependence is prominent within regional clusters due to the proximity of threats. The securitisation process links the security of individual states, impacting regional security dynamics. The descriptive survey research design was applied in the study, utilising secondary sources of data. The content analysis method was used as the method of data analysis. The findings revealed the systemic issues within West African political structures, such as poor governance and corruption, which have catalysed military interventions and weakened democratic institutions. Additionally, the study revealed factors contributing to regional security challenges such as; weak state institutions, economic disparities, ethnic and religious tensions, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The study concludes that the path to a stable and secure West Africa lies in a coordinated approach that combines political, economic, and social strategies. The study recommended enhanced regional security cooperation channelled towards economic development and poverty alleviation, strengthening democratic institutions and governance and also building capacity for conflict prevention and management in West Africa. This approach should be strengthened by strong regional cooperation, supported by the international community, and tailored to the unique challenges and needs of the region.

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KEYWORDS: *Regional Security, State Stability, ECOWAS, West African Region.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional security and state stability are central to promoting a global security system and facilitating economic development within a defined geographical area (David & Enze, 2021). In a fast-changing and interconnected global system, security and stability have not only become central concerns for regional and international bodies but also a defining element of prosperity and societal well-being (Alam et al., 2022; Malik et al., 2021). The recent decades have

witnessed a shift towards a regional collective approach, recognizing the ripple effects of instability in one state across the region, and believing such an approach to be more effective and far-reaching (Oladapo, 2018). Despite the clear manifestation of an unstable global security environment, countries and regional bodies have continued to initiate various prescriptions that go hand in hand with the trends of contemporary security challenges.

Despite its many resources and potential, focusing on Africa, a continent with a rich history and diverse cultures, has been home to various conflicts and instabilities, often rooted in historical legacies, socio-economic disparities, governance issues, and competing national interests (Aning & Pokoo, 2019). The complex interplay between these factors has led to multifaceted challenges faced by many African regions. One of the most notable developments shaping the regional security landscape in Africa is the fluid nature of security threats, attributed to the complex shifts in the post-Cold War period (John, 2001). This fluidity in security is characterized by increased struggles and contestations over scarce resources, communal/ethnic clashes, and religious tensions (Achumba et al., 2013). These struggles have been exacerbated by a governance deficit and the inability of states to provide public goods, amidst the rising influence of transnational criminal networks and terrorist groups in the continent.

ECOWAS's active engagement in regional affairs has placed it on the front burner in its effort to achieve regional security, stability, and lasting peace among the West African states. This study's focus on ECOWAS and West Africa presents a critical framework to explore the broader themes of regional security and state stability, allowing for an in-depth understanding of one of Africa's most dynamic regions. West Africa has faced significant challenges in bringing stability and security, ranging from civil wars to terrorist threats, and military coups to democratic transitions (Olaniyan, 2020). The fragility of some West African states has been a catalyst for regional unrest, leading to widespread implications for neighbouring countries.

ECOWAS's role in regional security, particularly in peace enforcement and peacekeeping, has been marked by success. Factors contributing to this success include the presence of a regional hegemon (such as Nigeria), high political will, and the experience of several ECOWAS member states in international peacekeeping operations (Nwankwo, 2010). Over time, ECOWAS developed a comparative advantage in conflict management, even serving as a continental model. The transformation of the ad hoc institutional framework, ECOMOG, into the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) exemplifies ECOWAS's dynamic approach to peacekeeping. ESF's standby status for various missions, from observation and monitoring to preventive deployment, reflects its versatile role in maintaining regional stability (Boukhars, 2013). However, a notable gap remains in the region's ability to respond to humanitarian crises, leading ECOWAS to take

steps to promote crisis prevention, preparedness, and bridge relief with medium-term rehabilitation (Alexandre et al., 2015).

In recognizing the shortcomings of past interventions by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in areas such as human rights, humanitarian concerns, and logistics support, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has made significant strides in prioritizing the development of a civilian component to work in harmony with the military element of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). These reforms have shaped the nature of future interventions, allowing for the deployment of a diverse array of professionals, including police, engineers, medical personnel, social workers, and political and legal officers, to work alongside military forces (Alexandre et al., 2015). Alongside this more comprehensive approach to deployment, ECOWAS has actively sought to enhance its logistical readiness. This has involved the creation of logistics and humanitarian depots to ensure that necessary equipment and relief supplies are readily available to support effective interventions.

The overriding objective of ECOWAS's initiatives within the West Africa region is to create a framework for regional security and stability. The interconnectedness of the West African states means that a crisis in one country could easily spill over into neighbouring territories, leading to broader regional instability and multifaceted security challenges. Recognizing this intricate web of relationships and dependencies, it is essential to closely examine the dynamics of regional security and state stability in West Africa.

2. Statement of the Problem

The regional security and state stability in West Africa present a landscape marked by complexity and multifaceted challenges. At the heart of this complexity is the rising trend of military coups, a phenomenon that has significantly disrupted the political equilibrium of the region. These coups, far from being isolated incidents, are indicative of deeper political and institutional weaknesses within the affected nations. They not only undermine the democratic process but also set a precedent that threatens the stability of neighboring states, potentially triggering a domino effect across the region. Despite the concerted efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to foster peace, democracy, and stability, the region continues to grapple with a myriad of persistent challenges. ECOWAS's role is pivotal in orchestrating a regional response to crises, yet the effectiveness of its strategies is often questioned in

the face of ongoing instability. This raises concerns about the need for more robust or innovative approaches to address the underlying issues.

One of the most significant threats to regional security is the influence of insurgent groups, with Boko Haram being a prime example. The activities of such groups, characterized by terrorism and extreme violence, have not only led to widespread human suffering but have also significantly contributed to political and social instability. The transnational nature of these insurgencies necessitates a coordinated response from multiple countries, further complicating the security landscape. In addition to insurgency, the region faces a plethora of security threats, including terrorism and piracy. These threats not only endanger lives but also disrupt economic activities and contribute to a pervasive climate of fear and uncertainty. Compounding these issues is the prevalent political instability, often fueled by governance challenges, economic hardships, and social grievances. Such instability provides fertile ground for security threats to take root and exacerbate the already fragile situation.

Military coups have emerged as a significant concern, creating instability in the West African region, and reflecting underlying political and institutional weaknesses. The recent coups in countries such as Guinea, Mali Burkina Faso and most recently Niger have exposed the fragility of democratic governance in the region, with the potential to trigger a domino effect in neighbouring states. The actions that were taken by ECOWAS in response to the coup in Guinea, Mali Burkina Faso and demonstrate the regional body's commitment to democracy but also underline the complexity of restoring and maintaining constitutional order.

The ideal scenario is a united and secure West African region, where states cooperate seamlessly to address shared security challenges, promote democratic governance, protect human rights, and ensure social and economic prosperity. Achieving this ideal requires strengthening regional mechanisms, building trust among member states, creating synergies with international partners, and developing adaptive, responsive strategies that address the unique dynamics of each state and the region as a whole (Alexandre et al., 2015). The aim of this study was to investigate the dynamics of regional security and state stability in West Africa from 2011 to 2023. The objectives were to assess the current state of regional security in West Africa and appraise the efforts by ECOWAS to stabilise the West African states and secure the region.

3. Conceptual Review

3.1. The Concept of Security

The concept of security conveys different meanings to scholars, analysts, policymakers and organisations across the globe (Edeko, 2011). Mijah (2007; p. 2) defines security as, “the freedom from danger, or threat to nation’s ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people. Fundamentally, security has to do with the presence of peace, safety, gladness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis or threats to human dignity, all of which facilitate the development and progress of any human society (Adedoyin, 2013). The concept of security has become a preoccupation for the decades following the end of the Cold War which could also be referred to as a landmark for the diverse school of thought in security studies (Wysokińska-Senkus, 2020). Security, as a concept, has diverse dimensions and attracts different meanings and different views. Unfortunately, many contributors approach these concepts from their ideologies.

3.2. The Concept of Regional Security

The concept of regional security, while seeming obvious to some, is one that, like the issue as a whole, had not been adequately addressed before Barry Buzan. When studying this aspect of security Buzan (2001) stated that security is a relational phenomenon. Security is relational, one cannot understand the national security of any given state without understanding the international pattern of security interdependence in which it is embedded.” In his analysis of regional security and how it affects the concept of security as a whole, Buzan offers several interesting and important concepts. (Stone, 2009) Knight and Oriola (2020) asserted that regional security refers to all the measures that are taken to protect a region and assuage any kind of threat to people and their values.

3.3. The Concept of State Stability

In contemporary discourse, state stability has garnered significant focus, particularly in emerging nations where political turmoil often obstructs stable governance. State stability hinges on the inherent strength and adaptability of a nation to establish lasting structures, ensuring the provision of essential socio-political and economic benefits to its populace. Such a state demonstrates an adept capacity to counter both domestic and external adversities effectively (Hamza, 2014). State stability, defined by Hamza (2014) as a nation's competence in quelling disturbances that endanger its very existence, implies a condition free from prolonged, unresolved conflicts.

Hamza (2014) defined state stability as a nation's competence in quelling disturbances that endanger its very existence, implying a condition free from prolonged, unresolved conflicts.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. The Regional Security Complex Theory

The study adopted the Regional Security Complex Theory, a framework developed by scholars Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, who are associated with the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. Buzan and Wæver initially presented this theory in their 2003 book, "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security." At the heart of this theory is the concept that the security of individual actors within a specific region is intertwined with the security of other actors in that region, creating an intricate web of security interdependence (Walsh, 2020; Thomas, 2020). Such security complexes can be considered as durable sub-systems within the broader context of international anarchy, each possessing its unique structure and pattern of interactions. Recognizing these complexes and their dynamic nature provides valuable insights to identify and evaluate shifts in regional security (Walsh, 2020). Consequently, the Regional Security Complex Theory posits that threats to state security are more likely to be regionally confined rather than having a global reach. The adoption of this theory for the study offers an analytical lens through which to understand and assess the regional security and stability dynamics in West Africa.

According to RSCT, actors' motivations and behaviours in the area of international security are largely regional (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This indicates that an actor's immediate neighbourhood is where their security concerns are mostly generated. Each actor's security in a region interacts with the other actors' security. Since most security worries don't travel very far, threats in an actor's immediate neighbourhood are probably felt the most strongly (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Pratama, 2013; Baylis & Smith, 2013).

The applications of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in West Africa further underscore the importance of this perspective. Scholars such as Aning (2008) have explored how great powers, including France and the United States, have shaped local security considerations, revealing limitations to the securitization of threats by local state actors. The role of regional organizations, like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), further emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of security interdependence in the region (Aning et al., 2017).

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Buzan and Wæver, serves as an intellectual tool that unlocks the complex security dynamics in West Africa, a region marked by multifaceted political, social, and economic interconnections. In applying this theory, a rich insight emerges, revealing a landscape where security is not an isolated phenomenon but an intricate weave of regional interactions. Central to the RSCT is the idea that security issues are socially constructed. This perspective is invaluable in understanding West Africa's complex environment, where leaders play an instrumental role in shaping and promoting specific threats. This sociopolitical construct is reflective of the region's intricate nature, where ideologies, perceptions, and political agendas underpin the security discourse. It offers an avenue for delving into the underlying forces that shape security policies, thereby revealing the multifaceted realities that define the region's security landscape.

The application of the regional security complex theory to West Africa illuminates the region's complex security system. By recognizing security as a social construct, employing a detailed multi-level analysis, emphasizing regional dynamics, and challenging conventional regional definitions, the RSCT offers a robust and comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse and interconnected security challenges in West Africa. Its alignment with the region's complexities renders it an indispensable tool for academics, policymakers, and practitioners alike, solidifying its relevance and utility in this study and also in contemporary regional studies.

5. Results and Discussion

Regional Security and State Stability in West Africa

The security situation in West Africa as of 2023 is complex, influenced by a mix of military, political, economic, and health issues. Each of these areas significantly affects the region's stability and safety. Recent military coups that occurred in countries like Mali in (2020) and (2022), Guinea in (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) highlight the growing role of the military in politics. These coups didn't just happen out of nowhere; they were responses to long-standing problems like poor governance, widespread corruption, and people losing faith in democracy (LeVan, 2021). These issues have made it harder to maintain security in West Africa. This section of the study looked at the main security issues in West Africa from 2011 to 2023, focusing on the major important events that have undermined regional security in West Africa.

The landscape of regional security in West Africa has been significantly shaped by the prevalence of military coups, a trend that has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Boakye (2023) offers a critical analysis of this phenomenon, observing that military coups have emerged as a common response to the dual pressures of economic hardship and political unrest within the region. These coups, far from being mere political transitions, have profound and far-reaching implications, particularly in terms of human rights and societal stability.

One of the most concerning aspects of these military takeovers is their impact on human rights. As Boakye (2023) notes, coups often lead to widespread violations of human rights, with the most vulnerable groups, including women and children, being the most affected. The disruption of the political order by military forces frequently results in a breakdown of law and order, leading to situations where abuses can occur unchecked. This breakdown in societal norms and the rule of law exacerbates the already precarious situation of vulnerable populations, often leading to increased violence and persecution. Another critical consequence of these coups is the worsening of the refugee crisis. The instability and fear generated by these events compel many to flee their homes, seeking refuge from persecution or in pursuit of political freedom. This mass movement of people not only creates humanitarian crises within the affected countries but also places a strain on neighbouring countries and the broader international community, which must respond to these emergent refugee populations. The contagious nature of coups in West Africa adds another layer of complexity to the region's security dynamics. The occurrence of a coup in one state can often serve as a catalyst or a justification for similar actions in neighbouring states. This domino effect can lead to a regional atmosphere of instability, where the threat of a coup looms large over multiple countries, further undermining regional stability and security. The following are some of the notable recent coups and events that occurred in West Africa that have contributed to undermining regional security and stability. They are;

A. Burkina Faso

The political landscape of Burkina Faso has been significantly marked by instability, particularly highlighted by the military coups in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2022 and 2023. These events reflect deeper systemic issues within the country's political framework. On October 30, 2014, Burkina Faso experienced a critical shift in its political history when Lt. Colonel Yacouba Isaac Zida led a military coup that ousted long-time President Blaise

Compaoré (BBC News, 2014). Compaoré's regime, which lasted for 27 years, was characterized by instability that belied underlying political and social tensions (Freedom House, 2015). The coup was primarily driven by public discontent over Compaoré's attempt to amend the constitution to extend his rule, a move seen as a blatant power grab, sparking widespread protests and civil unrest (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The aftermath of the 2014 coup saw a power struggle within the military and between civilian political forces, reflecting the deep divisions in Burkina Faso's political landscape (International Crisis Group, 2014). This period was marked by a lack of clear leadership and direction, leading to a volatile and unpredictable political environment.

The political instability continued with another significant event on September 17, 2015, when the presidential guard, led by Gilbert Diendéré, overthrew the interim government of President Michel Kafando (Al Jazeera, 2015). This coup was indicative of the ongoing power struggles within Burkina Faso's political and military elite. Diendéré, a close ally of former President Compaoré, was seen as attempting to reassert the old guard's influence over the country's political trajectory (Reuters, 2015). The 2015 coup was met with strong domestic and international condemnation and highlighted the fragile nature of the transitional process in Burkina Faso (United Nations Security Council, 2015). It disrupted the transitional process and complicated the path towards democratic elections and governance.

Both coups in Burkina Faso were symptomatic of broader issues such as entrenched corruption, weak institutions, and a lack of trust in the political process among the populace (Transparency International, 2014). The military's involvement in politics, a legacy of Compaoré's rule, remained a significant challenge, undermining efforts to establish a stable and democratic political order (African Union, 2015). The coups also underscored the role of external factors, such as regional dynamics and international responses, in shaping the country's political landscape (ECOWAS, 2015). The reaction of regional bodies like ECOWAS and international stakeholders played a crucial role in mediating the crises and pushing for a return to constitutional order.

On October 8, 2016, Burkina Faso faced another destabilizing event when loyalists of former President Blaise Compaoré and members of the former presidential guard attempted a coup against President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. This failed coup attempt was indicative of the ongoing influence of Compaoré's regime and the challenges faced by the new government in asserting control and moving

away from the shadow of the former regime (BBC News, 2016). The involvement of the former presidential guard, a remnant of Compaoré's rule, highlighted the difficulties in reforming and restructuring the military and security forces in the country. The 2016 coup attempt underscored the deep-seated divisions within Burkina Faso's military and political elite and the challenges of transitioning to a stable democratic governance structure. It also reflected the persistent issues of loyalty and allegiance within the armed forces, complicating efforts to establish a unified and professional military aligned with democratic principles (International Crisis Group, 2016).

The political turmoil in Burkina Faso took another turn on January 23, 2022, with a military coup that ousted President Kaboré. This coup, known as the January 2022 Burkina Faso coup d'état, was a significant setback in the country's democratic progress. The coup leaders, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, Lassina Zerbo, Alassane Bala Sakandé, Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, Rohilla de Amit, Sidsoré Kader Ouedraogo and Ibrahim Traoré cited the failure of Kaboré's government to effectively address the growing security challenges in the country, particularly the threat posed by Islamist militants, as a justification for their actions and Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was declared the military head of state in Burkina Faso (Al Jazeera, 2022).

The January 2022 coup raised concerns about the cyclical nature of military interventions in Burkina Faso's politics and the apparent ease with which elected governments could be overthrown. It also highlighted the broader issue of security sector reform in the country, where the military's role in politics had become increasingly normalized. The coup was a clear indication of the fragility of Burkina Faso's political institutions and the need for a more comprehensive approach to address the underlying causes of instability (United Nations Security Council, 2022).

The political landscape of Burkina Faso witnessed yet another significant upheaval with the military coup on September 30, 2022, just eight months after the January 2022 coup. This event, known as the September 2022 Burkina Faso coup d'état, marked yet another instance where the military intervened directly in the nation's governance. This coup was led by elements within the Burkinabe military who expressed dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the ongoing security crisis, particularly the increasing attacks by Islamist militants in the region (BBC News, 2022). Burkina Faso military leader Paul-Henri Damiba was deposed in the

country's second coup in a year, as army Captain Ibrahim Traore took charge of Burkina Faso. The September 2022 coup is indicative of the persistent and deep-rooted challenges in Burkina Faso's political and security environment. It underscores the fragile nature of the country's democratic institutions and the military's growing impatience with civilian leadership, especially regarding security matters. This coup also highlighted the broader regional implications, as instability in Burkina Faso could have a spillover effect in the already volatile Sahel region (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Continuing the trend of political instability, Burkina Faso experienced another significant event on September 26, 2023, with a failed coup attempt against President Ibrahim Traore. This attempt reflected ongoing discontent and factionalism within the military and political elite of the country. The failure of this coup attempt, however, demonstrated some resilience in the existing government structure, suggesting a possible shift in the dynamics of power and governance in Burkina Faso (Reuters, 2023). The failed coup of September 2023 also raises questions about the future trajectory of Burkina Faso's political stability. It suggests a possible turning point where the government may have an opportunity to consolidate power and address the underlying issues that have fueled repeated coups (African Union, 2023).

B. The Gambia

On December 30, 2014, The Gambia experienced a significant political event when a failed coup attempt was orchestrated by Lamin Sanneh, the former head of the presidential guards. This attempted coup was a critical moment in the country's political history, reflecting the underlying tensions and instability within its governance structure. The coup attempt was directed against President Yahya Jammeh, who had been in power since a successful coup in 1994. Sanneh, along with other plotters, aimed to overthrow Jammeh's long-standing regime, which had been criticized for its authoritarian practices and human rights abuses (BBC News, 2015). The attempt, however, was quickly quelled by forces loyal to President Jammeh, leading to a swift and harsh response against those involved (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

The 2014 coup attempt in The Gambia highlights several critical issues within the country's political landscape. Firstly, it underscores the fragility of the political system and the persistent risk of military intervention in politics. The involvement of a high-ranking military officer in the coup attempt points to the significant role the military played in the political

affairs of the country (Al Jazeera, 2015). Secondly, the failed coup reflects the broader context of political discontent and opposition to President Jammeh's rule. Despite the failure of the coup, it brought international attention to the political climate in The Gambia, particularly concerning human rights and the need for democratic reforms (Freedom House, 2015).

The Gambia's political crisis following the December 2016 presidential election marked a significant turning point in the country's history. The election surprisingly resulted in the victory of opposition leader Adama Barrow, ending Yahya Jammeh's 20-year rule, which had been marred by human rights abuses (Perfect, 2017). Initially, Jammeh conceded defeat but reversed his decision a week later, triggering a major political crisis. Over the next month, Jammeh made various attempts to cling to power before finally leaving the country on January 21, 2017, when faced with the prospect of removal by force (Connolly, 2018).

This period of political uncertainty and Jammeh's refusal to accept the election results brought The Gambia to the brink of a major conflict. The situation was further exacerbated by Jammeh's declaration of a state of emergency, which heightened the risk of violent protests and conflict throughout the country (Cline-Cole, 2017). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with support from the African Union and the United Nations, played a crucial role in mediating the crisis through peaceful interventions and the mobilization of military forces on the Senegalese border (Connolly, 2018).

On December 20, 2022, The Gambia faced another critical challenge when a few soldiers allegedly attempted to overthrow the government of President Adama Barrow. This coup attempt, although unsuccessful, highlighted the ongoing vulnerabilities in The Gambia's political and security environment. The attempt was a stark reminder of the fragility of the country's democratic institutions and the persistent risks posed by elements within the military (Drammeh, 2018). The 2022 coup attempt also underscored the importance of continued vigilance and the need for comprehensive reforms in the military and security sectors. It emphasized the necessity for The Gambia to strengthen its democratic institutions and processes to prevent future military interventions and ensure political stability (Drammeh, 2018). The political crisis of 2016-2017 and the coup attempt in 2022 in The Gambia illustrate the complexities of transitioning from an autocratic regime to a democratic system. These events underscore the need for strong, democratic governance and the importance of addressing the

underlying issues that fuel political instability and military interventions.

C. The 2021 Coup in Guinea

On September 5, 2021, Guinea experienced a significant political upheaval when Colonel Mamady Doumbouya led a military coup that resulted in the overthrow of President Alpha Condé. This event marked a critical juncture in Guinea's political history, reflecting deep-seated issues within the country's governance and political structure. Alpha Condé, who had been in power since 2010, was re-elected for a controversial third term in 2020 after a constitutional referendum, widely criticized for potentially extending his rule. This move sparked widespread protests and accusations of authoritarianism (BBC News, 2021). The coup led by Doumbouya, a former French Foreign Legionnaire, was justified by the coup leaders as a response to rampant corruption, human rights abuses, and mismanagement by Condé's government (Al Jazeera, 2021).

The coup was met with mixed reactions domestically and internationally. While some in Guinea welcomed the end of Condé's rule, others expressed concern about the military's return to politics and the implications for democratic governance in the country (Reuters, 2021). The African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) condemned the coup and called for a return to constitutional order (African Union, 2021).

The 2021 coup in Guinea highlights several critical issues. Firstly, it underscores the fragility of democratic institutions in the country and the persistent risk of military intervention in politics. The involvement of the military in the coup points to the significant role it continues to play in the political affairs of Guinea. Secondly, the coup reflects broader societal discontent and opposition to Condé's rule. Despite the initial promise of democratic reforms under Condé, his tenure was increasingly marked by allegations of authoritarianism and disregard for constitutional limits on presidential terms. The 2021 coup in Guinea serves as a stark reminder of the challenges faced by countries in maintaining democratic governance and the risks posed by military interventions in politics. It highlights the need for strong institutions, respect for constitutional norms, and genuine democratic reforms to ensure political stability and prevent future coups.

D. Guinea-Bissau

On December 27, 2011, Guinea-Bissau experienced an attempted coup, a significant event in the country's history of political instability. This attempt reflected the ongoing tensions and power struggles within the

nation's political and military spheres. Guinea-Bissau, with a history of military interventions in politics, faced this challenge during a period of heightened political uncertainty. The attempted coup underscored the fragile nature of the country's democratic institutions and the persistent risk of military intervention in politics.

The political situation in Guinea-Bissau escalated further on April 12, 2012, when the army overthrew the government. This coup was a critical blow to the country's efforts towards democratic governance and stability. The military's takeover highlighted the deep-seated issues of governance and the lack of civilian control over the armed forces. This event led to international condemnation and raised concerns about the future of democracy and stability in Guinea-Bissau (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022).

On February 1, 2022, Guinea-Bissau faced another challenge when a failed coup attempt was made against the government. This attempt, though unsuccessful, demonstrated the ongoing vulnerabilities in the country's political and security environment. The failed coup highlighted the need for continued vigilance and comprehensive reforms in the military and security sectors to prevent future military interventions and ensure political stability (Elischer & Lawrance, 2022).

On November 30, 2023, Guinea-Bissau faced a significant political crisis when an attempted coup was made against President Umaro Sissoco Embaló. This event marked yet another chapter in the country's long history of political instability and military interventions. The attempted coup underscores the ongoing challenges in establishing a stable and democratic governance structure in Guinea-Bissau. President Embaló, who had been navigating a series of internal crises, including public sector unrest over salary arrears and working conditions, faced opposition from various factions within the country. His efforts to secure the loyalty of the military, which has a history of coups, were crucial in the context of Guinea-Bissau's political dynamics (Oxford Analytica, 2021). The attempted coup reflects the deep-seated issues of governance and the persistent risk of military intervention in politics.

The political situation in Guinea-Bissau has been further complicated by the end of the UN peace operation and the departure of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB). The completion of these missions came amid a tense political standoff between President Embaló and the former ruling party, PAIGC (Oxford Analytica, 2021). This tense environment provided a backdrop for the attempted

coup, highlighting the fragility of the political and security situation in the country. The events of 2011, 2012, 2022, and the attempted coup of November 2023 in Guinea-Bissau collectively illustrate the complexities and challenges of maintaining democratic governance amidst a history of repeated military interventions. These incidents, spanning over a decade, serve as stark reminders of the difficulties faced by countries with a propensity for military involvement in politics. They underscore the critical need for the establishment of strong institutions, adherence to constitutional norms, and the implementation of genuine democratic reforms. Such measures are essential to ensure political stability and to prevent the recurrence of coups. The attempted coup in 2023 highlights the importance of regional and international support in assisting Guinea-Bissau on its path towards stable and democratic governance. This support is crucial in reinforcing the country's efforts to build resilient state structures capable of withstanding internal and external pressures that threaten democratic processes. The collective history of these events in Guinea-Bissau emphasizes the ongoing need for a concerted effort to foster a political environment where democratic principles are upheld, and military interventions are averted.

E. Mali

On March 22, 2012, Mali experienced a significant shift in its political landscape when a military coup led by Malian soldiers overthrew President Amadou Toumani Touré. This event marked a critical juncture in Mali's history, reflecting deep-seated issues within the country's governance and military structure. The coup was primarily driven by dissatisfaction among the military ranks regarding the government's handling of the Tuareg Rebellion in the north of the country (Primo, 2017). The Tuareg Rebellion, which escalated in the same year, was a major factor leading to the coup. The rebellion, fueled by long-standing grievances and bolstered by an influx of arms from the Libyan Civil War, sought autonomy for the northern region, known as Azawad. The declaration of independence by Azawad following the coup underscored the complex ethnic and geopolitical dynamics in Mali, contributing to the destabilization of the country.

Since 2015, Mali has continued to face ongoing conflict involving various insurgent groups. The situation has been exacerbated by the presence of jihadist groups linked to Al Qaeda, which have exploited the instability and power vacuum in the northern regions. The conflict has evolved into a multifaceted security crisis, involving not only separatist rebels but also Islamist militants and inter-

communal violence. The ongoing conflict in Mali poses significant challenges to the stability and security of the Sahel region. It has led to widespread displacement, and humanitarian crises, and has hindered efforts towards political reconciliation and national unity. The situation in Mali remains a concern for regional and international actors, as it has implications for security beyond Mali's borders.

On August 18, 2020, Mali witnessed a significant political upheaval when a military coup led to the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. This event marked a pivotal moment in Mali's contemporary political history and was a clear indication of the deep-seated dissatisfaction with Keïta's administration. The coup was primarily driven by widespread public discontent over issues such as corruption, mismanagement of the economy, and the government's failure to address the ongoing security crisis in the country. The military's intervention was initially met with some public support, as many Malians were frustrated with the persistent instability and deteriorating economic conditions. However, the coup also raised concerns about the future of democracy in Mali and the potential for further political and social unrest. The international community, including the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), condemned the coup and called for a return to constitutional order.

The political situation in Mali took another turn on May 24, 2021, with a second military coup against the transitional government led by President Bah N'daw. This coup occurred less than a year after the previous one and interrupted the transitional process that was supposed to lead to new elections and the restoration of civilian rule. The coup leaders cited the transitional government's failure to address the country's challenges and the exclusion of the military from key decisions in the transitional process as reasons for their actions. The 2021 coup further complicated Mali's political landscape, undermining efforts to establish a stable and democratic governance structure. It also highlighted the challenges in balancing the demands of various political and military actors in the country. The repeated coups have had a significant impact on Mali's international relations, leading to sanctions and a suspension from regional bodies.

In 2021, Mali experienced another significant political upheaval when Colonel Assimi Goïta led a second coup. This event followed the 2020 coup and further destabilized the already fragile political landscape in Mali. Colonel Goïta, who played a key role in the 2020 coup, seized power again, citing the

transitional government's failure to address the nation's challenges and the exclusion of the military from critical decisions in the transitional process. This second coup by Colonel Goïta raised serious concerns about the military's increasing influence in Mali's politics and its implications for the country's democratic future. The international community, including regional organizations like ECOWAS and the African Union, strongly condemned the coup and called for a swift return to civilian rule. The coup also led to international sanctions and further isolation of Mali from the global community.

On May 17, 2022, the Malian Military Junta claimed to have stopped a coup attempt allegedly led by an "unnamed NATO country." This claim added another layer of complexity to the already volatile political situation in Mali. The junta's assertion pointed to possible international dimensions of the instability in Mali, although details and evidence of the alleged foreign involvement were not fully disclosed. The claim of thwarting a foreign-backed coup attempt was met with scepticism by some international observers. It also highlighted the challenges in distinguishing genuine threats from potential propaganda used by the junta to consolidate power and justify its actions. The situation underscored the need for transparency and accountability in Mali's governance, especially given the country's history of military coups and political unrest. The events of 2021 and 2022 in Mali, including the second coup led by Colonel Assimi Goïta and the claimed thwarting of another coup attempt, illustrate the ongoing political instability and the challenges of establishing democratic governance in the face of military interventions. These developments highlight the importance of international engagement and support for Mali in navigating its complex political landscape and in working towards sustainable peace and stability.

F. Niger

On March 31, 2021, Niger experienced a significant political event when a failed coup attempt was orchestrated by Captain Sani Saley Gourouza. This attempted coup occurred during a critical period in Niger's political history, as the country was in the midst of transitioning power following the presidential elections. The coup attempt was a stark reminder of the challenges Niger faces in terms of political stability and democratic governance. Captain Gourouza and his co-conspirators reportedly sought to seize power amidst the political transition, highlighting the persistent risks of military intervention in the country's politics. The attempt was quickly thwarted by government forces, ensuring the continuation of the democratic transition process.

This event occurred in the context of Niger's broader struggles with security issues, including threats from extremist groups and internal political tensions. The failed coup underscores the fragility of Niger's democratic institutions and the importance of maintaining stability during periods of political transition. The international community, particularly regional organizations like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), closely monitored the situation in Niger. Their engagement and support were crucial in upholding democratic norms and ensuring the peaceful transfer of power.

On July 26, 2023, Niger faced a significant political development when several individuals were detained for their involvement in a plot against President Mohamed Bazoum. This incident occurred in a context where Niger, like many of its regional neighbours, has been grappling with issues of security and political stability. The detention of these individuals highlights the ongoing challenges in safeguarding the security of the nation's leadership and the stability of its political system. President Bazoum, who has been at the helm of the country's efforts to combat security threats and foster development, faced this internal threat at a time when Niger was navigating complex political and security landscapes. This event is indicative of the broader trend of political instability and military coups in the region since 2019. It reflects the mounting security

problems and internal power struggles that have been characteristic of the Sahel region in recent years. The coup attempt and the subsequent detention of the involved individuals underscore the fragile nature of Niger's political environment and the persistent risks of internal unrest and military interventions

The failed coup attempts in Niger in 2021 and the 2023 plot against President Mohamed Bazoum collectively serve as stark reminders of the ongoing challenges faced by countries in the Sahel region in maintaining democratic governance and stability. These events highlight the critical need for strong institutions, respect for the rule of law, and the importance of safeguarding democratic processes against internal threats. They underscore the necessity of vigilance and robust security measures to protect democratic institutions and leaders from such destabilizing attempts. These incidents emphasize the importance of ongoing efforts to strengthen political stability, address internal power struggles, and counter security threats effectively. The significance of regional and international cooperation is also brought to the forefront, as it plays a crucial role in supporting countries like Niger in their endeavours to establish and maintain stable and democratic governance systems. These events in Niger's recent history underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses both internal resilience and external support to navigate the complexities of political and security challenges in the Sahel region.

Table 1: Selected Coups and Security Challenges in West African Countries (2011-2023)

Serial Number	Country	Security Challenge	Date	Carried Out By	Target/Overthrown
1	Burkina Faso	Successful Coup d'état	September 30, 2022	Military (Ibrahim Traoré)	Interim President Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba
2	Guinea-Bissau	Failed d'état Coup	February 1, 2022	Unknown	Umaro Sissoco Embalo
3	Guinea-Bissau	Failed Coup d'état	November 30, 2023	Unknown	President Umaro Sissoco Embalo
4	Mali	Successful Coup d'état	March 22, 2012	Malian soldiers	President Amadou Toumani Touré
5	Mali	Successful Coup d'état	August 18, 2020	Military leaders	President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta
6	Mali	Successful Coup d'état	May 24, 2021	Military leaders	The transitional government of President Bah N'daw
7	Mali	Failed Coup d'état	May 17, 2022	Allegedly foreign-backed forces	Malian Military Junta
8	Niger	Failed Coup d'état	March 31, 2021	Captain Sani Saley Gourouza	Mohamed Bazoum.
9	Niger	Successful Coup d'état	July 26, 2023	Military Leaders (General Abdourahamane Tchiani)	President Mohamed Bazoum
10	Nigeria	Boko Haram Insurgency	2011-date	Boko Haram	Civilians and Government Targets

Source: (Researcher's Survey, 2023)

Table 4.1 summarizes significant political and security events in various West African countries from 2011 to 2023. It particularly focuses on military coups and insurgency activities, revealing a pattern of political instability across the region. The majority of these events are coups, either successful or failed, carried out by military forces or elements within them. For instance, Burkina Faso experienced a military coup during this period, indicating recurring political turmoil. Similarly, Mali witnessed several military coups, underscoring ongoing challenges in governance and military-civil relations. In countries like Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, the table lists both successful and failed coup attempts, highlighting the volatility in their political landscapes. A notable inclusion is the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, spanning over a decade, reflecting the persistent threat posed by extremist groups in the region. This insurgency, characterized by attacks on civilians and government targets, signifies a broader security challenge extending beyond traditional coups.

6. Conclusions

The study of West Africa's security and stability reveals complex challenges, deeply rooted in the fragility of democratic institutions, governance issues, and the pervasive threat of terrorism. The recurrent military coups in countries like Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger are indicative of deeper systemic issues, notably poor governance and corruption, which undermine the stability of democratic processes. These political upheavals have significant human rights implications, especially for vulnerable groups, highlighting the urgent need for effective mechanisms to protect civilians and uphold the rule of law. The transnational nature of security threats, exemplified by the Boko Haram insurgency, highlights the necessity of a coordinated regional response. This insurgency, which began in Nigeria but quickly spread to neighbouring countries, underscores the interconnectedness of security issues in the region and the inadequacy of unilateral state actions in addressing such multifaceted challenges. The economic and social impacts of these security challenges are profound, disrupting key sectors like trade and agriculture, exacerbating poverty, and hindering development. Therefore, except a holistic approach that extends beyond military strategies to encompass economic development, job creation, and social welfare programs are put in place in West Africa to address the root causes of instability, the domino effects will continue within the West African sub-region.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the results and discussions

1. Addressing economic disparities and poverty is key to stabilizing the region. Initiatives should focus on creating job opportunities, especially for the youth, promoting sustainable economic development, and investing in critical sectors such as agriculture, education, and healthcare. This approach will help in addressing some of the socio-economic grievances that often lead to unrest and instability.
2. ECOWAS should focus on building its capacity for conflict prevention and early warning systems. This includes investing in research and analysis, enhancing diplomatic capabilities, and developing mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution. Strengthening these capacities will enable the region to address potential conflicts proactively and prevent them from escalating. This will ensure regional stability within the ECOWAS
3. To address the root causes of military coups and political instability, it is crucial for ECOWAS to strengthen democratic institutions and governance in West African states. This includes enhancing the transparency and accountability of government operations, implementing effective anti-corruption measures, and ensuring the independence of judicial systems. Building robust and resilient democratic frameworks will help prevent the power vacuums that often lead to military interventions.

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