

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Regional Security in West Africa

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ABSTRACT

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is dedicated to the preservation of peace and order, as well as the integration and unity of action among all West African states, founded on shared values, objectives, interests, and development. ECOWAS is recognised for articulating and advancing the political, socio-economic, peace, and security interests of its member states within the evolving global environment. West African States are afflicted by communal and ethnic disputes, armed violence, political instability, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The aim of the study was to examine the role of ECOWAS in regional security in West Africa. Whereas the objectives were to explore ECOWAS and conflict prevention and intervention in West African States and examine the efforts by ECOWAS to stabilise the West African states and secure the region. The study adopted the structural functionalist theory. The basic assumption of the theory is that the society is structured in conjunction with different groups and organisations affiliation and connection. Structural Functionalist theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design and used secondary sources of data. The content analysis method was used as the method of data analysis. The findings from the study revealed fundamental weaknesses in West African political structures and pervasive corruption, which have precipitated military incursions and undermined democratic institutions. The study also identified factors contributing to regional security issues, including weak state institutions, economic inequities, ethnic and religious tensions, and the proliferation of small guns and light weapons. The paper concluded that except ECOWAS strengthens the democratic institutions in West Africa and its military arm in mitigating conflicts, armed violence, and wars, as well as in restoring democracy in West African nations affected by coups d'état and civil wars, the ripple effects will continue within the region. The study recommended that ECOWAS should continue to prioritise peace and security while harmonising policies targeted at infrastructural development within the region.

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KEYWORDS: Peace, Regional Security, ECOWAS, West African Region.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is an economic union consisting of fifteen West African nations. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organisation aimed at promoting peace, security, economic growth, and development in West Africa (Magu, 2023). In 2015, these countries were predicted to have a population exceeding 349 million individuals. ECOWAS was founded on May 28,

1975, with the signing of the Lagos Treaty (Ojo & Adedayo, 2022). The 1975 Treaty established ECOWAS's mandate to foster peace, security, and economic integration among its member states. These economic activities encompass industry, energy, telecommunications, agriculture, natural resources, trade, social and cultural issues, transportation, and monetary and financial matters. ECOWAS operates under the principles of democracy and the rule of law. The Treaty of Lagos was amended and executed on

July 24, 1993, at Cotonou. ECOWAS is a regional bloc under the African Economic Community (AEC) (Makinde, 2022). The member countries of ECOWAS include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo (Onuoha & Akogwu, 2022).

In the early 1990s, West Africa experienced a rise in socio-economic instability, violent conflicts, and state collapse. Countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau were adversely impacted. The alarming implications of the conditions prompted ECOWAS to alter its focus from economic development to peace, security, and stability. ECOWAS's engagement in these nations has created a fresh perspective for the organisation as a crucial instrument for achieving regional peace and security (Megwalu & Garba, 2024). Since its inception, ECOWAS has advocated for the concept of collective self-sufficiency among its member states. As a trading union, it aims to establish a unified, extensive trading bloc through economic collaboration among the member states. The ECOWAS joint military force has intervened in member states during periods of political turmoil. These encompass actions in Ivory Coast and Liberia in 2003, Guinea-Bissau in 2012, Mali in 2013, and Gambia in 2017. The community has established a borderless region that enables the population of its member states to access resources and opportunities across the nations. This access encompasses unrestricted travel, access to effective education, a robust healthcare system, and trade, all while ensuring peace and security. Currently, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is acknowledged as a successful entity that has promoted harmonious integration among its member nations (Bassey et al., 2024). This study relates the concepts of peacebuilding, peacekeeping, security, stability, and conflict management in the context of ECOWAS intervention in West African States to the economic and social revolution of West African society. The emphasis is on establishing a foundation for enduring peace, security, stability, and development.

In most instances, ECOWAS spearheaded the conception, execution, and implementation of programs and policies endorsed by its fifteen (15) member states, development partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and others. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) established the groundwork for ECOWAS's involvement in peace, security, and conflict management in West

African states. The ECOWAS Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was instrumental in preserving peace and stability in several West African conflict areas through the formation and deployment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Adetula et al., 2021). The study aims to examine the evolution and formation of ECOWAS, as well as its foundational mandates and organisational functions. It will also analyse ECOWAS's role in maintaining law, order, peace, and security among member states, and investigate the achievements and challenges faced by ECOWAS in sustaining peace and security in the region.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the structural functionalist theory. The basic assumption of the theory is that society is structured in conjunction with different groups and organisations' affiliations and connections (Orsini, 2024). Functionalist theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Liu et al., 2022). The theory was propounded by French Sociologists, Emile Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, Parsons and colleagues; they originally wanted to explain social institutions as a shared way for individuals in society to meet their own needs (Luhmann, 2021). The focus for structural functionalism changed to be more about the ways that social institutions in society meet the needs of individuals within the society. The theory serves a purpose and that all aspects of society such as institutions, roles, and norms are indispensable for the long-term survival of the society. It focuses attention on the social structures that shape society as a whole in terms of the function of its elements and functions performed in society by social structures such as institutions, groups, organisations, class and so on. Each aspect of society depends on each other and each contributes to the overall stability and functioning of the society. The theory advocates that no segment or section of society should be neglected, deprived, or marginalized.

By application, all the structures put in place by ECOWAS in the West Africa region are crucial in facilitating and fast-tracking peacebuilding initiatives and processes, conflict management, peacekeeping, security and socio-economic stability in the region. The ECOMOG and other bodies such as the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP), West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), as well as the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF) and others are working towards the Peace-building process and initiatives, conflict management, security and stability in the West Africa

Region therefore, there is need for them to function optimally and work together to achieve overall stability and functioning of the region.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the role of ECOWAS in regional security in West Africa. Whereas the objectives were to;

1. examine the Efforts by ECOWAS to stabilise the West African States and secure the region
2. explore ECOWAS and conflict intervention in West African states

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Overview of ECOWAS and Conflict Intervention in West Africa States

The unwillingness of the United Nations and western countries to demonstrate a dedication and commitment towards the situation in West Africa created a situation and condition ECOWAS had to resort to West Africa solution to a West African peace and security problem. This was experimented using ECOMOG as a launching pad (Akpabio & Okoro, 2025). The fact that ECOWAS undertook such initiative represented a significant shift in the involvement of regional organisations in peace security and stability issues. This was underscored by an earlier call by Boutros Boutros Ghali, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, to the effect that regional organisations should reduce the pressure faced by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in peacekeeping (Salton, 2024). Boutros Boutros Ghali as cited in (Salton, 2024) argued that: regional action, however, could lighten the burden of the Council and contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratisation in international affairs. Consultations between the United Nations and regional arrangements or agencies could do much to build international consensus on the nature of a problem and the measures required to address it.

The international community demonstration little or no concern over the situation in violent-conflict in West Africa, ECOWAS rose to the challenge (Ojo & Adedayo, 2022). Hence, a peace enforcement force under the auspices of the ECOMOG was established. It was the Liberian conflict that led to the establishment of ECOMOG as the first peacekeeping and peace enforcement mission set up a regional economic body in the world (Benson, 2021).

In August 1990, an ECOMOG force with membership drawn from Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone was put in place, thereby making it a primary source of security and stability in Liberia (Aning, 1994). The emergence of ECOMOG as a regional strategy for reacting to the multifaceted emergency in West African states was premised on the notion that regional peace, security, stability, unity, mutual relation trust and good neighbourliness were necessary for achieving the ultimate aims and objectives of ECOWAS (Orhero, 2023). The establishment of ECOMOG laid the foundation for peace, stabilisation, reconciliation and rehabilitation, which in turn led to the design of other post-conflict initiatives by ECOWAS. ECOMOG Roles in Conflict Management, Peace Building Process and Stabilisation of West Africa States. The emergence of ECOMOG and the role played in conflict management, peacebuilding process and stabilisation in West African states, made it be considered a model for conflict management, peacebuilding process and stabilisation in the West African region and beyond. It was used to contain conflicts in Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire among others. Therefore, ECOWAS decided to make it a permanent feature of its conflict management and resolution framework, as contained in the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding and Security (Ajibewa & Oduyingbo, 2024).

The ECOWAS experience with the establishment of ECOMOG as a tool for stabilisation was quite significant against the backdrop of the fact that the decision to establish ECOMOG was a rational one in the light of the growing refusal or reluctance by the international community to get involve in peacekeeping activities in the African continent. On their part, Member states of ECOWAS viewed ECOMOG more as a vehicle for defining their security apparatus (Ero, 2000), which can also serve as a model for other regional organisations. ECOWAS Partnership with Civil Society for Peace and Security in West Africa Region. The ECOWAS collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) has been a core component of the ECOWAS strategy for conflict management, peace building and peacekeeping process. The critical role played by civil society during and in the aftermath of various violent conflicts in West African states, laid the foundation for a strategic partnership between ECOWAS and civil society on issues related to peace, security and stability in West African states. Some of them included the West African Network for Peace

building (WANEP), the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA), as well as the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF). The establishment of Elections Unit by ECOWAS created an opportunity for more robust partnership between ECOWAS and civil societies in the region, through the WACSOFF (Kogbe, 2022). In concert with ECOWAS, WACSOFF played a critical role in election observation, conflict management and peacebuilding, as well as democratic process and good governance. The partnership between ECOWAS and civil society was anchored on the fact that civil society possesses the ability and capacity to make

informed input into ECOWAS peace-building initiatives in the West African region (Nedziwe & Tella, 2023).

4.2. The Efforts by ECOWAS to Stabilise the West African States and Secure the Region

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has undertaken several interventions to stabilise and secure the West African region. These interventions have ranged from diplomatic and political efforts to military engagements. Here are some of the notable ECOWAS interventions during this period as presented in the table below:

Table 1: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Major Interventions to Stabilise and Secure the West African Region from 2011 to 2023.

S/N	Country(s)	Events	Year	Description of ECOWAS Intervention
1	Côte d'Ivoire	Côte d'Ivoire Crisis	2011	ECOWAS played a crucial role in addressing the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire.
2	Mali	Mali Crisis	2012 2020	ECOWAS was actively involved in mediation efforts. The organisation also contributed to the formation of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which was later transformed into a UN mission.
3	Mali	Mali Military Coup	2020	ECOWAS economic sanctions prohibited the trade of goods and closed borders between Mali and its neighbours, with exceptions for food, fuel and medicine.
4	Guinea-Bissau	Guinea-Bissau Political Crisis	2013	ECOWAS intervened in the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau, which included a military coup. The organisation's efforts were focused on restoring constitutional order and facilitating dialogue among political stakeholders.
5	All West African Countries	Ebola Outbreak Response:	2014	While not a direct security intervention, ECOWAS's response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa was crucial in coordinating regional efforts to manage the health crisis, demonstrating its role in broader regional stability.
6	Gambia	The Gambia Presidential Crisis	2016-2017	ECOWAS played a decisive role in the Gambian presidential crisis, where the incumbent Yahya Jammeh refused to cede power after losing the elections. ECOWAS's intervention, which included the threat of military force, was instrumental in ensuring a peaceful transition of power.
7	Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.	Nigerian Boko Haram Insurgency	2018 -	ECOWAS continued to support regional efforts to combat the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, focusing on security cooperation and intelligence sharing.
8	Mali	Mali Political Crisis	2020	ECOWAS imposed economic sanctions and engaged in diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order and support a transition to civilian rule.
9	Guinea	Guinea Coup	2021 -	ECOWAS responded to the coup in Guinea by suspending the country from its decision-making

				bodies and imposing sanctions, while also engaging in diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order.
10	Niger	Military Coup	2023	ECOWAS announced a raft of sanctions on Niger, the strictest the bloc has ever imposed on an errant member state
11	Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso military coup	2022	ECOWAS suspended Burkina Faso in the aftermath of a military coup to punish the nation a military takeover
12	16 Members Countries of Ecowas	Military coups, Terrorism, Political instability, and smuggling of small arms and light weapons.	2022-2023	Ongoing Security Initiatives: ECOWAS has continued its efforts to address ongoing security challenges in the region, including terrorism in the Sahel, maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and political instability in various member states.

Source: (Research Survey, 2023)

Table 1 provides a detailed account of ECOWAS's diverse interventions across West Africa over twelve years. The table chronologically documents significant political and security crises in various countries, outlining ECOWAS's responses ranging from diplomatic efforts, and economic sanctions, to direct military involvement. Notable interventions include the resolution of the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (2011), mediation and military support during the Mali crises (2012, 2020), the handling of the Ebola outbreak (2014), and decisive actions during presidential crises in Gambia (2016-2017) and Guinea (2021). Additionally, the table highlights ECOWAS's ongoing efforts against the Boko Haram insurgency and its responses to military coups and political instability across the region. This table underscores ECOWAS's evolving role and strategic approach in maintaining regional stability and addressing multifaceted security challenges in West Africa. This can be further discussed highlighting the actions taken by ECOWAS in furtherance of its security efforts to stabilise the West African region.

a. 2011 - Côte d'Ivoire Crisis: The 2011 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire stands as a significant event in West African history, highlighting the complexities of political transitions and the role of regional organisations in conflict resolution. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a pivotal role in addressing this crisis, employing diplomatic negotiations and, critically, the threat of military intervention to ensure a peaceful resolution and uphold democratic principles. The crisis erupted following the presidential elections in November 2010, when incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refused to concede defeat to his challenger, Alassane Ouattara, despite international recognition of Ouattara's victory. This standoff plunged the country into a deep political

crisis, leading to widespread violence and human rights abuses (Akanji, 2022;).

ECOWAS's initial response to the crisis was diplomatic. The organisation, recognising the potential for the crisis to destabilise the region, quickly engaged in efforts to mediate between the two parties. ECOWAS leaders, including then-President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, and then-President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, played active roles in these diplomatic efforts. They sought to persuade Gbagbo to step down and allow for a peaceful transition of power (Bach, 2016). As diplomatic efforts stalled and the crisis escalated into violence, ECOWAS adopted a firmer stance, threatening military intervention. This threat was a clear indication of ECOWAS's commitment to enforcing democratic principles and protecting human rights in the region. The organisation's firm stance was supported by the African Union and the international community, including the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, which imposed sanctions on Gbagbo and his allies (Aning & Atuobi, 2011). Despite its proactive stance, ECOWAS faced several challenges and criticisms in its handling of the crisis. The threat of military intervention was controversial, raising questions about its legality and potential effectiveness. Critics argued that such an intervention could lead to further violence and destabilisation. Moreover, ECOWAS's approach was criticized for being too focused on military solutions, with insufficient attention to the underlying political and social issues driving the conflict (Piccolino, 2017).

The crisis eventually came to an end in April 2011, when Gbagbo was arrested with the assistance of French forces and UN peacekeepers. Ouattara was installed as president, marking the end of the

immediate crisis. ECOWAS's role in this resolution, though not without its challenges, was widely regarded as crucial in preventing the conflict from escalating further and in upholding democratic governance in Côte d'Ivoire (Erameh & Ologe, 202; Shipilov, 2022). The resolution of the Côte d'Ivoire crisis had significant implications for regional security and state stability in West Africa. ECOWAS's intervention demonstrated the organisation's capacity to address severe political crises and reinforced the principle of democratic governance in the region. However, the crisis also highlighted the fragility of political transitions in West Africa and the need for ongoing support for governance and reconciliation efforts post-conflict (Bach, 2016). The ECOWAS's response to the 2011 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire was a critical test of the organisation's ability to manage complex political conflicts. Through a combination of diplomatic negotiations and the threat of military intervention, ECOWAS played a vital role in resolving the crisis and upholding democratic principles. The experience in Côte d'Ivoire underscores the importance of regional organisations in conflict resolution but also highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that address the root causes of conflicts.

b. 2012 - Mali Crisis: The 2012 Mali Crisis, marked by a military coup and a subsequent insurgency in the north, posed a significant challenge to regional stability in West Africa. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a crucial role in addressing this crisis, engaging in mediation efforts and contributing to the formation of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which later evolved into a United Nations mission. This critical discussion examines ECOWAS's involvement in the crisis, focusing on its strategies, impacts, and the challenges encountered.

The crisis in Mali began with a military coup in March 2012, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré. The coup was fueled by dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the Tuareg rebellion in the north. Following the coup, the Tuareg rebels, along with Islamist groups, seized control of northern Mali, declaring independence for the region of Azawad. This situation posed a significant threat to the stability and territorial integrity of Mali and the broader region (Check, 2023).

ECOWAS quickly responded to the crisis with a dual approach: mediation efforts to restore constitutional order and initiatives to address the insurgency in the

north. ECOWAS leaders, including then-President of Burkina Faso Blaise Compaoré, played a key role in mediating between the coup leaders and the Malian government. These efforts were aimed at facilitating a return to democratic governance and preventing further escalation of the conflict (Adebajo, 2011). Recognising the need for a military response to the insurgency in northern Mali, ECOWAS contributed to the formation of AFISMA. This mission was mandated to assist the Malian government in reclaiming the northern territories and stabilizing the country. AFISMA comprised troops from various ECOWAS member states and received logistical and financial support from international partners. The mission played a critical role in supporting the Malian army and preparing the ground for a broader international intervention (Keita, 2014).

In April 2013, the United Nations Security Council authorized the transformation of AFISMA into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This transition marked a significant escalation in international involvement in the Mali crisis. MINUSMA was tasked with supporting political processes, stabilizing key areas, and protecting civilians. The involvement of the UN brought additional resources and international legitimacy to the efforts to stabilise Mali (Boutellis & Zahar, 2015).

ECOWAS's involvement in the Mali crisis faced several challenges. The organisation grappled with limited resources and varying levels of commitment from member states. Additionally, the complexity of the conflict, which involved various armed groups with differing agendas, made the mediation process particularly challenging. There were also criticisms regarding the effectiveness of ECOWAS's military intervention, with some arguing that it lacked a clear strategy and adequate resources to address the root causes of the conflict (Wing, 2016). The Mali crisis and ECOWAS's response had significant implications for regional security and state stability. The crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities of West African states to internal conflicts and the potential for such conflicts to have regional implications. ECOWAS's intervention in Mali demonstrated the organisation's capacity to respond to complex crises, but it also underscored the need for stronger regional mechanisms to prevent and manage conflicts (Lecocq & Schrijver, 2017).

The ECOWAS's response to the 2012 Mali crisis was a critical test of the organisation's ability to manage complex political and security challenges. Through a combination of diplomatic mediation and military

intervention, ECOWAS played a vital role in addressing the crisis. However, the experience in Mali also highlighted the limitations and challenges facing regional organisations in conflict management and underscored the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate security concerns and the underlying political and social issues.

c. 2013 - Guinea-Bissau Political Crisis: The 2013 political crisis in Guinea-Bissau, marked by a military coup, posed a significant challenge to the stability of the country and the West African region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a crucial role in addressing this crisis, focusing on restoring constitutional order and facilitating dialogue among political stakeholders. This critical discussion examines ECOWAS's intervention in the crisis, its strategies, impacts, and the challenges encountered. The crisis in Guinea-Bissau began with a military coup in April 2012, which disrupted the presidential election process and led to the arrest of the interim president and the prime minister. This event plunged the country into a state of political instability and uncertainty, exacerbating existing challenges such as weak governance, corruption, and drug trafficking (Embalo, 2013).

ECOWAS's response to the crisis was primarily diplomatic. The organisation, recognising the potential for the crisis to destabilise the region, engaged in mediation efforts to resolve the political impasse. ECOWAS leaders, including representatives from Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal, played active roles in these diplomatic efforts. They sought to negotiate a peaceful solution that would respect the constitutional order and the democratic process (Adebajo, 2011). A key focus of ECOWAS's intervention was the restoration of constitutional order. The organisation worked towards ensuring that a transitional government was established and that constitutional processes were respected. This effort included the facilitation of a transitional government that would lead the country to new elections. ECOWAS's commitment to constitutionalism was crucial in legitimising the transitional process and ensuring international support (Vines, 2013). ECOWAS also played a significant role in facilitating dialogue among various political stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau. The organisation recognised that sustainable peace and stability could only be achieved through inclusive dialogue and reconciliation. ECOWAS's efforts included organising meetings and negotiations between the coup leaders, political parties, and civil society groups to create a consensus on the way forward. However, ECOWAS faced several

challenges in its handling of the Guinea-Bissau crisis. One major challenge was the deep-seated political and military divisions within the country, which made the mediation process complex and protracted. Additionally, the involvement of external actors, including drug traffickers and foreign mercenaries, complicated the situation. There were also criticisms regarding the effectiveness of ECOWAS's intervention, with some arguing that it lacked a long-term strategy for addressing the underlying causes of instability in Guinea-Bissau (Crisis Group, 2016).

According to Megwalu and Garba (2024), the Guinea-Bissau crisis and ECOWAS's response had significant implications for regional security and state stability. The crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities of West African states to political instability and the potential for such instability to have regional implications. ECOWAS's intervention in Guinea-Bissau demonstrated the organisation's capacity to respond to political crises, but it also underscored the need for stronger mechanisms to prevent and manage conflicts in the region (Olonisakin, 2017).

d. 2016-2017 - The Gambia Presidential Crisis: The 2016-2017 Gambian presidential crisis was a significant political event in West Africa, highlighting the challenges of democratic transitions and the role of regional organisations in upholding democratic norms. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a decisive role in this crisis, particularly when the incumbent President Yahya Jammeh refused to cede power after losing the elections. ECOWAS's intervention, which notably included the threat of military force, was instrumental in ensuring a peaceful transition of power. This critical discussion examines ECOWAS's involvement in the crisis, focusing on its strategies, impacts, and the challenges it faced.

The crisis began when Yahya Jammeh, who had been in power for 22 years, lost the December 2016 presidential election to opposition candidate Adama Barrow. Initially, Jammeh conceded defeat, but a week later, he reversed his position, alleging electoral irregularities and vowing to stay in power. This reversal led to a political impasse and raised fears of violence and instability in The Gambia and the wider region (Saine, 2017).

ECOWAS's response to the crisis was initially diplomatic. The organisation, recognising the potential for regional destabilisation, engaged in efforts to mediate the standoff. ECOWAS leaders, including then-President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari,

played active roles in these diplomatic efforts. They sought to persuade Jammeh to respect the election results and facilitate a peaceful transition of power (Halidu et al., 2024). As diplomatic efforts were met with resistance from Jammeh, ECOWAS adopted a firmer stance, threatening military intervention. This threat was a clear indication of ECOWAS's commitment to enforcing democratic principles and protecting human rights in the region. The organisation's firm stance was supported by the African Union and the international community, including the United Nations, which all demanded that Jammeh step down and respect the election results (Omilusi, 2017). The crisis was eventually resolved in January 2017, when Jammeh agreed to step down and go into exile, following the arrival of ECOWAS military forces in The Gambia. Adama Barrow was sworn in as president, marking the end of the immediate crisis. ECOWAS's role in this resolution, though not without its challenges, was widely regarded as crucial in preventing the conflict from escalating and in upholding democratic governance in The Gambia (Hartmann, 2017).

The resolution of the Gambian crisis had significant implications for regional security and state stability in West Africa. ECOWAS's intervention demonstrated the organisation's capacity to address severe political crises and reinforced the principle of democratic governance in the region. However, the crisis also highlighted the fragility of political transitions in West Africa and the need for ongoing support for governance and reconciliation efforts post-conflict (Chukwuebuka, 2025). ECOWAS faced several challenges in its handling of the Gambian crisis. The threat of military intervention was controversial, raising questions about its legality and potential effectiveness. Critics argued that such an intervention could lead to further violence and destabilisation. Additionally, ECOWAS's approach was criticized for being too focused on military solutions, with insufficient attention to the underlying political and social issues driving the conflict (Omilusi, 2017).

e. 2018 - Nigerian Boko Haram Insurgency: The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, which has extended into neighbouring countries, represents one of the most significant security challenges in West Africa. Since its emergence in 2009, Boko Haram has caused widespread devastation, leading to the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has continued to play a crucial role in regional efforts to combat this insurgency, particularly since 2018, focusing on security cooperation and intelligence sharing among member

states. ECOWAS's approach to combating the Boko Haram insurgency has been multifaceted, with a significant emphasis on enhancing security cooperation and intelligence sharing among member states. This approach is crucial given the transnational nature of the threat posed by Boko Haram, which operates not only in Nigeria but also in neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. ECOWAS has facilitated joint military operations and coordinated efforts to monitor and disrupt the activities of Boko Haram. The organisation has also worked to strengthen the capacity of national militaries and security forces in the region to effectively counter the insurgency (Onuoha, 2019). However, despite these efforts, combating the Boko Haram insurgency presents significant challenges. One of the primary challenges is the complex and adaptive nature of Boko Haram as a terrorist group. The group has shown a capacity to change its tactics and strategies, making it a persistent and elusive threat. Additionally, the underlying socio-economic and political conditions in the affected areas, such as poverty, unemployment, and governance issues, contribute to the insurgency's resilience and complicate efforts to combat it effectively (Amao & Maiangwa, 2020).

The Boko Haram insurgency has had a profound humanitarian and socio-economic impact on the region. The insurgency has led to a large-scale humanitarian crisis, with millions of people displaced and in need of assistance. The violence has disrupted livelihoods, education, and health services, exacerbating poverty and underdevelopment in the affected areas. ECOWAS's response has therefore had to consider not only military and security aspects but also humanitarian and developmental dimensions (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2021).

ECOWAS's efforts to combat Boko Haram have involved collaboration with various regional and international actors. This includes working with the African Union, the United Nations, and partners such as the European Union and the United States. Such collaboration is essential for pooling resources, and expertise, and for coordinating a more effective response to the insurgency. However, ensuring effective collaboration and coordination among a diverse range of actors remains a challenge (Okeke & Okeke, 2018).

Looking forward, the continued threat posed by Boko Haram necessitates sustained and adaptive strategies from ECOWAS and its member states. This includes not only ongoing military and security efforts but also addressing the root causes of the insurgency.

Strategies that focus on development, good governance, and the provision of basic services are crucial for long-term stability and for undermining the appeal of extremist groups. Additionally, efforts to promote deradicalisation, reintegration, and reconciliation are important components of a comprehensive approach to the insurgency (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2024).

f. 2020 - Mali Political Crisis: The 2020 political crisis in Mali, marked by a military coup, presented a significant challenge to the stability of the country and the broader West African region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a critical role in responding to this crisis, employing a combination of economic sanctions and diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order and support a transition to civilian rule. This critical discussion examines ECOWAS's involvement in the crisis, focusing on its strategies, impacts, and the challenges it faced.

The crisis in Mali began with a military coup on August 18, 2020, led by Colonel Assimi Goïta, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. The coup was driven by widespread dissatisfaction with the government over issues such as corruption, economic mismanagement, and the handling of the ongoing insurgency in the north of the country. The coup raised concerns about the potential for increased instability in Mali and the Sahel region (Wing, 2020). In response to the coup, ECOWAS quickly imposed economic sanctions on Mali. These sanctions included the closure of borders, the suspension of financial flows, and the halt of trade exchanges, except for necessities. The sanctions aimed to pressure the military junta to return the country to civilian rule and were part of a broader strategy to uphold democratic governance in the region (Maianhi & Liaga, 2024).

Alongside economic sanctions, ECOWAS engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. ECOWAS leaders, including the Presidents of Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, played active roles in mediating between the military junta and civilian political leaders. These efforts were aimed at facilitating a peaceful resolution and ensuring a swift return to constitutional order. ECOWAS also insisted on a short transitional period led by civilians, which was a key demand of the Malian opposition and civil society groups (Bøås, 2020). However, the ECOWAS imposition of economic sanctions was controversial, with concerns about their impact on the Malian population and the potential to exacerbate existing humanitarian crises. Additionally, the mediation

process was complex, with multiple stakeholders, including the military junta, political opposition, civil society, and religious leaders, having divergent interests and demands (Keita, 2021). The crisis eventually led to the establishment of a transitional government in Mali, with a civilian, Bah Ndaw, appointed as interim president, and Colonel Goïta as vice president. This transition, which was facilitated by ECOWAS's mediation, marked a significant step towards restoring constitutional order. However, the arrangement was seen by some as a compromise that left substantial power in the hands of the military (Lecocq & Schrijver, 2021). The Mali crisis and ECOWAS's response had significant implications for regional security and state stability. The crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities of West African states to military coups and the challenges of maintaining democratic governance. ECOWAS's intervention demonstrated the organisation's commitment to democratic principles but also underscored the need for stronger mechanisms to prevent and manage political crises in the region (Aning & Atuobi, 2021).

g. 2021 - Guinea Coup: The 2021 coup in Guinea, which led to the ousting of President Alpha Condé, marked a significant political upheaval in the region. In response, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took decisive actions, including suspending Guinea from its decision-making bodies, imposing sanctions, and engaging in diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order. This critical discussion explores ECOWAS's response to the Guinea coup, focusing on its strategies, impacts, and the challenges it faced.

ECOWAS's response to the coup was swift and firm. The organisation condemned the coup and immediately suspended Guinea from all decision-making bodies of ECOWAS. This suspension was a clear signal of ECOWAS's stance against unconstitutional changes of government, a principle enshrined in the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Odubajo & Ishola, 2024). In addition to suspension, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Guinea. These sanctions were targeted at the junta and its members, including travel bans and asset freezes. The sanctions aimed to pressure the military leaders to return the country to constitutional rule and were part of ECOWAS's broader strategy to uphold democratic governance in the region (Akinyemi et al., 2024).

Alongside sanctions, ECOWAS engaged in diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. ECOWAS leaders, including the Presidents of Ghana and Nigeria, played active roles in mediating between the

military junta and other political stakeholders in Guinea. These efforts were aimed at facilitating a peaceful resolution and ensuring a swift return to constitutional order. ECOWAS also insisted on a short transitional period led by civilians, which was a key demand of the international community (Keita, 2022). ECOWAS faced several challenges in its handling of the Guinea crisis. The imposition of sanctions was controversial, with concerns about their impact on the Guinean population and the potential to exacerbate existing humanitarian crises. Additionally, the mediation process was complex, with multiple stakeholders having divergent interests and demands. The military junta's commitment to a civilian-led transition and the timeline for such a transition remained unclear (Lecocq & Schrijver, 2021).

The Guinea coup and ECOWAS's response had significant implications for regional security and state stability. The coup highlighted the vulnerabilities of West African states to military coups and the challenges of maintaining democratic governance. ECOWAS's intervention demonstrated the organisation's commitment to democratic principles but also underscored the need for stronger mechanisms to prevent and manage political crises in the region (Aning & Atuobi, 2021).

h. 2022-2023 - Ongoing Security Initiatives: The period under review in this study has been pivotal for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in addressing ongoing security challenges in the region. These challenges include terrorism in the Sahel, maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and political instability in various member states. ECOWAS's efforts in tackling these issues have been multifaceted, involving military, diplomatic, and developmental strategies. This critical discussion examines the nature of these security challenges and the effectiveness of ECOWAS's responses.

The Sahel region, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has continued to face significant threats from terrorist groups, including affiliates of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These groups have exploited local grievances, weak state presence, and intercommunal conflicts to expand their influence. ECOWAS's response has involved supporting regional military initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which aims to combat terrorism and transnational crime. However, the effectiveness of these military responses has been limited by logistical challenges, insufficient funding, and the need for more robust political solutions to address the root causes of extremism (Lawal et al., 2025;

Maniszewska, 2024). Also, maritime piracy remains a significant threat in the Gulf of Guinea, affecting international shipping and local economies. ECOWAS has been working in collaboration with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to enhance maritime security. This collaboration has involved joint naval exercises, information sharing, and capacity building for naval forces. While these efforts have led to a decrease in piracy incidents, the Gulf of Guinea remains one of the most dangerous maritime areas in the world (Bueger, 2021).

Political instability in various ECOWAS member states, often manifested in military coups and electoral disputes, has been another major challenge. ECOWAS has actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to mediate conflicts and promote democratic governance. For instance, in response to the 2021 coup in Guinea, ECOWAS imposed sanctions and facilitated dialogue among political stakeholders. However, the organisation's ability to enforce democratic norms has been inconsistent, and its responses have sometimes been criticized for lacking effectiveness and impartiality (Olonisakin, 2021). On July 26, 2023, a coup d'état took place in Niger as the country's presidential guard apprehended President Mohamed Bazoum. General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the commander of the Presidential Guard, declared himself the head of a new military junta, shortly after verifying the success of the coup. Within days, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) slapped a slew of sanctions against Niger, the most severe the group has ever levied on an errant member state. Members of the fifteen-nation bloc (excluding Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, which have been suspended since falling under military rule) and the eight-member West African Economic and Monetary Union have agreed to close all borders with Niger, suspend financial transactions, and freeze the country's assets in external banks. ECOWAS has issued an ultimatum to the junta to restore constitutional order and reinstate the ousted president, Mohamed Bazoum, within one week or face further action, possibly military intervention.

ECOWAS' early reaction to the Niger coup was justified, given legitimate fears about coup contagion throughout West Africa. Nigeria shaped this reaction. Eager to establish herself as a strong leader amid a regional crisis, newly elected Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who took over as ECOWAS chairman two weeks before the coup, was among the regional heads of state who called for aggressive action to restore Bazoum (Yusuf, 2023;). Most politicians appeared to agree that Nigeria's army, the largest in West Africa,

would lead any military operation. However, ECOWAS and Tinubu appear to have overshot the point (Uvere & Onyendi, 2025). Although the ECOWAS sanctions conveyed a strong signal of disapproval for coups and probably increased external pressure on Niger's generals, they also backfired in ways that affected both Niamey and Abuja (Kanté et al., 2024). They have caused severe hardship in Niger, with negative knock-on effects on Nigeria, crippling a thriving cross-border economy straddling the long Nigeria-Niger border, disrupting livelihoods, exacerbating humanitarian challenges, and jeopardising major rail and gas projects that could boost regional trade. On the political front, the restrictions threaten to stymie bilateral cooperation on a variety of critical subjects, including security.

ECOWAS's efforts in addressing these security challenges have faced several criticisms. One major criticism is the over-reliance on military solutions, which often fail to address the underlying socio-economic and political factors driving insecurity (Abaneme et al., 2024). Additionally, there have been concerns about the coordination and implementation of regional security initiatives, with some member states lacking the capacity or political will to effectively participate. Furthermore, the organisation's responses to political crises have sometimes been viewed as too lenient or too harsh, raising questions about its consistency and credibility (Keita, 2022). Looking forward, ECOWAS faces the task of adapting its strategies to the evolving security landscape in West Africa. This adaptation requires a more comprehensive approach that balances military responses with political and developmental strategies. Strengthening state institutions, promoting good governance, and addressing socio-economic grievances are essential for long-term stability. Additionally, enhancing regional cooperation and partnerships with international actors is crucial for addressing transnational security threats effectively (Bøås, 2023).

Conclusion

ECOWAS has been noted for its successful political, security and community engagements with a creditable showing in the management of regional order and as an economically vibrant region. ECOWAS is described as a successful sub-regional experiment in Africa based on its utilisation of its multilateral armed force Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in containing conflicts, armed violence, wars and restoring democracy in many West-African States turn apart by coup d'état and civil wars.

The magnitude of the challenges posed by poverty to the peace and security in West African states, and the volume of its social, political and socioeconomic demand, calls for the mobilization of a lot of resources within the region. The West African predicament can therefore be described as being in abject poverty amid plenty. However, it has become intrinsic to note that the journey to achieve peace, security, stability and development is a prospective and equally challenging one. The integration is expected to move the West African states to a greater height in a world that is fast globalising.

The ECOWAS has been seen as an essential instrument to faster collective growth and prosperity for the countries and peoples of the West African states it is the hope and indeed the shared aspiration of the West African leaders to create a large economic entity and marketplace. The intervention by ECOWAS in various conflicts and disputes in West African states highlighted the linkage between regional security and regional economic development. Therefore, in advancing its goal of integrating the West African region economically, the issue of peace, security and stability had to be placed on the front burner of the ECOWAS agenda. This is emphasized by the fact that in the absence of peace and security, the goal of economic growth and development cannot be easily actualised.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results and discussion, the study made the following recommendations;

1. That ECOWAS should continue to make peace and security a priority and harmonise general policies and infrastructure development in the region.
2. The ECOWAS must create workable structures, policies and implementation processes to coordinate and support the execution and implementation of decisions made on resolving conflict and disputes and the effective carrying out of protocols adopted to guarantee peace, security and stability and respect for democratic processes and standards.
3. ECOWAS need to ensure that the diplomatic and standing military positions and decisions taken and adopted by regional organisations have the backing, consent and political will of members to be effectively executed.
4. In the Future, decisions taken by ECOWAS aimed at resolving any forms of disputes and conflicts should be done with the support of all member states and a united approach

should be adopted by those involved in peace-making, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts when adopting sanctions against those who violate democratic principles and processes.

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