



Challenges and Prospects of ECOWAS and Political Stability in West Africa

Abstract

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is developed with the sole aim of promoting economic and regional integration in Africa. However, the organization is fraught with challenges ranging from lack of funds, policy gaps and political instability in the region. The main objective of this study was to investigate the challenges and prospects of ECOWAS in ensuring political stability in West Africa. The mixed method of data collection was utilized to elicit data and to give credence to the findings of the study. The theory of democratic consolidation developed by Juan Linz was adopted as the theoretical pedestal of the study. Findings of the study revealed that ECOWAS military and security capabilities have significantly impacted its ability to influence responses to regional crises. Further discovery shows that West African internal political instability hinders ECOWAS ability to effectively lead and coordinate regional development initiatives within the region. It was concluded that the limited collaboration between ECOWAS member states constrained the scalability of ECOWAS interventions and efforts towards sustaining the development of West Africa. This exposed the necessity for structured partnerships and institutional support to amplify ECOWAS reach and effectiveness. The study recommended that ECOWAS should establish a mandatory regional stabilization fund financed through enforceable member-state contributions and a fixed levy on intra-regional trade, with strict compliance monitoring and sanctions for defaulting states.

Keywords: ECOWAS, politics, stability, West Africa, governance, Regional Coordination.

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Introduction

The norms and values of ECOWAS emphasize the promotion of democratic practices thereby military coups and military governments are considered unconstitutional. Consequently, ECOWAS immediately released official

statements to out-rightly condemn the coup in the Sahelian region and this public condemnation is intended as a form of diplomatic pressure aimed at delegitimizing military regimes and emphasizing the commitment of the

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regional organization to democratic values (Onapajo & Babalola, 2024).

In order to ensure and sustain political stability in West Africa, Onapajo & Babalola (2024) noted that ECOWAS has imposed a number of sanctions (both economic and diplomatic) against the military juntas in Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso following the refusal of coup leaders to heed the regional body's call for a return to civilian rule or formulate a workable transition plan. The membership of these states were suspended and different economic sanctions have been imposed.

Furthermore, the failure of democracy enabled the military arrogated itself as a corrective regime with necessary professionalism to become justifiable alternative to the unenviable leadership deficit confronting the region thereby brought about unfortunate military coups with dire consequences in many West African states (Oluyemi, 2024). In the fight against the spread of military governments in the region, the ECOWAS under the leadership of the Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, threatened to intervene by force after the imposition of several sanctions against the military juntas' of Mali (Assimi Goïta, 2021), Burkina Faso (Ibrahim Traoré, 2022) and Niger (Abdourahamane Tchiani, 2023). Consequently, the three military regimes of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger decided to establish a new regional organization, the Alliance of Sahel States (Alliance des États du Sahel, AES) to defend themselves (Kohnert, 2024). According to Haruna (2024), the formation of the alliance represents a broader shift in regional dynamics, it

challenges the hegemony of ECOWAS and it signifies the rise of a new axis of power rooted in military-led government in competition with the traditional norms of democracy championed by ECOWAS in the region. This constitutes the rise of ideological rivalry between military system of government and democracy in West Africa depicting the resurgence of the Cold War ideological division in the region.

Despite the fact that these military actions were primarily prompted by instability and economic hardship, all of these activities ultimately weakened the sub-region's democratic governance and democratisation process.

According to Abubakar & Hakeem (2023), Nigeria is concerned about the need and objective of ensuring that other countries in the West African sub-region embrace democratic forms of governance in order to attain relative peace and growth. However, the paper examined how ECOWAS contributed to democratising member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), especially Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Gambia. The contributions included diplomatic mediation and coercive measures, peacekeeping and conflict resolutions, and support and technical assistance. It is against this background that this study is set out to investigate the role of ECOWAS in political stability in West Africa.

Statement of the Problem

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a strong record of setting regional norms on governance and democracy (Musah, 2023). Yet the organization now faces

significant challenges in how to reorient its role and credibility amid a rise in the military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and most recently, Niger. The two (constitutional coup or civilian coup”) refer to how civilian rulers act in a way that is so military that it undermines democratic procedures. In this instance, the political leaders, who are civilians, are hesitant to permit an easy political transition and are manipulating the laws of the state to abuse their position of authority (Dagia, 2022).

The lifting of sanctions on Niger after the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) undermines ECOWAS' credibility as a forceful advocate for democracy. Similarly, the regional solidarity of Mali, and Burkina Faso, with Niger forming their alliance (ASS) weakens economic pressure and hinders ECOWAS' ability to achieve its goals and enforce its demands (Zambakari, 2023). Beyond the immediate challenges of sanctions, ECOWAS faced internal divisions and regional rivalries that undermined its ability to respond to the Niger's coups. The formation of the ASS and the inability of regional powers like Nigeria to commit its military, in the long run, to forcefully remove the junta highlight the lack of consensus on how to handle coups. Additionally, the involvement of external actors like France with its interests in the region adds another layer of complexity, making it difficult for ECOWAS to present a unified front on issues like the Niger coup. This emboldens those who defy the organisation and undermines its overall influence (Zambakari, 2023).

Research Questions

- i. To what extent do internal and external factors constrain ECOWAS's effectiveness in conflict prevention and peace-building in West Africa?
- ii. How effective is ECOWAS's response to the compounding issues of political instability in West Africa?

Objectives of the Study

- vii. To ascertain the extent to which internal and external factors constrain ECOWAS's effectiveness in conflict prevention and peace-building in West Africa.
- viii. To examine the effectiveness of ECOWAS's response to the compounding issues of political instability in West Africa.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Regional Integration

As a result of the need for security and self-preservation, people with common language and culture used to come together to form communities. Such is imperative for security, self-preservation and other issues makes communities to integrate, and nations emerge for achieving their goal and development (Thomas, 2010, p.47). The idea of regional integration of European Union inspired West African Heads of States and government to consider the idea and apply it to their region in order to solve their problems of security, political, economic and social issues. Regional integration in West Africa was motivated by the integration processes in Western Europe due to much

commitment of E.U towards integration (Ogbeidi, 2010). According to Ogbonna & Ogundiwin, (2013, p.221), the emergence of the ECOWAS in 1975 by West African leaders through the signing of its treaty is a great achievement and success in the region and entire Africa. The region is heterogeneous in terms of historical background, colonialism and other complexities. By formation of ECOWAS, West Africa will achieve economic, security and political integration as well as cooperation.

Politics

Politics has remained a dynamic phenomenon, with probably as many definitions as there are scholars in the field. However, there are some popular and authoritative definitions with common key concepts and some scholars. A look at this definition is instructive at this stage. David Easton sees politics as the 'authoritative allocation of values in a society; a view that links politics with the production and distribution of values or resources' (Easton, 1960). These values may either be political, economic, cultural, or social values which are vital to human existence and whose allocation can only be done within the political system.

Lasswell succinctly sees politics as 'who gets what, when and how?' This definition has been commended for its attempt to see politics even in social setting. The element of struggle is also implying in who gets what, when and how? Max Weber's definition links politics more directly with power than many others when he says that 'politics means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of

power either among states or among groups within a state (Weber1947).

According to Toluhi (1997; p.2); "differences in human roles and values, arising from different social, ethnic, economic, cultural, religious etc. goals and heights often precipitate political actions for redistribution of opportunities and facilitate development".

The attempt to reconcile these differences and prevent society from degenerating into anarchy, which is inimical to development and peaceful coexistence, underscores the need for politics as a forum for some authoritative reconciliations among contending interests and groups since no meaningful development could be achieved in atmosphere characterized with rancour. Thus, politics must be seen beyond mere conflict and power struggle to a forum of reconciliation and cooperation through which peaceful coexistence among diverse people could be achieved. Toluhi (1997) notes thus; politics should be seen as the process or forum through which decisions are reached within an entity in an attempt to solve common problems (ethnicity inclusive) and bring about development.

Political Stability

The concept of political stability is highly relevant within the remit of political science. The main reason is that it can serve to evaluate given political phenomena, while having at the same time a significant predictive power. Moreover, in empirical research on stability, it is possible to distinguish certain indices that can be used for heuristic purposes. Khan, Siddiqui, Bukhari, and Iqbal, (2020) sees political stability in a nation or region, or sub-

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region such as West Africa can be determined on the basis of important reports such as, say, Human Development Index, which is strictly related to human rights issues. Rule of law and democratization are other fields of research calling for the studies on stability (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). These examples mentioned above evince the relevance of the concept of political stability. This category should be recognized as a crucial one that is necessary in analysing political systems their structure and functions as well as their functioning in given environment.

A theoretical approach that is very helpful in clearing up the concept of stability is to be found in Sven Hansson and Gert Helgesson's theoretical approach. The authors distinguish three types of stability: a) constancy; b) robustness; c) resilience. As we can read in their article: "It turned out that all or nearly all of the references that we found to the concept of stability belong to three major categories, that we have chosen to call constancy, robustness, and resilience". By constancy is meant that some variable or aspect is not changed or is not changed much. By robustness is meant that some variable or aspect does not tend to change, or does not tend to change much, when exposed to certain disturbances. "By resilience is meant that if a variable or aspect changes due to certain disturbances, then it returns to the original state or to some state close to it" (Hansson & Helgesson, 2003, p. 220). This typology reveals the multidimensional character of stability and underlines the fact that the crucial category for grasping stability is a change. It is precisely the reaction towards the change that determines the

type of stability that could be used for the explanation of particular cases. Moreover, the constancy is presented as one of the several aspects of stability. Robustness and resilience are, on the other hand, the features of the object that is dynamic and responsive. Examples of such an object can be found in a political system. Its main principle of functioning consists in transforming and managing changes and not in avoiding those changes by all means.

In a bid to ensure political stability in the Africa's sub-region, ECOWAS and Nigeria are committed to the democratisation of all African nations, with a focus on the West African sub-region. However, over ten years of excessive military intervention in political and administrative affairs, most African countries have been forced into an ecliptic democratic trial of leadership and governance, in addition to other forms of political instability caused by internal conflicts and violence. Today, most of the world's military takeovers take place over the entire African continent. In recent years, military control has been in place in Sudan, Mali, Chad, Niger, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Gabon (Mohanasakthivel, 2023).

Empirical Review

Using a qualitative research approach, data were obtained through expert interviews and an extensive review of secondary sources, including reports from international organizations, policy briefs, and conflict databases. Ogwuche, Ahmed and Attah's (2025) findings indicated that economic deprivation, resource mismanagement, and weak governance structures are critical drivers of instability, exacerbating

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terrorism and organized crime. Additionally, the recent withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the G5 Sahel highlight internal fractures and shifting geopolitical alignments, further complicating regional security efforts. It recommended a comprehensive approach that combines military strategies with socioeconomic development initiatives, alongside stronger political will and regional cooperation through ECOWAS.

In another study on the resurgence of military coups in West Africa: effects on efforts at establishing resilient democratic order. The study is purely qualitative in nature. Drawing on analytical research method, the study explores two key theoretical perspectives, praetorian and conflict theories, to explain the resurgence of military coups in West Africa. By examining recent cases of military coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger, Shehu, Bamidele and Yusuf (2024) study highlighted the political instability, security challenges, and dissatisfaction with governance that have fueled these coups. The analysis revealed a complex interplay of factors such as weak political institutions, military independence, conflict situations, corruption, bad governance, and economic problems as underlying causes of recurring military coups in West Africa. The study recommended among others that efforts should be made by West African countries to address insecurity plaguing the region. Increased regional cooperation in the area of security should be encouraged, in addition to strengthening the security architectures of various West African countries to improve their abilities to

respond to security threats from within and outside.

With the adoption of qualitative research method, depending mainly on secondary sources, Adisa's (2025), study titled "the cold war resurgence: a discourse on the rivalry between ECOWAS and AES in West. Africa". However, this research argued on the possible continuation of the old Cold War in the present contemporary era using the recent unfolding rivalry within the West African region as a case study. Recently, the Sahel region in West Africa has been confronted with political instability and security challenges, marked by the rise of insurgent movements, military coups and deteriorating state governance. The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) was created in September 2023 by the three military juntas of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as a counterweight to ECOWAS and the postcolonial influence of France and other Western allies.

Uvere (2025), did a study on the role of external actors in fueling separatist conflicts in parts of West Africa and ECOWAS response. Employing a qualitative research methodology and secondary data, the study draws on case studies, policy reviews, and conflict analysis. It is anchored in dependency theory and regional security theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how external influences intertwine with local dynamics. Findings revealed that external actors often exploit separatist grievances for geopolitical advantage, resource extraction, or destabilization strategies, exacerbating conflicts and undermining ECOWAS's integration efforts. ECOWAS's interventions, though notable, frequently lack the

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coordination and capacity to address the multifaceted nature of external involvement. The research recommended robust policies aimed at curbing illicit external influences and fostering inclusive governance within member states to address the root causes of separatist movements. By doing so, ECOWAS can safeguard regional stability and advance its vision of unity and development.

In a study titled effectiveness of ECOWAS in countering coups in West Africa: A Case Study of Niger Republic, Abdulrahman, Taiwo and Nazifi (2025) employed secondary data sources and utilised liberalist theoretical framework. The study finds that ECOWAS' sanctions on Niger Republic established a regional precedent, influencing actions by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and sending a message of deterrence. However, inconsistencies in applying sanctions hampered its effectiveness in restoring President Bazoum to power. Additionally, ECOWAS faced challenges in securing unanimous support for military intervention. These weaknesses significantly hampered ECOWAS' ability to achieve its goals in Niger Republic. To strengthen its response to coups, the study recommended that ECOWAS must ensure uniform and robust enforcement of sanctions and other measures against all coup perpetrators in the region. By implementing these multi-pronged approaches, ECOWAS can become a more effective force for lasting stability and democracy in West Africa. This reviewed study focused on the effectiveness in countering coups in West Africa without exploring other areas and role ECOWAS played in

ensuring political stability in the sub-region. This constitute the gap that need to be filled by the current study.

In evaluating the effectiveness of the ECOWAS protocol on democracy and good governance in preventing the resurgence of military coups in West Africa, Williams & Sunjo's (2024) study is primarily qualitative. For this research, the researcher used the qualitative research method by reviewing books, articles, and online interviews. Considering the reasons, which include diminishing optimism, growing levels of insecurity, falling economies, and persistently low performance in human development, the research study concludes with these findings. It is therefore recommended that the Economic Community of West African States and other relevant stakeholders that are interested in reducing military coups should invest more in finance. Rather than trying to employ coercive tactics to end the ongoing military coups in West Africa. In the same vein, they should also focus on resolving the root causes of conflicts and investing in local communities, rather than sacrificing them for hidden geo-strategic interests or agendas.

While investigating potency of ECOWAS mission strategy in resolving electoral conflict in West Africa: A case of Côte d'Ivoire, an in depth interview research design was adopted, that is, both primary (structured interviews) and secondary (contextual review) techniques of data collection were used. Through a qualitative approach, a total number of 15 key-informants were interviewed using the cluster sampling method. The results showed that ECOWAS adopted the mechanisms of mediation, peace enforcement,

peacekeeping, diplomacy, negotiation, election observation and litigation to bring about peace in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010. Furthermore, Daniel & Enweremadu (2020), observed that internal identity based conflict, lack of structural and strategic election management strategy, border insecurity, not being proactive, lack of stable military force and politics among its member states were discovered as factors militating ECOWAS in its efforts to bring about peace in the sub region, while proper funding, emphasis on education sector, legislature actions, use of sanctions and regional cooperation were recommended. The study concluded that lack of financial and technical resources has limited the intervention of ECOWAS in conflict resolutions to only political and diplomatic approaches.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Consolidation Theory

Theory of democratic consolidation was developed by Juan Linz in 1978, in his book "The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Re-equilibration. Other scholars that wrote about the theory of democratic consolidation are Adams Przeworski and Samuel Huntington. The theory argued that there are four factors that contribute to the consolidation of democracy, namely, strong economy, strong civil society, rule of law, and shared commitment to democratic values. It further contends that democracy is not just about creating institutions and practices that allow democracy to thrive and that it takes time for democracy to consolidate, with period of instability and crisis.

The theory of democratic consolidation examines how well democracies are able to survive and thrive. What factors make democracy survive or fail. It also helps to look at how coup d'etat in West Africa has affected the democratic processes in various countries. It will also enable us to find out policies that could be implemented to help ensure that democracy remains strong that democratic consolidation requires a strong commitment to rule of law. Which means that citizens must believe that their government is accountable to the law and that no one is above the law?

However, the theory of democratic consolidation has been criticised on the following grounds; that it focuses too much on institutions and not on the role of individuals in shaping a democracy. It is also criticised that it failed to take into account the role of culture and tradition in shaping a country's political system. Another criticism levelled against the theory of democratic consolidation is that it is too simplistic and does not take into account the complexities of real world politics and lastly, that it is too idealistic not considering the challenges of implementing democracy in real life situation.

In application to this study, the theory of democratic consolidation becomes relevant because it helps to analyse and understand how resurgence of coup d'etat in West Africa will impact the democratic governance and its dividends in the region. This so due to that fact is helps to comprehend and examine how well democracies are able to survive and thrive under certain conditions or factors. That is what factors make democracy survive or fail.

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For instance, the 2020 military coup in Mali was partly traced to the crisis resulting from frustration over flawed legislative elections in 2020 when results for 31 legislative seats were overturned in favour of President Keïta, as well the problem of insecurity through increasing violent extremism and accusations of corruption which later led to popular protests against President Keïta and are believed to be the main triggers for the coup in the country. It also helps to look at how coup d'etat in West Africa has affected the democratic processes in various countries. It is equally important to note that the theory of democratic consolidation is relevant to this dissertation because it will also enable us to find out policies that could be implemented to help ensure that democracy remains strong (James, 2020).

Methodology

The study adopted mixed-method research design. The targeted population of the study is 24,730 which comprises of individuals drawn from Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abuja, Central Bank of Nigeria, Abuja Headquarters, Federal Ministry of Finance, Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), Federal Ministry of Works, Niger Embassy, Chadian Embassy and the National Assembly who are actively involved in the activities of ECOWAS. These groups were carefully chosen because they are positioned at the intersection of democratic consolidation and political stability, community engagement, and political participation offering crucial perspectives relevant to the study's

objectives. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) statistical formula was employed to reduce the population of the study to a manageable standard of 377.

The study employed both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The instruments that were used in collecting data for this study are questionnaires and secondary sources. Stratified and Random Sampling Techniques were used in selecting the respondents among different categories for the administration of questionnaire. This study made use of charts as a platform to present the research data and also analyze the data collected from the field on the subject matter using simple percentage and graphs as the case may be for the descriptive analysis. The version that was used for analyzing data for the study is SPSS 25. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative information.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

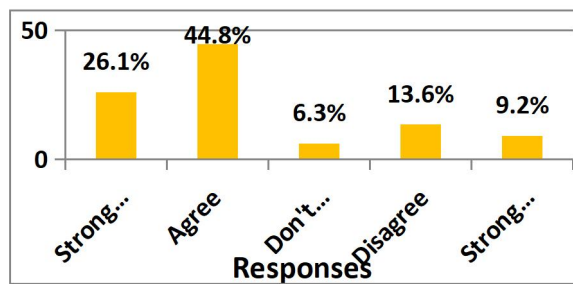
A total of 377 copies of questionnaire were distributed while 337 copies were retrieved. Therefore, the presentation and analysis was done based on the 337 retrieved copies of questionnaire. The pattern of presentation was based on the objectives of the study using frequency table (frequency, count and percentage) as well as charts. The discussion of findings then followed. This was supported with information from extant literature.

Internal and External Factors Constraining ECOWAS's Effectiveness in Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building in West Africa

The first research question posed by the study was to evaluate the internal and

external factors that constrain ECOWAS's effectiveness in conflict prevention and peace-building in West Africa. In addressing the research question, the survey asked respondents appropriate questions and data generated are presented at Figures 1 to 4.

Figure 1: Respondents View on Assessing Whether or Not West Africa's Internal Political Instability Hinders ECOWAS Ability to Effectively Lead and Coordinate Regional Development Initiatives Within the region.

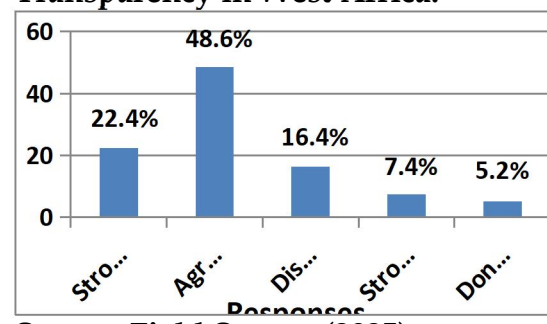


Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 1 depicts that a cumulative majority of respondents totaling 70.9 per cent agreed that West Africa's internal political instability hinders ECOWAS ability to effectively lead and coordinate regional development initiatives within the region. This can be seen in ECOWAS led by Nigeria's president failure to sustain and reinstate democracy in Niger Republic when the military overthrew a democratically elected president in 2023. Only, 13.6 per cent of respondents disagreed and 9.2 per cent strongly disagreed respectively with the posed question. It could be inferred from the analysis that Nigeria a member of ECOWAS and a key actor is battling with numerous challenges such as corruption, ethno-religious conflict, electoral violence, Boko haram, banditry,

Independent People of Biafra, Niger Delta Avengers, which has resulted in an unending political instability that has contributed in posing hindrance in ECOWAS ability to effectively lead and coordinate regional development initiatives within West Africa.

Figure 2: Respondents Opinion on Ascertaining Whether or Not Weak Governance and Corruption within ECOWAS Member States Undermine its Credibility and Effectiveness in Promoting Good Governance and Transparency in West Africa.

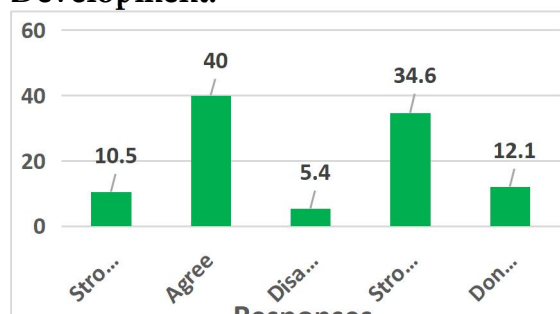


Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 2 above depicts as affirmed by a cumulative majority of respondents making up 71.0 per cent that weak governance and corruption within ECOWAS member states undermine its credibility and effectiveness in promoting good governance and transparency within ECOWAS, while 23.8 per cent of respondents cumulatively disagreed to the posed question. The result of the analysis shows that corruption and bad governance in Nigeria has to a large extent undermine its credibility and effectiveness in promoting good governance and transparency within ECOWAS.

Figure 3: Respondents Assessment on Whether Resistance from other ECOWAS Member States to ECOWAS Leadership Due to Perceived Dominance or Hegemony Prevents

Collaborative Efforts for Sustainable Development.

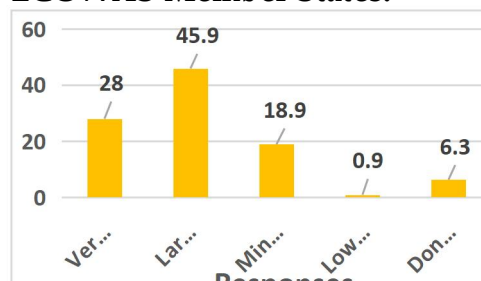


Source: Field Survey (2025).

The analysis on Figure 3 shows that 50.5 per cent of respondents cumulatively agreed that resistance from other ECOWAS member states to ECOWAS leadership due to perceived dominance or hegemony prevents collaborative efforts for sustainable development. In addition, 40 per cent of respondents cumulatively disagreed to the posed question. It could be deduced from the analysis that there is no clearly stated public opposition to Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS by any West African state which may prevents collaborative efforts for sustainable development. However, there are numerous factors such as political rivalries between Nigeria and nations like the Cameroon republic, tension related to interventions as a result of military incursions in place like Gambia, Mali and Guinea and recently Niger republic and economic disparities between Nigeria and other small West African states which will likely prevents collaborative efforts for sustainable development due to the fear of domination and hegemony that may emanate from Nigeria being the largest financier of ECOWAS.

Figure 4: Respondents View on Assessing Whether or Not External Factors, Such as Global Economic

Shocks and Geopolitical Instability, Significantly Constrain ECOWAS Ability to Effectively Support Sustainable Development within ECOWAS Member States.



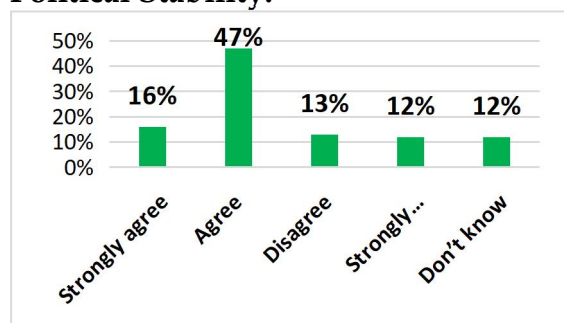
Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 4 depicts that a high number of respondents ranking 28.0 per cent and 45.9 per cent opined that external factors, such as global economic shocks and geopolitical instability, significantly constrain ECOWAS ability to effectively support sustainable development within ECOWAS member states to a 'considerable extent' and 'large extent', respectively. Additionally, 18.9 per cent of respondents indicated that the external factors, such as global economic shocks and geopolitical instability has to a minimal extent significantly constrain Nigeria's ability to effectively support sustainable development within ECOWAS. It could be inferred from the analysis that indeed global economic shocks such as the global economic meltdown witnessed in 2009 and the one caused by Covid19 in 2020 and geopolitical instability like terrorism, military incursion in politics, failed states among others have significantly constrain ECOWAS ability to effectively support sustainable development within ECOWAS member states and beyond.

Effectiveness of ECOWAS's Response to the Compounding Issues of Political Instability in West Africa.

The second research question analyzed the effectiveness of ECOWAS response to the compounding issues of political instability in West Africa. To address this research question, the study asked respondents appropriate questions and data generated are presented at Figure 5 to 8.

Figure 5: Respondents View Assessing Whether Strengthening Regional Security through ECOWAS Collaborations Will Aid in Improving West Africa's Internal Security and Political Stability.

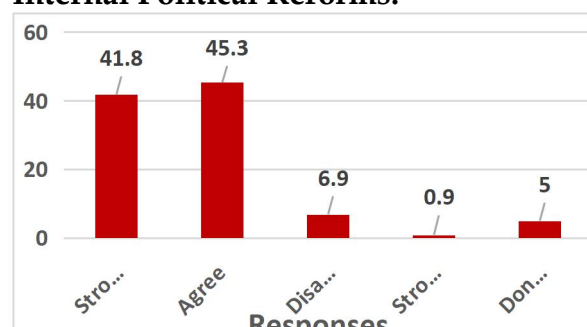


Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 5 indicates a significant perception that the strengthening of regional security through ECOWAS collaborations will aid in improving West Africa's internal security and political stability, as 63 per cent of respondents express agreement. However, the presence of 25 per cent of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the posed question. This discrepancy highlights a need for reforms and strengthening of regional security whose absence has contributed in the deterioration of internal security and political stability in Nigeria. This can be seen in the proliferation of Small Arms, Light Weapons (SALWs) and the emergence of Boko Haram, bandits and Lakurawa terrorists organizations

which is inextricably linked to the political instability in Libya and Somalia which trickled down to West African states of Mali, Chad, Niger and Cameroon with devastating effect on Nigeria thereby causing a serious internal security and political instability. Therefore, the strengthening of regional security through ECOWAS collaborations will aid in improving Nigeria's internal security and political stability.

Figure 6: Respondents View on Determining the Extent to Which Promoting Democratic Governance and Good Governance Practices within ECOWAS Will Serve as a Model and Exert Positive Pressure on ECOWAS Internal Political Reforms.

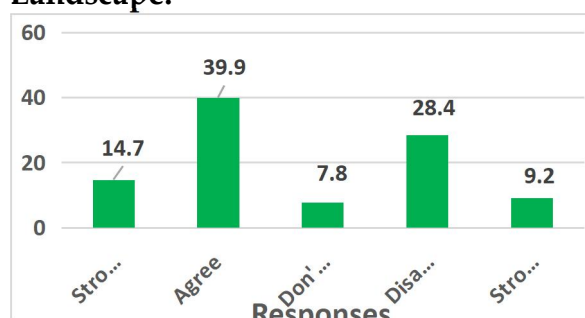


Source: Field Survey (2025).

The analysis on Figure 6 depicts that an overwhelming majority of respondents cumulatively ranking 87.1 per cent were of the view that promoting democratic governance and good governance practices within ECOWAS will serve as a model and exert positive pressure on ECOWAS internal political reforms. On the other hand, a small fraction of the respondents ranking 7.8 per cent disagreed with the posed question. Hence, the need for the Nigerian governments to sustain existing mechanisms on promoting democratic governance and good governance

practices within ECOWAS member states and use such effort as a model to strengthen Nigeria's internal political reforms.

Figure 7: Respondents View on Ascertaining Whether or Not Facilitating Regional Economic Integration through ECOWAS Will Lead to Improved Economic Conditions in West Africa, Thus Positively Impacting its Political Landscape.

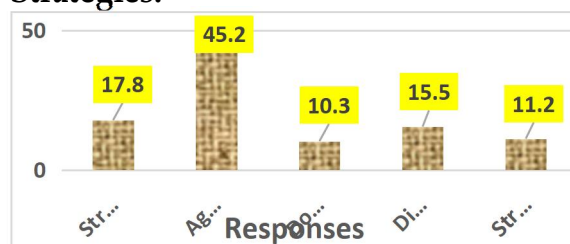


Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 7 shows that a high number of respondents cumulatively representing 54.6 per cent indicated facilitating regional economic integration through ECOWAS will lead to improved economic conditions in West Africa, thus positively impacting its political landscape. From another perspective, 39.6 per cent of respondents were of the view that facilitating regional economic integration through ECOWAS will not in any way lead to improved economic conditions in West Africa, nor positively impacting its political landscape. It could be inferred from the analysis that indeed facilitating regional economic integration through ECOWAS will significantly lead to improved economic conditions in West Africa thereby positively impacting its political landscape and enhancing the overall

political landscape of the West African region.

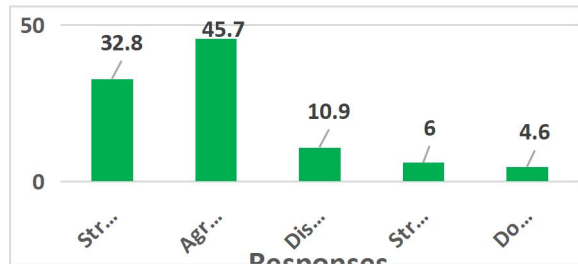
Figure 8: Respondents View on Whether or Not Ascertaining whether or Not Active Participation in ECOWAS's Conflict Resolution Mechanisms will Provide West African States with Valuable Experience and Expertise Transferable to its Own Domestic Conflict Management Strategies.



Source: Field Survey (2025).

Figure 8 depicts that a high number of respondents cumulatively ranking 63.0 per cent hold the view that active participation in ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms will provide Nigeria with valuable experience and expertise transferable to its own domestic conflict management strategies. In addition, a cumulative 26.7 per cent of respondents disagreed to the posed question. It is evident from the analysis that indeed Nigeria has learnt a lot from active participation in ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms and peace keeping operation under the auspices of ECOMOG been the security organ of ECOWAS. This has to a greater extent provided Nigeria and its security forces with valuable insights, experience and expertise that have been transferred and efficiently implemented in managing Nigeria's domestic conflict challenges such as Boko Haram, banditry, IPOB and MASSOB among others.

Figure 9: Respondents View on Determining whether or Not Leveraging ECOWAS Platforms to Foster Dialogue and Consensus-Building on Regional Issues will Strengthen West Africa's Diplomatic Skills and Enhance Member States' Ability to Manage Internal Political Divisions.



Source: Field Survey (2025).

As highlighted in Figure 9, an overwhelming majority of respondents cumulatively ranking 78.5 per cent respondents were of the view that leveraging ECOWAS platforms to foster dialogue and consensus-building on regional issues will strengthen West African governments' diplomatic skills and enhance its ability to manage internal political divisions. On the other hand, 16.9 per cent of the respondents cumulatively disagreed with the posed question. It could be surmised from the analysis that if West Africa leverages on ECOWAS platforms to foster dialogue and consensus-building on regional issues, it will in return strengthen member state's diplomatic skills and enhance its ability to manage internal political divisions.

Discussion of Findings

Internal and External Factors Constraining ECOWAS's Effectiveness in Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building in West Africa

No doubt, ECOWAS faces numerous challenges in effectively leveraging its position within West Africa to drive sustainable development in the region. Among the challenges faced by ECOWAS activities, the study findings revealed that Nigeria's internal political instability hinders its ability to effectively lead and coordinate regional development initiatives within ECOWAS. In buttressing the findings of the study, Fadakinte (2014) argues that Nigeria state lacks the capacity to provide effective management of economy and resources, cannot conduct accurate census, free and fair election, provide for its citizen's welfare in terms of adequate infrastructure and security. In further corroborating the findings of the study, Bakare (2019), submitted that Nigeria might be caught again in withdrawing its troops from Guinea-Bissau, a possibility that was connected to the country's internal security challenges and economic crisis. According to the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria has spent \$75,000,000 in Guinea Bissau since 2011. It also contributed US\$63,000,000 to the ECOWAS fund for the Defence and Security Sector reform in 2011 and US\$10,000,000 to enable the Interim Government to function effectively in 2012 (The Scoop, 2017). Nigerian military intervention in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) was able to return the country to a democratic government under José Mario Vaz in May 2014 for a five-year term (ECOWAS, 2017).

The findings further indicated that weak governance and corruption within West African states undermine ECOWAS credibility and effectiveness in promoting good governance and transparency among member states. In

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corroborating the above findings, Ogbaji and Lorhen (2023), observed that Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges, ranging from huge governance problems which affects its national image such as political incompetence, corruption, disregard for the rule of law, policy inconsistency, insecurity and poor conducive environment for doing business. These challenges are in tandem with the findings of Yusuf and Abdullahi (2020) who conducted a study on the role of Nigeria in the ECOWAS and its support towards the common proposed currency eco that loyalty to colonialism and the francophone country's long-existing monetary cooperation towards France was the strong blockade of the proposal of the single currency as well as ECOWAS member nations were unable to reach-up to the set of convergence, which resulted in the shift and delays on the establishment of the common currency date. This finding also agrees with the views of Udeh (2011); Yusuf, Ahmad and Wali (2018) on the influence of France over francophone member states.

The study highlighted that external factors, such as global economic shocks and geopolitical instability, significantly constrain ECOWAS ability to effectively support sustainable development among member states. In line with the forgoing findings, Ikechi, Chinedum, and Nwokoro (2022), observed that trade relations amongst the ECOWAS member nations aren't blossoming as it should. A review of 2019 trade data indicates that the average total imports from the ECOWAS trading bloc stood at 20.10%. Again, the average total exports from within the trading bloc stood at 7.51%.

These figures are considered not good enough. They are far from being pleasant and obviously require an intense assessment of the trade relationships amongst the ECOWAS member countries. It might be recalled that out of the 15 member nations, it was only the trading positions of nine member states that we could lay our hands on. The trading positions of the other 6 member nations were not available for assessment. These states include Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali and Niger. Perhaps, this is a pointer to the fact that; some of the ECOWAS member nations are yet to pay heed to the idea of trade liberalization and trade enthronelement within the sub region.

The findings revealed that promoting democratic governance and good governance practices within ECOWAS will serve as a model and exert positive pressure on member state's internal political reforms. In buttressing the above findings, it is worthy of note that there exist an ECOWAS protocol tailored towards such direction with the title Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. The above protocol was signed on the December 21, 2001 in Dakar, Senegal. Ibrahim, Obiageli and Bibi (2017) stated that the rationale behind its signing was that if change of governments in member countries are based on constitutional means rather than violence people of the region will enjoy the dividends of integration as wars will be reduced.

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The recent ECOWAS' intervention in the restoration of democracy in Gambia has been a success story. This is a claim which is associated with the long-accumulated wealth of experience of the regional bloc, which proved valuable in successfully mediating The Gambia's post-election impasse (Khadiagala, 2018). The Gambia's post-election crisis presented Nigeria an ample opportunity to convince the international community of its regional influence to mediate in political and security issues after eighteen years of stable internal. The disputed December 2016 presidential elections in The Gambia was the first case where Nigerian-led ECOWAS intervention successfully managed to "restore democracy" in the country by using the threat of force but without any use of direct physical violence (Hartmann, 2017). Nigeria's previous peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau had constantly involved both the use of threat of force and direct physical violence; however, the restoration of democracy in the country underscores an external intervention anchored on a collective mandate of the ECOWAS and the principle of multilateralism which embraced the collective participation of other regional blocs beyond West Africa. These regional blocs comprise the UN and AU.

The study established that active participation in ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms will provide member states with valuable experience and expertise transferable to its own domestic conflict management strategies. In corroborating the forgoing findings, Akolga (2024), observed that during the Liberian war, the lack of security

mechanisms at the time was both an 'opportunity' for Nigeria to manifest hegemonic leadership through ECOWAS, but more importantly, the sub-region stood to benefit more. In other words, a successful Nigerian leadership was intended to raise Nigeria's leadership credentials both within the sub-region and beyond, but it was also going to simultaneously bring about stability in Liberia and the sub-region. Critically, that had the potential to prevent subsequent conflicts in the sub region because of the fear of a united and effective West African reaction or deterrence by the unity of purpose. It also had the potential to bring an end to external interference in West African security governance in the long run.

Conclusion

This study has provided an in-depth examination of the roles and impacts of ECOWAS in the political stability of West Africa. Focusing on the activities of ECOWAS and leadership role exhibited as well as the huge financial contribution made in ensuring the sustenance of political stability in the region. The research explored the contributions of ECOWAS towards resolving the compounding challenges bedeviling member states and resistance faced by the organization in fulfilling its mandate in order to ensure sub-regional growth and development, social cohesion and economic stability. A critical evaluation of the findings underscores the need for strategic realignment of ECOWAS efforts to maximise her gains and developmental impacts in West Africa.

Consequently, the researcher opined that a combination of strategic planning, enhanced collaboration, and

resource optimisation is essential for ECOWAS to sustain and expand their contributions to member states for more nuanced socio-economic and political development in West Africa. There is therefore the need for ECOWAS as a regional organization to focus on integrating innovative approaches, such as digital platforms to be used in advocating for good governance, economic and socio-political development and capacity-building programmes, to address evolving challenges and capitalise on emerging opportunities in the West African sub-region.

Recommendations

- i. ECOWAS should establish a mandatory regional stabilization fund financed through enforceable member-state contributions and a fixed levy on intra-regional trade, with strict compliance monitoring and sanctions for defaulting states.
- ii. ECOWAS should operationalize a binding early warning-early action framework by strengthening its Early Warning Directorate, integrating civil society intelligence networks, and mandating automatic diplomatic and mediation deployment once predefined instability indicators are triggered.
- iii. ECOWAS should adopt a uniform enforcement protocol under its democratic governance instruments (including the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance) that ensures consistent application of sanctions, mediation timelines, and post-conflict reconstruction

benchmarks across all member states.

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