

# Role of Regional Organization in Preventing and Resolving Coup De'tat Crisis in West Africa, 2020-2025

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## ABSTRACT

The renewed wave of military coups in West Africa since 2020 represents a significant setback to democratic consolidation and regional stability. Despite established regional norms against unconstitutional changes of government, countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger have experienced repeated coups, which are detrimental to the region. This study explores the factors responsible for the resurgence of military coups in West Africa and examines the role of regional organizations in preventing and resolving coup d'état crises, with particular focus on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) between 2020 and 2025. Guided by neoliberal institutionalism, the study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing on in-depth interviews, policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature.

Findings indicate that the resurgence of military coups is largely driven by poor governance, corruption, weak democratic institutions, electoral manipulation, insecurity, and socio-economic deprivation, which undermine public trust in civilian governments. The study further finds that ECOWAS has employed sanctions, mediation, diplomatic engagement, and peace support mechanisms in response to coup crises. However, its effectiveness has been constrained by institutional limitations, inconsistent enforcement, popular support for military juntas, and geopolitical pressures. The study concludes that strengthening early warning mechanisms, consistent enforcement of democratic norms, and addressing governance deficits are essential for preventing future coups in the sub-region. It recommends that ECOWAS engage member-state leadership to address root causes through inclusive, transparent governance and enforce sanctions consistently against coup perpetrators.

**Keywords:** Coup prevention; Democratic consolidation; Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Governance deficits; Military coups; West Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

Resolving coup d'état crisis becomes an important act because of the magnitude of its threats around the world today. Military takeovers in regional politics are not entirely new events; since World War II, such occurrences, to a variable degree, have been reported in over two-thirds of countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. A coup d'état is typically characterized by a sudden, unconstitutional, and violent government toppling by a small group, usually military or police, who overthrow the existing leaders. Through coups d'état in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, the military has overstepped the boundaries of state security and interfered directly in political affairs (ICG, 2021).

Africa is one of the continents with the most successful coups, failed coups and attempted coups in the world. Among the 54 countries of the African continent, 45 nations have experienced at least one attempted coup d'état since 1950, resulting in millions of deaths. Military infiltration into governance, ethnic denial, poor governance, and ecological and environmental issues had and still contribute to rampant violence in Africa (Lekalake and Buchanan-Clarke, 2021). Despite the rapid growth of democracy in Africa, especially as witnessed in the 1990s and early 2000s, there is a current resurgence of military coup especially in West African sub-region. This wave of democracy and democratic consolidation in Africa is being disrupted recently by rampant emergence of military coups. It is not just democratic processes within the nation-states of the region but also democratic relations and institutions among and across nation-states in sub-region.

According to African Center for Strategic Studies (2021), the West Africa sub-region has witnessed numerous successful and attempted coups since 2020, following the coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Niger Republic. This is the most recurrent coups period in Africa within a single year since 1999 (Marshall, 2022).

The resurgence of coups in West Africa in the 21st century shows that the sub-region has not achieved any significant political development after more than half a century, apart from the ritual of holding regular elections to qualify for a nomenclature of democracy (Akinola et al. 2022). Between August 2020 and August 2023, six successful military coups were carried out after three failed attempts. The military used a rigged parliamentary election to support its coup d'état in Mali in August 2020. Between March and April 2021, successive military coups took place in the Republic of Niger and Chad, the latter leading to the death of former President Idris Deby. In May 2021, there was a counter-coup in Mali, followed by the coup in Guinea in September 2021. In October 2021, there was a counter-coup in Sudan, Chad's neighbouring country, against the 2019 coup that overthrew President Omar El Bashir. In January 2022, there was another coup in Burkina Faso, followed by the most recent coup in the Republic of Niger on 26 July 2023 (Nsaibia, 2023).

In a seemingly unstoppable wave of resurgence of military rule in Africa, another coup was announced in Gabon on 30 August 2023, where President Ali Bongo was overthrown a few hours after the result of the country's presidential election was announced (Daily Trust Newspaper, 30th August, 2023). The removal of Ali Bongo in Gabon is another challenge to democratisation in Africa because the military claimed that the election had been massively rigged, amounting to a civilian coup d'état that is often ignored by democracy advocates.

Presenting and resolving can save countries billions in potential losses. For every money spent in prevention, it's estimated that ten times such is saved in potential conflict-related cost. Absence of conflict boost economic growth, attract more foreign investment and trade, fostering economic development. It will also preserve human capital, allowing countries to retain skill workers and invest in education and health care.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite concerted efforts by regional organization such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to uphold democratic norms and constitutional order, these interventions have often been met with limited success. The persistent occurrence of coups, alongside the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes, calls into question the effectiveness of strategies employed by these organizations. This development is problematic because military coups d'état have the potency of contagion effect. They can spread wide and fast too in the circumstance of the level of facilitation by different situations. The recent resurgence of coup particularly in West Africa is very worrisome. According to De Oliveira and Verhoeven (2023), Africa has experienced more military takeovers and political interventions throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In early 1960s immediately after most of the countries in the continent gained its independence, most African coups in history started; most African countries were plunged into military coup. So far, West Africa has witnessed about 90 successful and unsuccessful coups. Therefore, it can be said that Africa is a continent that experiences coups frequently, with over 40 governments having either successfully or unsuccessfully staged coups (Ani, 2021).

In West Africa within this period, countries like Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria etc. witnessed recurrent military coup. Recent resurgence of military coup seems to have thwarted democratic consolidation particularly in West African sub-region. The structure of the Economic Community has changed several times over the years in an attempt to achieve security and economy integration of the sub-region. In June 2019, ECOWAS has seven active institutions: the Authority of Heads of State and Government (which is the leading body), the ECOWAS Commission (the administrative instrument), the Community Parliament, the Community Court of Justice, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), the West African Health Organisation (WAHO), and the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in West Africa (GIABA) (Boddy-Evans, 2019).

With the phenomenon becoming a political behaviour as people openly called for them in times of economic hardships, coups have become a menace than a panacea to human security in the sub-region. Women and

children continue to suffer violations and the constant abuse of their rights. Killings have become rampant and a part of military juntas putting lives in the sub-region in fear and jeopardy. With people fleeing military juntas out of fear of being persecuted or in search of political freedom, the issue of refugees has become a constant problem for all states in the region. The paper has clearly captured that the region's human security has constantly been under threat due to military coups d'états even in the twenty-first century.

### Research Questions

In effort towards addressing the research problem of this study, the following questions are considered fundamental:

- i. What are the factors responsible for resurgence of military coup in West Africa?
- ii. What is the role of ECOWAS in preventing and resolving coup de'tat crisis in West Africa?

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the role of regional organization in preventing and resolving coup de'tat crisis in West Africa with focus on ECOWAS (2020 – 2025). The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To explore the factors responsible for resurgence of military coup in West Africa.
- ii. To examine the role of ECOWAS in preventing and resolving coup de'tat crisis in West Africa.

### Conceptual Framework

#### Concept of Coup d'état

The term “coup d'état” is a French word which means a sudden blow or strike. According to Fatola (2022), it was first used to describe Napoleon's seizure of power in France on November 9, 1799. Hence, coup d'état could be defined as a sudden, illegal, and mostly violent change of government, by a faction of the armed forces. The definition is relevant to this study as it involves the unconstitutional takeover of government's power by the military or other state security actors, either against a civilian-led government or the government by the military itself.

Ani (2021) defined coup as a political act directed at the authority by seizure of power through the direct use of, or the threat of the use of violent force. As a show of force, the coup plotters also occupy strategic government position. The definition is significant in that Coup d'état is essentially the forceful removal of a political leader or government regime by the military without adherence to the constitution or established rules of governance. From the foregoing, the key fact about military coup is that it is an abrupt overthrow of a government against popular will. This means that military coup is always carried out forcefully and unexpectedly without prior notice to the existing government; it is unlawful as it does not respect the constitution or established law. Before a coup is carried out, military forces are heavily involved. While an unsuccessful coup attempt is considered a rebellion with heavy consequences on the coup plotters, successful coup results in a sudden and significant change in the policies of the previous regime and the executive leadership. This is always marked by messianic messages from the coup plotters discrediting the activities of the incumbent and promising rosy future for the masses.

### Conflict Management

In Mundy's book titled “Imaginative geographies of Algerian violence: Conflict science, conflict management, antipolitics” he notes that by the end of the cold war the concept of conflict management had become “free of the political and ideational constraints” thereby embracing a different understanding of a political frameworks of management which were “based on apolitical frameworks of understanding” with “today's most prevalent forms of international conflict management arising out of depoliticized understandings of late warfare” (Mundy, 2015: 7-9). Mundy (2015) opines that the term conflict management is mostly linked to the business

world and finance and that the term conflict resolution is often used with regard to issues concerning warfare. He argues that the notion of conflict resolution is misleading and illusionary based on the fact that conflicts are never truly resolved but instead transformed. In this vein he argues that conflicts cannot be resolved but “they can only be managed” (Mundy, 2015: 18).

Mundy writes that contemporary conflict management and science have never adopted the maximalist or positive peace notions but instead operate “within the global structures of thought and power that make seemingly “minimalist” advances possible, yet actual conflict resolution impossible” (Mundy, 2015: 18). He also argues that even though there has not been any intentional and organised attempts to create a peaceful world, there is limited war and warfare these days yet there is not even a single conflict scientist who can explain this phenomenon hence a thing he claims reveals the degree to which we can understand the world of war and peace today in terms of conflict management (Mundy, 2015: 18).

Due to the devastating effects of conflict on humanity, many have advocated for a quick resolution where it has occurred and prevented where it is brewing. This now brings us to the concept of Conflict management, which according to Wani, (2021:105) is an “Umbrella term for a whole range of methods and approaches for dealing with conflict: from negotiation to diplomacy from mediation to arbitration, from facilitation to adjudication, from conciliation to conflict prevention, from conflict management to conflict transformation, from restorative justice to peacekeeping”.

## **Empirical Review**

### **Factors Responsible for Resurgence of Military Coup**

Adegboye, Zamani, Meyeyin-Bala, Amakiri, Haruna and Adama (2023) employed State Fragility Theory to assess the impact of ECOWAS Early Warning Response Networks (ECOWARN) and ECOWAS Stand by Force (ESF) in resolving challenges in West Africa. This study adopts a qualitative research design; by reviewing publicly available archive documents on, literature concerning ECOWAS dispute resolution and intervention activities, Mediation, and peacekeeping operations. The study concludes that ill governance from democratic rules, tenure extensions, and monarchical presidency system by African leaders are triggers to coups and counter coups on the sub-region and continent. Findings from this study show that the establishment of ECOWAS Stand by Force positively influences her role in resolving conflicts in West Africa. The study also submitted that there exists a weak link between ECOWAS Early Warning Response Networks and conflict resolution in the region. The study therefore recommends that ECOWAS should explore all means to maintain her Standby Force and deepen professionalisation that eschews military coups. The study also recommends that the ECOWAS’s ECOWARN should go beyond data analysis on crisis build-ups to envoy and mediation experts’ visits and likewise bloc’s pressure on seated government to focus on governance and human security.

Mu’azu, Adegboye, Unachukwu, Emmanuel, Pepple and Onibiyo (2023) investigated the influencing roles of social media and emerging multi polar world order on ECOWAS military intervention in Niger Republic. The study engaged qualitative research design and the findings from the study revealed that the Nigeria government lost swift military interventions in the people’s courts to the influence of social media restraints, which painted the intervention as war and a needless war against her Northern region which share ethnical, families and economic ties with Niger. The study did not interrogate the factors responsible for resurgence of military coup in West Africa which this study does

Akinola and Makombe (2024) historicized military coups, examined their root and immediate causes and explores whether military coups constitute a democratic reversal in Africa. The study adopted a qualitative research method through unstructured interviews conducted between April and July 2022. Data were collected from face-to-face interactions in Pretoria in South Africa and Lagos in Nigeria, while virtual interviews were conducted with participants in the United States and Conakry in Guinea. Despite the shortcomings of civilian administrations and the turbulent attempt at democratisation, democracy still has a place in Africa. Majority rule has presented Africa with the opportunity to institutionalise strong political institutions and build the material and human resources that are required to lead the masses out of their economic misery and insecurity. Military coups have the tendency to erode the gains of democracy, not only in the Sahel region but in other

parts of Africa, due to their spillover effects. Indeed, the resurgence of military coups reflects poor democratic performance, a lack of effective governance, acute greed and corruption among political elites and the underdevelopment of mineral resources and human capacities.

### **Role of ECOWAS in Preventing and Resolving Coup De'tat Crisis**

Ani and Amusan (2016) empirically examined peace and conflict management in West Africa by the Economic Community of West African States primarily formed to promote multidimensional cooperation that will bring peace and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study was a qualitative study with reliance on related secondary source of data. Findings from the study revealed how organs of the ECOWAS has successfully managed a number of conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau and Cote d' Ivoire, while highlighting the policies and programs adopted to manage conflict and promote sustainable development. Study submitted that a multi-track approach in the war against terrorism, revolution, multi-dimensional conflicts and political crisis that have bedeviled the West African region should be considered. Study was done with general focus on all organs while this study specifically focused on the wise men council and peacekeeping operation and referent to the Gambia operation which the study did not capture hence the need to fill the gap in literature.

Bosetti et al. (2016) investigated the nexus between organized crime the continual difficulty in conflict prevention and peacemaking activities by inculcating sensitivity to good practices. The study submitted that peacemakers, peacekeepers, and peacebuilders operate in highly complex and fluid strategic environments, where groups with clear criminal agendas have a major impact on conflict dynamics, peace processes, and postwar transitions. The study submitted that an increasing international recognition of the close connections between organized crime and conflict should be taken serious by integrating awareness of organized crime into conflict prevention strategies, conflict analysis, mission assessment, and planning. This is particular as it has been noticed that organised criminals desired political powers and political gladiators are also into organised crimes thus a continual loop that made violence to remain unabated. This study underscore the relevance of Early warning Early Response mechanism on how organised crimes and violence keeps violence against states in a continual loop

Maru (2016) interrogated the African Union's Continental Early Warning System and the nexus response using organizational culture of response, political will and depoliticisation of warning indicators The study adopted thematic analysis of semi-structured interview with 30 experts and decision-makers while referring to pertinent secondary data, with process tracing to assess the political willingness of response to conflict in Burundi. Findings submitted that that decision-makers were reluctant to discuss early warning signals of powerful African countries, struggled to put continental welfare over national interests, and lacked authority to impose decisions on member states. Study also showed that conflict early warning experts, hierarchical organizational structure, and the absence of a formal structure to bring early warning into the decision-making process limited the effective flow of early warning information to the decision-makers. On depoliticization, study revealed that the early warning indicators were developed in a technical manner, which limits subjectivity or bias. Effective conflict early response is guaranteed when decision-makers prioritize early response above political interest. Study was done on African Union while this study considers ECOWAS.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The Theory of Neoliberal Institutionalism**

The theory of neoliberal institutionalism is premised on the core “liberal IR theory assumptions about the possibility of cumulative progress in human affairs” (Folker, 2016: 89). The primary area of interest of neoliberal institutionalism is establishing how cooperation among nation states and other actors in the international system can be achieved (Folker, 2016). Furthermore, Folker stresses that neoliberal institutionalism focuses on the role international institutions play in obtaining international collective outcome (Folker, 2016). Among the proponents of neoliberal institutionalism were Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye who highlight the importance of international institutions in promoting and maintaining world peace. Keohane and Nye argue that complex interdependence necessitates the creation of institutions to manage

interdependence among states. The concept emerged as the study of international organizations, regional integration and international regimes became widely spread. Neo-liberal institutionalists primarily concerned with global governance to manage globalization. They expounded that institutions create the capability for states to cooperate for mutual benefits, reduce transaction costs as well as making and enforcing agreements.

More expansively, Folker writes that neoliberal institutionalism subscribes to the notion that states are the main actors in the international system. She stresses that the international system is dominated by states which are rational, unitary and utility maximising actors which make “decisions based on a set of self-interested priorities and according to a strategic cost to benefit analysis of possible choices, reactions and outcomes” (Folker, 2016: 89). In other words, states cooperate in order to achieve shared self-interests for instance peace and economic prosperity.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research method for data analysis, combining several qualitative research methods and approaches. The study combined content analyses of ECOWAS agreements norms and mechanisms from relevant institutional records and written texts with primary data that was collected in the field through interview with key informants or participants.

The approach that was adopted enabled the attainment of higher levels of credibility and trustworthiness about the result and the phenomenon and events under study.

Summarily, rigorous content analysis of documents for information related to the topic of study, such as research papers, government official documents/ agreements, Newspapers and publications, textbooks were applied effectively to achieve validity and reliability of research.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The interviews obtained in the secondary data on the role of regional organization in preventing and resolving coup de'tat crisis in West Africa with focus on ECOWAS (2020 – 2025) gotten from staff and officials of Directorate of Early Warning, Regional Security Division and SSR division of ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja, Embassies of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger ECOWAS Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Africa affairs unit of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution, National Institute for Security Studies, Centre for Strategic Research and Studies-Nigerian Defence College, Network of Human Rights institutions in West Africa, International Institute of Leadership and Governance, Centre for Democracy & Development in Nigeria and Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) who have dependable information on this subject matter.

The study assigned a code to all the participants; each was given a pseudonym, for example P1, standing for Participant1 to Participant 8, to ensure they were shielded from any form of identification due to the sensitivity of the subject and protection from retaliation. Participants’ units, specific year(s) of deployment, locations, names of comrades or commanders mentioned during the interviews, and other identifying information are suppressed. Participants were asked questions in an effort to answer the research questions on the role of regional organization in preventing and resolving coup de'tat crisis in West Africa. This task was undertaken to demonstrate transparency in the data analysis process. The interview results were supplemented with information from the extant literature, including newspapers, magazines, reports and official documents.

### Sample Population Showing the Target Population for an In-depth Interview

SN	Category of the Targeted Population	Population	Total Sample
1.	ECOWAS: Directorate of Early Warning, Regional Security Division and SSR division	21	2
2.	Embassies of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger	26	3
3.	ECOWAS Division, Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs	19	2
4.	Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (Africa Affairs)	13	1

5.	National Institute for Security Studies in Nigeria.	26	3
6.	Centre for Strategic Research and Studies-Nigerian Defence College	31	3
7	Network of Human Rights Institutions in West Africa.	15	2
8	International Institute of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria	12	1
9	Centre for Democracy & Development in Nigeria.	21	2
10	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA)	18	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>20</b>

**Source:** Researcher’s Compilation (2025).

### Factors Responsible for Resurgence of Military Coup in West Africa

An interview response with Participant 1 reveals that the overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali in August 2020 and the transitional government in Mali in May 2021 through military coups is evidence of the legitimacy crises which the civilian governments face as a result of corruption and weak democratic governance. Similarly, the case of elite corruption and a failure to enhance citizens’ welfare were also evident in the military coup in Guinea in September 2021 which led to the overthrow of President Alpha Condé (Interviewed April, 2025).

However, Martin-Shields, Charles, Koester and Diana (2024) attributed the recent resurgence of military coup in west Africa to state fragility, orchestrated by the presence of weak democratic institutions, poverty, corruption, disputes over natural resources, ethno-religious tension. According to them, these factors make the countries more susceptible to coups. Amidst this, the ECOWAS has a critical role to play in sustaining democratic consolidation in the West African Sub-region. Though, ECOWAS was created in 1975 with sole responsibility of enhancing economic cooperation and development among the countries of West Africa, but due to the complexity of the challenges facing the sub-region, the organization has incurred more responsibility of maintaining peace and security; thereby, serving as a watchdog for the region. This necessitates the adoption of ECOWAS protocol on democracy in 2001 and the 2021 ECOWAS supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance which aim to use democratic principle in maintaining peace and good governance in the West African sub-region.

According to Participant 2 (April 2025), another reason for the rise of coup in West Africa is the failure of democracy to intensify and deepen in the region. There are numerous instances of poor governance in West African region, evident in massive corruption, worsening security crises, lack of free, fair, and credible election, marginalization, domination and sit-tight syndrome. This account for the reason people celebrates the return of the military in politics. An example of this is the case of Guinea which has history of long serving presidents with poor governance, massive economic hardship and corruption.

For instance, President Ahmed Sékou Touré served as president for 25 years while President Lansana Conté served for 24 years. Another example is the case of Togo where Gnassingbé Eyadéma made himself almost a lifetime president by ruling Togo for thirty-eight years; from 1967 until his death in 2005. He was succeeded by his son Faure Gnassingbé who took over power in 2005 in a very controversial way which led to a nationwide protest that led to the death of over 1,000 people who were killed by security forces (Mills, 2022). Woldense (2022) attribute the recent reoccurrence of coups in Africa to various factors such as inadequate leadership, lack of democratic practices, economic hardships, the avarice of military personnel, discontent among the youth and residents, and so on.

### Furthermore, Participant 3 laments that:

It is very unfortunate how many of the African leaders see politics as an opportunity for self perpetuation and aggrandizement; hence, they arrogated the power of the state to themselves without remorse. This led to patrimonialism which promotes personal ambitions of political leaders and corruption. The effect was the challenges of underdevelopment of civil and political institutions, massive economic hardship, corruption and worsening insecurity. With intolerance to opposition and the employment of the state resource for self-

perpetuation, the only means of socio-political change is the military take over which was always welcome by the masses. Unfortunately, most of the states within the sub-region are plural states with difference in tribe, language, culture, origin and religion. For instance, the inter and intra party crises as experienced in Nigeria in the First Republic led to political violence, instability and general sense of insecurity which beckoned on the military as the last hope for restoration of law and order because of the military's perceived neutrality in the political landscape. Moreover, the military itself is part of the society; who see and understand the game of politics as access to political power and the control of the state resources. Hence, ambitious officers also use the military as a platform to actualize their ambition of ruling their respective countries and gain access to the state resources for personal and group gain as done by the politicians (Interviewed April, 2025).

From the 1960s after independence of most African states, military coup has been a common occurrence in West Africa. Sadly, Falola (2022) reported that data indicate that democracy is not strengthening but rather failing. Suleiman and Onapajo (2022) estimate that out of the 40 successful and attempted coups in Africa, roughly 20 occurred in the West Africa sub-region; making up 50% of coups in recent decades. This may be associated with plural character of the sub-region and its malfeasance tendencies. Afro-barometer surveys have revealed that public support for military takeovers has increased throughout the area. According to Lekalake and Buchanan-Clarke (2021), an average of 46% of participants across 18 nations revealed that they would support the military takeover of the country. Just before the coups of 2021, Mali had a highest percentage (61%) support for coups, followed by Guinea (59%). This is an indication that the region's civilian administrations have been overpowered by prevalent insecurity, including armed insurgencies, ethnic and communal conflicts, failed democratic transitions, predatory ruling elites and other factors. These factors have contributed to the resurgence of coups.

Furthermore, interconnectedness of the global system makes for easy escalation of military coup. This may account for the succession of military intervention in Africa between 1960s and 80s. For example, Mobutu in Congo, November 1965, Soigho in Dahomey four days after, Bakassa of Central Africa Republic on January 1, 1966, Lamiza in Burkina Faso, four days after, and the five majors in Nigeria eleven days after. The trend continued as most of the African states were ruled by Military Juntas. Besides, the neo-colonial nature of Third World Countries that makes them too porous for external influence especially those that have Multi-National Corporations. These companies are willing to do anything to protect their interest. For instance, it is widely believed that the assassination of Murtala Mohammed in Nigeria was fallout of his pro-eastern foreign policy against the west. Also, there were speculations that the coup against President Allendes of Chile was fallout of his policy against the MNCs. There is an indication that such scenario still plays out covertly in some of the coups in West Africa owing to the deliberate desperate effort by the two power blocs (Eastern and Western power blocs) to counter each other in the politics of the third world where they recruited supports and alliance through support for military intervention for their ideological interest (Interviewed with P4 - April, 2025).

On August 19th 2020, the first coup took place in Mali which was followed by the second coup on May 24th 2021. Some of the major factor that triggered these military coups in Mali was malpractice in the electoral process; particularly the parliamentary elections, which raised national instability and corruption. The both coups were led by Asimi Goita. In the first place, the coup of 2020 targeted the administration of President Ibrahim Keita; while the second coup led to the overthrowing of President Bah Ndaw in 2021 (Chilaka, & Oyinmiebi, 2022). Another military coup that took place was the coup in Guinea in September, 2021 which was led by Col. Mamady Doumbaya. Daudu, Osimen and Shuaibu (2023) noted that corruption and autocratic (civilian) governance, economic mismanagement, deteriorating and flawed democratic norms were the major factors that triggered the coup. These factors resulted in the overthrowing of the civilian government of President Alpha Conde; leading to the end of Conde's controversial third term following his heavily disputed election victory in 2020. The coup was fueled by frustrations over massive corruption, human rights abuse and lack of economic progress under Conde; which was compounded by the French prolonged imperialism in Francophone West Africa resulting to significant economic, political, and social regression in the sub-region (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023). The extraction of resources and establishment of colonial administrations during this period led to lack of local autonomy; hence, overdependence on France. This resulted in increased fragility in the region as the French prioritized their own interests over those of the indigenous populations (Ani, 2021).

Participant 5 notes that Guinea Bissau also experienced a military intervention in 2022 as a result of several factors such as insecurity in the region, bad governance, youth unemployment, and citizens' discontent and so on. The coup targeted the leadership of President Umaro Embalo who was criticized by the coup plotters for his failing leadership. Though, the coup was described as unsuccessful because it did not successfully overthrow President Umaro Embalo. Also, in January 2022, Bukina Faso witnessed a military coup which ousted the government of President Roch Marc Christian Kabore. Soldiers led by a top military officer Lt. Col. Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba staged a coup because of increased level of insecurity in the region, political instability and corruption, lack of opportunity for the youth and growing population. The successful coup saw to the removal of the president and imposition of the military in the affairs of government. This was also orchestrated by anger over the government's failure to tackle a spiraling jihadist insurgency (Interviewed April, 2025).

### **Role of ECOWAS in Preventing and Resolving Coup De'tat Crisis in West Africa**

Interview response from Participant 6 shows that ECOWAS has established mechanisms like the Conflict Prevention Framework and the Community's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which focus on early warning, preventative diplomacy, and confidence-building measures. ECOWAS has responded to coups with sanctions, including economic blockades, travel bans, and suspension from international organizations, as well as diplomatic interventions and negotiations. ECOWAS has deployed peace operations in countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone to restore peace and stability, and has supported peace building efforts in other conflict zones. ECOWAS has supported democratic transitions in countries like Guinea-Bissau, providing mediation, good offices, and support for free and fair elections. ECOWAS has worked to strengthen the capacities of its member states in areas like conflict prevention, management, and peacekeeping. Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, Diplomatic and Non-Diplomatic Measures, Peacekeeping and Peace building, Support for Democratic Transitions and Capacity Building (Interviewed April, 2025).

Idris (2024) remarked that when the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 as a regional economic community, its primary aim was to facilitate trade among its members. However, as a result of continuous outbreak of leadership conflict in the region, ECOWAS gradually advanced its focus towards addressing military concerns in addition to the initial objectives which centered on economic development of the region. The experiences of the Liberia and Sierra Leonean civil wars vividly illustrated the connection between economic development, peace, and security in the region.

According to Mills (2022), from the 1990s, ECOWAS has implemented various legal frameworks such as the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security to provide military support, mediation services, and assistance for peace building to its member countries. The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance which was adopted in 2001 contains a mechanism and principles for addressing unconstitutional change in government such as the case of military coup. The ECOWAS treaties Article 25 granted ECOWAS the right to interfere in situation of unconstitutional change of government by the military. This protocol also includes clauses about the democratic governance of ECOWAS members, encompassing aspects such as electoral processes, judicial impartiality, and the neutrality of security forces.

ECOWAS has played strategic roles in enhancing stability and economic development of the countries in the West African sub-region. Besides intervening in military coups in the region, many other political developments such as cases of third terms or unlimited presidential terms, controversial re-elections of leaders, post-election violence and instances of alleged corruption of political leaders are other areas that ECOWAS has intervened in the region. For instance, ECOWAS intervened in 2016 post-election violence in Gambia between Adama Barrow and Yaya Jammeh. In early 2017, the ECOWAS delegation intervened and mediated for peaceful resolution of the conflict. The union was able to intervene in Gambia and ensured handover of power by the defeated incumbent president who was refusing to hand over power. This was precautionary to political crisis that would have led to destabilization of already set democratic process and possible military intervention (Interview with P7 - April, 2025).

Another example is the case of the Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé, the son of Gnassingbé Eyadéma who had made himself almost a lifetime president by presided over Togo for thirty-eight years (Mills, 2022). The ascension of power by Faure Gnassingbé in 2005 was widely criticized and described as a coup. Despite this, he was declared president by the ruling party. Consequently, there was a nationwide protest against this which led to the death of over 1,000 people who were killed by security forces (Togo deputies legitimise coup, 2005). In response to this, ECOWAS suspended Togo and implemented sanctions such as an arms embargo and travel bans on its leaders (ECOWAS Sanctions Togo in Response to Country's Political Situation, 2005).

P12 reveal in an interview that in the case of Guinea, the country has had a history of long-serving rulers. Ahmed Sékou Touré served as president for twenty-five years while Lansana Conté, served for twenty-four years. In 2020, the first president to be democratically elected in Guinea, Alpha Condé amended the constitution to enable him to serve for two more terms. Condé who was celebrated for representing a fresh start for Guinean democracy dashed the hope of people with this step of amending the constitution for his selfish reason. This step was met with resistance and nationwide protest. P8 stated that ECOWAS responded by mediating for dialogue. A year later, Condé was overthrown in a military coup which made ECOWAS to respond immediately by suspending and imposing sanctions on Guinea (Interviewed April, 2025).

In Guinea Bissau, the union also played good roles to ensure democratic consolidation over leadership challenges that faced the nation in 2022. The United Nations and other Western partners were of great assistance to ECOWAS in advancing pressure on the juntas to hand over power. It engaged in mediation and later sanction on Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad over unconstitutional change of government by the military (Interview with P8 - April, 2025).

Furthermore, the most significant intervention of ECOWAS is seen Niger. In 2023, there was a coup in Niger Republic which led to the overthrow of President Mohamed Bazoum. This was due to the growing dissatisfaction with the inability to effectively handle security issues as witnessed in uprising threat of terrorism, allegations of embezzlement and the mismanagement of public funds (Zambakari, 2023). In response, ECOWAS condemned the coup and imposed serious sanctions which significantly affected trade and movement by closing land and air borders between Niger and other ECOWAS states. Furthermore, the assets of Niger held in foreign banks were frozen; with the aim of restricting the financial resources of the juntas. Additionally, ECOWAS halted all financial transactions between ECOWAS states and Niger.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding shows that the motivation for military coup in the sub-region is anchored on bad governance, corruption by the civilian political leaders and demand for an end to such abuse by the populace even through military intervention. The result is in agreement with studies by Adebaniwi and Obadare (2021) and Ojo (2018), which reveal that there are a number of intricate and varied elements that contribute to military coups in West Africa, including political unrest, economic hardships, corruption, socioeconomic disparities, ethnic conflicts, and weak institutions.

The study revealed that regional organizations in West Africa, particularly ECOWAS, play a crucial role in preventing and resolving coup d'état crises. They do this by establishing mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, including diplomatic sanctions, peace operations, and support for democratic transitions. ECOWAS has responded to coups with sanctions, including economic blockades, travel bans, and suspension from international organizations, as well as diplomatic interventions and negotiations. While these efforts have shown promise, they have also faced challenges in addressing the complex factors that contribute to the resurgence of coups in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Military coup is observed to be prevalent in African since the 1960s, posing a major threat to the democratization process. While they ceased to be the norm for about two decades, recent coups in countries since 2021 in Mali, Guinea, Niger, Niger and Burkina Faso suggest that the military is finding its way back to power. This is a product of poor leadership, widespread corruption, abuse of constitution and neo-colonial

exploitation within the region. ECOWAS has made some efforts through dialogue, negotiation and lately sanctions deter military regime in the sub-region and discourage such from happening. This is in line with the tenets and spirit of ECOWAS's Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance 2001 and ECOWAS treaties Article 25 of the 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention which all the countries in the sub-region signed.

The inability of Economic Community of West African States to effectively responds with mediation experts and trails of sanctions to earlier signals of mass protests, tenure elongations, absence of security sector reforms, premeditated constitutional crises, opaqueness of law and order, and endangered human security status from member states could be seen legalizing Military Coups in the region and disenchantment towards former colonial masters as seen in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger. The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security set out a framework for collective action to prevent and resolve conflicts.

The recent coup in Niger challenged ECOWAS' ability to enforce decisions, particularly by means of sanctions and diplomatic efforts. The sanctions had the effect of expressing strong disapproval but with negative consequences, causing hardship to the civilian population and causing disruptions to regional economic activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the challenges and constraints faced by ECOWAS in addressing coups and fostering democracy in the region, it is recommended that:

- i. ECOWAS should engage the leadership of the member-states to tackle the root causes of coups in the region by ensuring democratic governance, inclusiveness, transparent corruption-free governance and end to tenure elongation. This can be achieved through developing early mechanism framework through mediation and dialogue by addressing grievances, political intensions and economic deprivation before it materializes into internal crisis and call for military coup.
- ii. ECOWAS should ensure consistent enforcement of its sanctions and other measures against all coup perpetrators, irrespective of any other emerging factors (internally or externally) or personality involved which will serve as deterrence to coup plotters in line with its Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance 2001.

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