

**ECOWAS RESPONSE TO COUP SURGE IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATION
ON ECOWAS'S FUTURE**

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BENIN CITY

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by EDOBOR MOSES in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to God, Mother Mary, my late father (John Edobor), My Mother Mrs. Florence Edobor and my supporting brothers especially Edobor ThankGod Ofure.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), originally conceived as a regional economic integration body, has increasingly evolved into a multifaceted political actor, particularly in the realm of peace and security. In light of the recent surge in military coups across West Africa including those in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023). ECOWAS’s role has expanded and come under greater scrutiny. This new reality demands a conceptual redefinition of ECOWAS: not only as a vehicle for economic cooperation, but as a regional guardian of democracy, constitutional governance, and political stability¹.

ECOWAS’s response mechanisms are rooted in several key legal instruments. Notably, the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) and the Supplementary Protocol on

Democracy and Good Governance (2001) provide the foundation for its stance against unconstitutional changes of government². These frameworks authorize ECOWAS to take collective action against member states where constitutional order is disrupted ranging from diplomatic sanctions and economic embargoes, to suspension of membership and military intervention threats³.

Following the recent coups, ECOWAS has adopted a toughened posture. It swiftly imposed sanctions on coup leaders, froze assets, closed borders, and even threatened armed intervention—most notably in Niger in 2023⁴. These actions reflect an attempt to reassert normative authority and deter future unconstitutional takeovers⁵. However, the bloc has faced internal divisions, logistical challenges, and legitimacy concerns, especially as military juntas have often garnered significant domestic support and portrayed ECOWAS as acting on behalf of foreign interests. Therefore, ECOWAS can now be conceptualized as an institution in transition—moving from a primarily economic union to a regional political entity with an expanding peace and security mandate⁶. Its response to the coup surge illustrates a delicate balancing act: enforcing democratic norms while maintaining regional unity, responding decisively without escalating conflict, and promoting stability without compromising sovereignty.

This evolving role has profound implications for ECOWAS's future credibility, effectiveness, and institutional identity⁷. How the organization navigates this complex terrain will likely determine its standing not just in West Africa, but as a model for regional governance and security architecture across the continent. This research explores

ECOWAS's response to the recent wave of coups, analyzing its strategies, successes, and shortcomings. Furthermore, it examines the broader implications of these events on the future of ECOWAS as a regional bloc, including questions around its credibility, unity, and ability to uphold democratic norms in a rapidly shifting political landscape.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to critically examine ECOWAS's response to the recent surge in military coups across West Africa and evaluate the effectiveness, challenges, and long-term implications of these responses on the organization's relevance, unity, and regional security.

Objectives are:

- I. To analyze the recent patterns and causes of military coups surge within the ECOWAS region and in Africa.
- II. To assess the nature and effectiveness of ECOWAS's political, diplomatic, and military responses to these coups surge.
- III. To examine the internal and external challenges ECOWAS faces in enforcing democratic governance among member states.
- IV. To explore the implications of recurring coups surge on regional stability, economic integration, and ECOWAS's credibility.
- V. To evaluate how ECOWAS's current strategies and responses might shape its future as a regional body.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the response of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the recent surge in military coups within the West African sub-region, particularly between 2020 and 2024. The research will primarily cover member states that have experienced coups during this period, such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. It will analyze the diplomatic, political, and military measures taken by ECOWAS in reaction to these unconstitutional changes of government.

The study will also assess the effectiveness and limitations of ECOWAS's interventions, as well as the broader implications of these developments on the organization's future role in regional integration, democratic consolidation, and peacekeeping. However, the study will be limited to West Africa and will not extend to the broader African continent, even though similar political trends may exist elsewhere.

Methodology

This study will adopt a historical and qualitative research approach through a comprehensive analysis of the primary and Secondary source which will seek to present a clear and detailed understanding of ECOWAS Response strategies and possible implications of the coup surge in Africa, particularly West Africa on ECOWAS'S future as a regional organization.

Primary Sources such as archival materials, government publications, as well as news report and official ECOWAS documents.

Secondary Sources includes Academic Publications, Academic journals, news article like newspapers and magazines, internet work, experts opinions, and possible relevant case studies.

The information gathered from the primary and secondary sources will be critically analyzed.

Literature Review

A series of Studies and Analysis have been carried out on Coup surge in Africa and as well as ECOWAS Response and Implications on ECOWAS Future. These Academic works and publications will be reviewed here to provide a clear background and Analysis to this research work on Coup surge in Africa and Its Implication on ECOWAS future.

Olaloluwa Olorunfemmi in the book titled *Military Coup in West Africa*¹ provides an in-depth analysis of the successful military coups that occurred in select West African nations between 2020 and 2023. The book delves into the backgrounds, causes, and reactions associated with these coups, offering a comprehensive examination of the political dynamics during this period.

Thomas Jaye, Dauda Garuba, and Stella Amadi *ECOWAS and the Dynamics of Conflict and Peace-building*² the book traces ECOWAS's transition from a primarily economic integration body to a significant actor in regional security. It highlights the establishment and deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in

response to civil wars, marking a shift towards proactive peacekeeping and enforcement without prior UN authorization. The book also provides a nuanced understanding of the regional body's multifaceted role in conflict management. By examining both achievements and challenges, the book offers valuable lessons for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners interested in regional approaches to peace and security in West Africa.

Emmanuel Balogun in the book titled *Region-Building in West Africa: Convergence and Agency in ECOWAS*³ offers a clear exploration of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), emphasizing the pivotal role of bureaucratic actors in shaping regional integration and governance. Departing from traditional analyses that focus primarily on state leaders, it also highlights the agency of ECOWAS practitioners in fostering cooperation across member states.

Leonie Mills' work, *The Effectiveness of ECOWAS in Mitigating Coups in West Africa*⁴ offers a critical examination of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its role in addressing the resurgence of military coups in the region. It also contributes to the broader discourse on regional governance in West Africa, highlighting the complexities ECOWAS faces in mitigating coups. The study underscores the necessity for ECOWAS to strengthen its enforcement mechanisms and address underlying issues that contribute to political instability.

Emile Sunjo's work *Evaluating the Effectiveness of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in Preventing the Resurgence of Military Coups in West Africa*⁵ offers a comprehensive analysis of ECOWAS's efforts to curb military

coups in the region. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research draws upon existing literature, policy documents, and interviews to assess the strengths and limitations of ECOWAS's strategies. The study provides a critical assessment of ECOWAS's current strategies in mitigating military coups, highlighting the need for consistent enforcement of protocols, addressing socioeconomic and institutional vulnerabilities, and enhancing both preventive and responsive mechanisms. The recommendations offered aim to foster a more resilient democratic framework within West Africa.

The Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) published a policy brief titled *Challenges to Peace and Security in West Africa: The Role of ECOWAS in 2015*⁶ This document provides a concise analysis of the primary security challenges in West Africa over the preceding five years and evaluates the responses of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to these issues. The FOI's analysis presents ECOWAS as a pivotal actor in West Africa's security landscape, with notable achievements in establishing normative frameworks for democracy and cooperation. However, the organization's effectiveness is constrained by inconsistent enforcement of protocols, limited military engagement in key conflicts, and challenges in addressing transnational threats.

Tina Asante-Apeatu *Instability and Coups in West Africa: A Call for Collective Action*⁷ this book offers a comprehensive analysis of the resurgence of military coups in West Africa and advocates for a unified regional response to address the underlying

causes of political instability. The book also provides a critical examination of the multifaceted challenges contributing to political instability in West Africa. By highlighting socioeconomic disparities, external influences, and the erosion of democratic norms, the article underscores the urgent need for collective action by regional bodies and governance actors to restore stability and uphold democratic principles in the region.

Okechukwu Collins Obasi's article, *The Re-Emergence of Military Coups in West Africa and the Efficacy of Nigerian-Led ECOWAS Interventions*⁸ provides a comprehensive analysis of the recent resurgence of military coups in West Africa and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions led by Nigeria through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It also provides a critical examination of the challenges facing ECOWAS in curbing the resurgence of military coups in West Africa. While acknowledging Nigeria's leadership role, the study emphasizes the need for more robust and coordinated regional efforts to uphold democratic governance and prevent future coups.

Chilaka Francis Chigozie and Peter Thankgod Oyinmiebi *Resurgence of Military Coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS*⁹ the study explore the alarming increase in military coups within West Africa and its repercussions on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The study employs the "regulative capability" analytical framework, part of Almond's General Systems theory, to assess ECOWAS's ability to maintain order and enforce democratic norms. The framework suggests that

ECOWAS's current strategies may be insufficient in addressing the root causes of coups, necessitating a more robust approach to governance and institutional reform.

Hakeem Onapajo and Dele Babalola in the book *ECOWAS and the Challenge of Preventing a Resurgence of Coups d'État in West Africa: An Assessment of the 'Zero Tolerance' Policy*¹⁰ critically examine the efficacy of ECOWAS's 'zero tolerance' stance on unconstitutional changes of government, particularly in light of the recent uptick in military coups within the region. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of ECOWAS's mechanisms and responses to the resurgence of coups.

Barau Yusuf Abdulrahman in the book *Effectiveness of ECOWAS in Countering Coups in West Africa: A Case Study of Niger Republic*¹¹ critically examines the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) response to the 2023 military coup in Niger. The study assesses ECOWAS's strategies and their efficacy in restoring constitutional order. The book concludes that while ECOWAS has demonstrated a commitment to upholding democratic norms, its response to the Niger coup highlights significant challenges in enforcement and regional cohesion. Addressing these issues is crucial for the bloc to effectively deter future unconstitutional changes of government and promote lasting stability in West Africa.

Tola Odubajo *ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance: An Analysis of Response to the 2021 Guinean Coup D'état*¹² this book critically examines the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) reaction to the September 2021 military coup in Guinea. The book assesses ECOWAS's response within the

framework of its 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, highlighting the organization's challenges in upholding democratic principles among its member states. The article concludes that ECOWAS's response to the 2021 Guinean coup reflects broader challenges in enforcing democratic norms within the region.

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CHAPTER TWO

BRIEF HISTORY OF ECOWAS

Introduction

The Economic community of west Africa State (ECOWAS) is a regional body/organization established with the primary aim to promote economic integration and development among west African States. This organization was founded on 28th May 1975. It has been instrumental in shaping the political and economic landscape of the west African region as well as the whole Africa. The organization was born out of a collective desire among west African states to transcend colonial legacies and to foster unity in attainment of socio-economic progress through cooperation.

Formation and Founding Objectives of ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on May 28 1975. The creation of ECOWAS was formalized with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos in Nigeria by Fifteen west African states namely; Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Cote d' Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. In 1977 Cape Verde joined the organization raising the number of member state to Sixteen.¹

The establishment of ECOWAS was motivated and necessitated by the recognition that regional cooperation and integration is essential for economic growth which will foster stability and enhance the region's capacity to compete in the global economy. This idea was born out of the situation that characterized the post-independence period, which was marked by economic fragmentation, poor infrastructural connectivity, and external dependency particularly in the west Africa.² ECOWAS emerged as a strategic response and possible solution to these challenges, aiming to promote intra-regional trade and collective self-reliance.

The founding objectives of ECOWAS were articulated in the 1975 Treaty of Lagos which created the ECOWAS as regional economic organization which further expanded in the 1993 Revised Treaty to include security and protection of the region. These objectives reflect a comprehensive vision for regional economic, social and political integration.³

1. Promotion of Economic Cooperation and Development.

ECOWAS's core mandate is the promotion of economic integration across west Africa. This includes the establishment of a common market, the harmonization of economic and financial policies and probably a creation of a monetary union. The member states committed to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers, which ensuring free movement of goods, capital and services.⁴

2. Free Movement of persons and Right of Establishment

One of the following aim and objectives of ECOWAS was to ensure the free movement of people within the region. The community adopted protocols granting citizens of member states the right to enter, reside, and establish businesses in other member countries. This objective laid and facilitated the foundation for ECOWAS travel certificate and ECOWAS biometric passport, facilitating regional mobility.⁵

3. Policy Harmonization and Cooperation.

ECOWAS standing aim and objective is to coordinate and harmonize national politics in key sectors such as agriculture, industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, and environmental protection. By aligning development strategies, the organization seeks to minimize regional synergies.⁶

4. Promoting of Industrial and Agricultural Development.

ECOWAS's aim and objectives were also visible in the area of industry and Agricultural development. The organization prioritizes the diversification of

regional economics through the development of industries and agriculture. This includes the establishment of common agricultural policies, food security programs, and support for small and medium scale enterprises.⁷

5. Peace, Security, and Political Stability.

One of the ECOWAS core objectives was in the area of security and political stability. Recognizing the link between development and stability, ECOWAS is committed to maintaining peace and security within the region. It has established conflict prevention and resolution mechanism such as the ECOWAS monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and supports democratic governance, constitutional order and human rights in member states.⁸

The 1993 Revised Treaty and Expansion of Mandate

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formerly established in 1975 as regional organization to promote economic integration and development in west African states. However, by the early 1990s, it became evident that economic alone was insufficient to address the complex challenges facing the region. These includes recurring political instability, civil wars, coup' d' tat and poor governances. In response to these issues, ECOWAS adopted the Revised Treaty on 24 July 1993 in Cotonou, Benin in a bid to broaden its mandate and institutional framework.⁹

The revision of the original Treaty of Lagos was necessitated by multiple structure and contextual challenges. In which many member States were plagued by

Military Coups, ethno-political conflicts and fragile economies. The Liberian civil war of 1989-1997 in particular underscore the limitations of ECOWAS's initial economic focus and exposed the urgent need for a security and government mandate. The 1993 treaty was however crafted to equip the organization with the legal authority and institutional mechanism to actively intervene in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and democratic promotion¹⁰

The revised Treaty retained the primary objective of economic integration but significantly expanded ECOWAS functions to address political, security and social developmental concerns. It introduced a set of new objectives that extended beyond trade and economic affair. These include the promotion and consolidation of democratic governance. Human right and rule of law, prevention and resolution of armed conflicts and internal crisis. The revised treaty also underwent institutional restructuring which includes the transformation of the Executive Secretariat into the ECOWAS commission. The creation of the ECOWAS Parliament, the strengthening of the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the establishment of the authority of Heads of State and Government as the Supreme decision-making body/organ. These reforms were aimed to ensure and increase the efficiency, transparency and effectiveness of ECOWAS institutions.¹¹

One of the most critical expansion introduced by the 1993 Treaty was the Formal inclusion of regional peace and security. The treaty acknowledged that economic growth could not be sustained in an environment of conflict and instability, this necessitated the need to promote security and peace and stability in the region by the establishment of

ECOMOG, though active in Liberia since 1990 but the Revised Treaty provided the organization with formal legitimacy to undertake military interventions in member state. The Revised Treaty also incorporated a strong commitment to the promotion of Democracy and good Governance. These were further reinforced by the 2001 supplementary protocol on Democracy and good Governance which rejected unconstitutional change of government and advocated for free and fair election which is to be monitored by ECOWAS observers' missions.¹²

The adoption of the 1993 Revised Treaty was necessary and critical in the evolution of ECOWAS. It was meant to broaden the organizations mandate to include political stability, peace and security and democratic governance. It also transformed ECOWAS to include security as part of their objectives and commitment to ensure stability in the region.

ECOWAS Early Interventions and Peacekeeping Missions Before The 1993 Revised Treaty

ECOWAS was originally established by the Treaty of Lagos [1975] in which the primary objective was to focus on economic cooperation and region integration, the political instability and civil conflicts that engulfed the west African region in the 1980s and early 1990s forced ECOWAS to engage in peace and security matters earlier than originally intended. This early intervention occurred before the legal framework for peacekeeping was formalized under the 1993 Revised Treaty and the 1999 conflict prevention protocol. ECOWAS involvement in Liberia, beginning in 1990 marked the

first major instance of a sub-regional organization engaging in a military and humanitarian intervention without prior United Nation's authorization.¹³

In 1980s, West Africa experienced a wave of military coups, authoritarian regimes and violent internal conflicts, which posed serious threats to regional peace, cross border trade and the safety of civilians. This wave of military coups and internal conflicts affected some ECOWAS member states which resulted in refugee flows, weapons proliferation and economic disruption. Although the 1975 Treaty of Lagos did not provide for collective security or conflict management mechanism, the worsening condition in Liberia by the end of the 1980s compelled ECOWAS to take unprecedented action.¹⁴

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CHAPTER THREE
BRIEF ANALYSIS OF COUPS IN AFRICA

Introduction

Africa post-independence political history has been marked by a high incidence of Military Coups from the early 1960s to the end of the 20th century numerous African states experienced the forceful overthrow of government by Military. The cause of patterns and consequences of these coups have profoundly shaped the continents political landscapes which often undermine democratic development and State stability.

Historical Overview of Coups in Africa

The wave of African independence in the later 1950s and 1960s brought hope for Sovereign Governance. However, the newly independent States were often structurally weak, with limited institutional capacity and deep ethnic and regional division. The Colonial legacies including centralized power structures and authoritarian tendencies remained intact. These newly independence African states were often faced and characterized with corrupt practices and weak governance, this volatile environment, militaries emerged as powerful institutions capable of seizing political control. The first successful post-independence coup in Africa occurred in Togo in 1963, when president Sylvanus Olympio was assassinated and overthrown by the military led by Sergeant Etienne Gnassingbe Eyadema. This marked the beginning of a trend that quickly spread across the continent.¹

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the highest frequency of Military Coups in Africa countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Ugandan and the Central African Republic. In Ghana, kwame Nkrumah, a leading figure of Africa independence and Pan-Africanism was overthrown in 1966 while on a State visit to China. The coup was led by Emmanuel

Kotoka and the National Liberation Council, which was cited on economic mismanagement and authoritarianism by the coup leaders. Similarly, Nigeria also experiences its first coup in January 1966, when a group of young military officers led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu overthrew the civilian government, assassinating top leaders including Prime Minister Tafawa Balawa. This coup was quickly followed by a counter-coup in July 1966 which sparked a chain of instability that eventually led to the Nigerian civil war in 1967-1970.²

In the 1980s and 1990s a lot of coups have taken place due to persistent instability in the region and mostly some hidden motives. During this period, coups were often motivated not just by power struggles but also by widespread dissatisfaction with one party systems, economic crisis, and corruptions. In Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara took power through a coup in 1983, initiating radical socio-economic reforms and Pan-African policies. His assassination and the rise of Blaise Compaore in 1987 reflect an emblematic internal elite rivalry within revolutionary movements. Other coups during this era, such as in Liberia 1980, where Master Sergeant Samuel Doe overthrew President William Tolbert and executed 13 Cabinet members, which highlight the deepening crisis of governance and growing military assertiveness.³

These coups were often based on regional patterns and external influences. Some regions such as West Africa were more prone to coups than others, partly due to colonial legacies, ethnicity and the absence of strong democratic institutions. The Francophone States, despite French support and military presence also saw considerable coup activity.

External actors especially during the Cold war played a significant role. Both the western and Eastern Blocs often supported or condoned coups that aligned with their ideological interests. For instance, the U.S and France were often accused of complicity in several coups including in DR Congo and Chad, this was to protect their strategic and economic interests.⁴

Case Study of Coups in Africa: Togo, Nigeria, and Ghana

Military coups have played a profound role in shaping the political landscape of many Africa countries, particularly in west African countries. Among the most notable examples are Togo, Nigeria, and Ghana. These countries were among the first to experience military coup in Africa and in west Africa, their post-independence was punctuated by military interventions that responded to, and in many ways deepened political, economic, and social instability. The understanding of coup history of these states will offer important insights into the challenges of early state-building and governance in post-colonial Africa.

Togo:

Togo holds the first country in Africa and west Africa to have experience a successful military coup after independence on January 13, 1963. President Sylvanus olympio, the nation's first democratically elected leader was assassinated outside the U.S embassy in Lome. The coup was reported to have been led by sergeant Etienne Eyadema and other ex-servicemen, many of whom had served in the French army but were excluded from integration into the Togolese national army after independence. The president, Olympio,

though had governed with centralized approach, but was still faced with growing domestic dissatisfaction, especially from marginalized military and political actors. His refusal to expand the army and reintegrate former colonial soldiers led to his assassination. The coup came as a shock to the continent and also set a precedent for militarized politics in west Africa.⁵ Three years later in 1967, Gnassingbe Eyadema led another coup which was against President Nicolas Grunitzky who had taken power after President Olympio's death. He installed himself as president and ruled Togo until his death in 2005, making him one of the Africa's longest ruling heads of states. His regime reflect how military coups could limit democratic development.

Nigeria:

Nigeria's post-independence experience is among the most turbulent in Africa, marked by series of coups that both reflected and fueled ethnic tensions, political rivalries and institutional weaknesses. The country's first coup occurred on January 15 1966 led by major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and a group of young army officers. The coup targeted some political elite, many of whom were seen and labeled corrupt and ethnically biased and resulted in the assassination of key leaders, including the prime Minister Sir. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello the premier of Northern region and amongst others.⁶ Although the coup plotters claimed they intended to end corruption and misrule; it was interpreted especially in the Northern region as an ethnic coup favouring the predominantly Igbo officers. These perceptions led to a counter-coup in July 1966, led by Northern officers, including Murtala Mohammed and Yakubu Gowon which

resulted in killing of General Aguiyi Ironsi, the first military head of state and other Igbo officers. These coups set Nigeria on a course towards civil war, culminating in the Biafran war (1967-1970), it was a devastating conflict that claimed over a million lives. After the civil war, coups still remained common, in 1975, Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup by General Murtala Mohammed, who was also assassinated during an attempted coup in 1976, leading to the rise of General Olusegun Obasanjo. Nigeria returned to democratic rule briefly in 1978 making Nigeria's second republic, but military rule returned with another coup in 1983, led by General Muhammadu Buhari, followed by General Ibrahim Babangida's takeover in 1985 and later General Sani Abacha's rule after a palace coup in 1993. By the late 1990s, Nigeria had experienced six successful coups and some failed attempts, making it one of Africa's most coup prone Nation.⁷

Ghana:

Ghana was the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain independence in 1957 under Kwame Nkrumah, and also among the earliest to experience military camp. The first democratic president, Kwame Nkuumah, a staunch pan Africanist and socialist, initially enjoyed massive support but gradually adopted authoritarian measures banning opposition parties and centralizing power under a one-party state. His increasing repressive tactics and failing economic policies led to widespread dissatisfaction.

In February 1966, White Nkrumah was on a Peace Mission to Vietnam, the Ghana Armed Forces, led by Colonel Emmanuel Kotoka and Lieutenant General Ankrah, staged

a coup ending Nkrumah's rule. The coup was welcomed by many Ghanaians and backed tacitly by external powers, including the U.S(CIA) who saw Nkrumah's Socialist learning as a threat during the cold war. Ghana's political instability continued in the subsequent years. In 1972, Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong over throw the Civilian Government of Kofi Busia, initiating a new wave military government/rule that persisted through the 1970s. A series of coup followed until flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings a charismatic young officer, seized power in June 1979, briefly handed over to a civilian regime, and returned via another coup on December 31, 1981.⁸

Rawling second rule lasted until the 1990s transitioning eventually to a democratic government. He won the 1992 and 1996 election marking one of the African's more successful transition from military to civilian rule.⁷ However, Ghana's early history of coups highlights the volatility of post-colonial government and the fragility of democratic institutions.⁹

Implications of Coups in Africa

Military coups in Africa before the 21st century, had a profound implication and impact on its region and continent. The implications and impacts went beyond regime change, they shaped interstate relations, regional cooperation, ideological alignment and also the governance and security on the continent. One of the immediate regional impacts of the early coups was the domino effect of political instability they created. When Togo experienced Africans first post-independence coup in 1963, it was quickly followed by similar event in Nigeria 1966, Ghana 1966, Benin 1963 and the Central African Republic

1965. The success of the military takeover often emboldened military officers in neighboring countries who was similarly dissatisfied with their civilian governments.¹⁰

The instability caused by repeated coups in Africa and west Africa were often undermining efforts at regional integration. For example, the economic community of west Africa states (ECOWAS), formed in 1975 to promote the economic cooperation, found itself grappling with regional security threats the frequent change in leadership complicated policy continuity and trust building among member states. A government over thrown in a coup might suddenly shift foreign policy direction or withdraw from regional initiatives.⁹. this was led to a fragmented approach to regional cooperation, with some states engaging selectively.¹¹

The early post-independence had seen bold efforts at continental unity and solidity under leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere. However, the rise of military regimes fragmented these aspirations. The ideological difference between radical military government and pro-western authoritarian regimes sharpened continental divisions. As coups multiplied, Africa leaders became more preoccupied with regime survival than continental unity, the organization of African unity (OAU), although committed to principles of non-interference, was often paralyzed in responding to unconstitutional changed of government. Its non-intervention doctrine” ironically provided a protective shield for coup-born regimes, allowing them to consolidate power without facing real continental sanctions.¹²

The regional and continental implications and impact of coup in Africa gave rise to regional norms around security and democracy. By 1990s after decade of instability the cumulative impact of coups began to shift continental attitudes. The African union predecessor, the OAU, began rethinking its passive approach of non-intervention doctrine” which refrained from intervening with coups, the rising toll of civil wars, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda and economic stagnation pushed the leaders to slowly support norms of democracy, constitutional governance and regional peace keeping. The shift was also evident in the formation of ECOMOG (ECOWAS monitoring group). Which was developed in Liberia in 1990 to intervene in civil war that stemmed in part from the 1980 coup by Samuel Doe. These interventions eventually marked emergence of regional responsibility for maintaining constitutional order.¹³

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CHAPTER FOUR

ECOWAS RESPONSE AND IMPLICATIONS ON ECOWAS'S FUTURE

Introduction

In recent years in the 21st century Africa and west Africa region has been shaken by a troubling resurgence of military coups, especially in countries like Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These recent development of resurgence of coups have sent shockwaves through the economic community of west Africa states (ECOWAS), an organization that have positioned itself as a guardian of democracy and regional stability. ECOWAS as an organization against unconstitutional change of government has implore difference response strategies towards combating the recent resurgence of coups and to strengthen the organization as a regional body.

ECOWAS Response Mechanism to Recent Coup Surge in West Africa: Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger.

In the last few years, west Africa region has witnessed a disturbing resurgence of military coups and takeovers, sponsoring political instability and unconstitutional change of government. The coups have taken place recently in four key West African countries, such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger. These have taken place in the year 2020 in Mali, 2021 Guinea, 2022 Burkina Faso, and Niger 2023, these coups have not only shaken these respective countries but have also tested the strength, unity, credibility, and resolve of the Economic Community of West Africa states (ECOWAS) as a regional body committed to promoting democracy and good governance. ¹

Mali 2020-2021

The crisis in Mali marks a significant chapter in the recent resurgence of military coups in west Africa. The crisis arises following the country's transition from military

rule in 1990s, from then Mali's political stability has been on a downward slope for over a decade. The coup of 2020 and 2021, led by colonel Assimi Goita, did not only signaled growing public disenfranchisement with civilian leadership but also exposed the limitations of ECOWAS's crisis response capacity in a region increasingly vulnerable to authoritarian relapse following the August 2020 coup, Mali was gripped by widespread public anger. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita faced accusations of corruption, nepotism, and failure to address the worsening Jihadist Insurgence in the north and central regions of the country, public distrust in the democratic institutions led to a massive protest led by the June 5 movement (A rally of Patriotic forces M5-RFP). On 18 August 2020, a group of soldiers from the Kati military base staged a mutiny and forced Keita, the president to resign.²

The aftermath of 2020 military coup deepened uncertainty, though the military initially promised a short transition. It retained significant control over the interim administration. In 2021 May following internal disagreements within the transitional government, colonel Goita carried out a second coup, removing the president and prime minister of the transitional government. The regional body of the economic community of west African states acted swiftly after the 2020 coup. It suspended Mali's membership, closed borders and imposed economic sanctions, including the freezing of financial transactions with the regional central bank. However, the pressure mixed results, while a transitional charter was adopted and a civil interim president installed, the real power retained in the hands of the military.³ When the second coup occurred in 2021, ECOWAS once again suspended

Mali and held emergency summit, the summit demanded a revised short timeline for democratic election, but Goita regime resisted, proposing a five-year transition instead. As tensions escalated, ECOWAS intensified its Sanctions on Mali on January 2022, blocking Mali's access to regional markets and institution, but the measures began to backfire, fueling nationalist rhetoric within Mali and strengthen support for the Junta, especially as Goita portrayed ECOWAS as acting under the influence of foreign powers. In response, ECOWAS shifted its strategy from confrontation to cautious engagement. Dialogue channels remained open in which a compromise was eventually reached in July 2022, in which Mali agreed to hold elections by early 2024, leading to a partial easing of sanctions.⁴

Burkina Faso 2022.

Burkina Faso once regarded as one of west Africa's most stable democracies, but in recent years became a ground of political and security instability. Between January and September 2022, the country experienced two military coups, reflecting the intense pressure on democratic governance. Burkina Faso's Road to instability was paved by years of rising insecurity particularly from armed Jihadist groups operating in the northern and eastern parts of the country. By late 2021, the government of president Roch March Christian Kabore was visibly overwhelmed by militant groups which led to over 1.5millions displaced persons and anti-government protests became increasingly frequent. Amid this pressure and crisis, on 24 January 2022, military officers led by Lieutenant colonel Pavl-Henri Sandaogo Damiba sized power, citing the government's failure to

address terrorism and protect civilians. The coup was met with mixed feelings domestically.⁶

ECOWAS responded to the January coup with condemnation, swiftly suspending Burkina Faso from all its governing bodies. However, unlike its firmer stance in Mali and Guinea, ECOWAS refrained. This measured response was likely influenced by the country's fragile Security situation and fears that additional economic pressure could worsen the humanitarian crisis. Instead, ECOWAS remained focused on mediation and diplomacy, by sending envoys to engaged with the transitional pushing for a concrete timetable for returned to constitutional order. Just after the negotiation with the transitional government led by Damiba, on 30 September 2022, just eight months after the first coup, Burkina Faso witnessed yet another military takeover which was led by a young and charismatic officer Captain Ibrahim Traore. He accused Damiba regime of failing to improve security and allowing division within the armed forces. Traore's rise signaled not only internal discontent within the military hierarchy but also the depth of the national crisis. This second coup further complicated ECOWAS's mediation efforts. Once again, the country was suspended and an emergency summit was held in Accra, in which th ECOWAS envoys met with Traore and pressed for a reduction in the transitional timeline.⁷

Guniea 2021

On 5 September 2021, Guinea also joins the growing list of west African countries that have experienced a military coup led by colonel Mamady Doumbouya.

Guinea's political tension had been on ground before the 2021 coup. The regime of Alpha Conde who was Guinea first democratic elected president in 2010, initially raised hopes of reforms and national unity. However, over time, his administration became increasingly autocratic, culminating in a controversial constitutional referendum in 2020, which allowed him to run for a third term. The referendum was met with mass protests and violent crackdowns, despite strong domestic opposition and international concerns, President Alpha Conde won the October 2020 presidential election which was rejected Guineans and tensions rises, which colonel Doumbouya and his men stormed the presidential palace and declared the end of the regime.⁸

Colonel Doumbouya Framed the coup as a necessary intervention to save the country from misrule, corruption, and human rights abuses. He referred himself as national committee for reconciliation and development (CNRD), the constitution was dissolved and suspended as well as government institutions. The coup was welcomed by Guineans hoping for a better reform from the military government. ECOWAS responded swiftly and immediately, Guinea was suspended from the bloc, and the regional heads of states demanded the unconditional release of Alpha Conde. The organization sent high-level envoys, including Ghana's president Nana Akufo-Addo and Cote d' Ivoire's Alassane Ovattara to mediate with the transitional government. However, unlike in Mali, ECOWAS stopped short of imposing sweeping economic sanctions. ECOWAS pushed for a short and clear transitional timetable, but was resisted by the transitional government by proposing 36 months transition, but was rejected by the bloc which led to

increased tension and the threat of sanctions in early 2022 which were not fully enforced.⁹

Niger 2023

In July 2023, Niger became the latest west African country to fall to a military coup, adding to the region's growing record of resurgence of military coups. On 26 July 2023, members of the presidential Guard, led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, detained president Bazoum, citing misgovernance and rising insecurity as justifications for the takeover, Bazoum elected 2021 was accused by the military government of being disconnected from the suffering of the people and failing to adequately tackle insecurity and corruption. However, the coup was viewed as more of a struggle than a response to genuine grief especially since it originated within elite security circles rather than mass protest.¹⁰

ECOWAS swiftly reacted to the Niger crisis with rare urgency and severity on 30 July 2023, ECOWAS held an extraordinary summit in Abuja, which suspended Niger from all the decision-making bodies, and imposed sweeping sanctions which include border closures, airspace restrictions, assets freezes, and a halt to financial transactions with Niger Central bank. ECOWAS went a step further by issuing a one-week ultimatum for the military government to restore constitutional order or face military intervention. The announcement of a possible military response marked a sharp shift in ECOWAS strategy in responding coup in the region. This strategy was seen by many in the region as a signal that the bloc had reached breaking point after three consecutive coups in

member state. Despite this strong stance ECOWAS faced significant internal and external constraints while some state like Nigeria, Senegal and Cote d' Ivoire support ECOWAS approach but it was condemned in other state like Mali, Burkina Faso and declared that an attack on Niger would be considered a declaration of war. Public opinion across west Africa was also deeply divided in Niger mass rallies were held in support the military regime fueled by nationalism anti French sentiment and distrust of ECOWAS and western powers. In Nigeria, ECOWAS decision was also condemned by civil society groups, law makers which warned ECOWAS against any military interventions in Niger, As a result ECOWAS paused its intervention plans and focused on diplomacy.¹¹

Impact of ECOWAS Response

The Economic community of west African state (ECOWAS) known as a pioneering regional body promoting democracy, peace, and stability has faced one of its most severe legitimacy tests in recent years. The wave of military coup in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023) has not only shaken the political foundations of the region but exposed the limitations of ECOWAS current mechanisms and strategies for democratic protection and crisis management. ECOWAS protocol on democracy and good governance (2001) clearly prohibit any access or maintenance of power by constitutional means. This framework gives the ECOWAS as bloc a normative mandate to respond decisively to coups. In theory, it seems to ensure swift and firm action against military takeovers in west African States but in practice however ECOWAS responses have uneven hesitant and sometimes counterproductive

making it ineffective and unproductive, while ECOWAS has routinely suspended offending states and issued condemnations over recent wave of coup, its over reliance on sanctions and diplomatic ultimatum without sufficient internal consensus or enforcement capacity has in a sense weakened its credibility as a regional security and economic bloc.¹²

ECOWAS sanctions has no little or no impact on the offending states. In Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, ECOWAS imposed a mix of economic sanctions, border closures and financial freezes following the unconstitutional change of government in those states. However, these measures produced mixed results rather than forcing a swift return to civilian rule, they often hardened the resolve of the military government. For instance, in the case of Niger, ECOWAS took its strongest position yet, threatening military intervention if President Mohamed Bazoum was not restored to power yet, internal divisions and lack of regional support stalled any concrete action, leading to a loss of face for the bloc. Internal disunity and geopolitical pressures have weakened ECOWAS effectiveness. It has also been hampered by lack of cohesion among member states countries like Nigeria and Senegal have advocated stronger action, while others such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea governed by military regimes have resisted intervention. This fragmentation undermines ECOWAS collective authority and create the impression of inconsistency and selective enforcement.¹³

Geopolitically, the growing influence of external actors, especially Russia has complicated ECOWAS efforts, military led government in the Sahel have increasingly

turned to non-traditional partners to bypass ECOWAS pressure, challenging the bloc diplomatic leverage, perhaps the most troubling challenge facing ECOWAS is the erosion of public trust and crisis of credibility. In many coups affected states, the populations have supported the military takeover not necessarily out of love for authoritarianism but because of deep disappointment with corrupt, self-serving civilian regimes. ECOWAS by appearing to protect unpopular government or delay meaningful reforms has been perceived as act of touch with the citizens demands for justice, security and dignity. This perception was particularly evident in Mali, and Burkina Faso where anti ECOWAS protest erupted following sanctions on the state, citizens saw the bloc not as a defender of democracy but as an enforcer of elite political interest. ECOWAS effectiveness in addressing the recent coups have exposed its structural weakness if not looked into properly it may risk becoming irrelevant in west Africa or as a regional body.¹⁴

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Economic community of west African state (ECOWAS) established in May 28, 1975 was born out of the collective ambition of west African states to promote economic integration and development. The organization has been instrumental in shaping the political and economic landscape of the west African region and also to foster unity in attainment of socio-economic progress through cooperation. ECOWAS as originally conceived as a regional economic integration body has increasingly evolved into a multifaceted political actor, particularly in the realm of peace and security.

The economic community of west African states as a regional guardian of democracy constitutional governance and political stability has been instrumental in restoring peace and security in west Africa. Through the activities of the ECOWAS monitoring group that was established in August 1990. The group was formed and established primarily to ensure peace and stability in the region. ECOWAS dedication for peace, security and political stability was evidence in their intervention in Liberia civil war in 1989 led by ECOWAS monitoring group consisting of the Nigeria, Ghanian and other west African country military troops which was deployed to enforce cease fire and create a condition for peace negotiations, protect the civilians and restore law and order. This ECOWAS intervention in Liberia actually set a precedent for regional peace keeping mission in west Africa and Africa at large. However, with the revised treaty in 1993

which was the formal inclusion of regional peace and security, it was necessitated by the need to promote security, peace and stability in the region in which the treaty provides the organization with formal legitimacy to undertake military interventions in member state.

The resurgence of military coup in west Africa between 2020 and 2023 has profoundly challenged the foundation, credibility, and operational capacities of economics community of west African states (ECOWAS). ECOWAS once seen and celebrated as a regional beacon for democracy promotion and integration now finds itself at a historical crossroads caught between upholding its normative democratic principles and navigating the complex political, security, and social realities of its member states ECOWASs swift responses to the coups, primarily through suspensions, sanctions and diplomatic pressure highlighted its commitment to constitutional order and the rule of law. However, the outcome of this interventions has been largely ineffective in reversing military takeovers instead, the bloc has faced increasing resistance from the very regimes it sought to discipline, as well as criticism from populations who felt marginalized by both local elites and ECOWAS leaderships.

The failure of this interventions, particularly in Niger, where ECOWAS threatened military force but failed to act decisively, exposed the limits of ECOWAS's enforcement capacity. These limits stem not only from logistical fragmentation among member states, as divergent national interests and ideological shifts prevented a unified response. Consequently, ECOWASs different power has weakened, emboldening

military actors elsewhere in west Africa region. Furthermore, the formation of the alliance of Sahel states (AES) comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger and also their formal withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2024 marked a tectonic shift in regional geopolitics. For the first time in its history, ECOWAS an active splintering of its membership. This border crises of legitimacy, where a growing member of the governments and citizens question whether E OWAS still represent their interests.

A key failure of ECOWAS has been its perceived inconsistency in upholding democratic norms while it condemns military coups, it has often turned a blind eye to constitutional manipulations, electoral malpractice, and third-termism by elected leaders of its member states. This double standard has weakened public confidence in the organization, as many west Africans associate ECOWAS with elite protectionism, rather than genuine democratic reforms. This implication for ECOWAS's future is significant. Its visions for a politically and economically integrated region, rooted in democratic governance, now faces existential threats without reforms that address both structural weakness and moral inconsistencies, ECOWAS may risk been relegated to irrelevances in a region rapidly redefining its political alignments and priorities. The growing influence of non-western actors like Russia, as well as the rise of populist nationalism further complicates the regional landscape.

Despite these challenges, this crisis also offers ECOWAS a moment of strategic renewal. If the organization can learn from its recent missteps, it can evolve into a more people centered flexible, and inclusive body. Such a transformation would require broad

consultation with civil society, engagement with youth and grassroots movements and a willingness to support institutional reforms in member states, than just a more enforcement of punitive responses. Moreover, ECOWAS must pivot from a primarily reactive model to one that emphasizes and prioritizes early warning, preventive diplomacy, and conflict sensitive development. By investing in governance monitoring systems, promoting transparency and electoral justice, and facilitating intra-region dialogue among civilians and militaries alike will be a key to preventing future unconstitutional power takeover.

In the long term, ECOWAS's survival and relevance will depend on its ability to balance principled leadership with practical engagement. It must uphold democratic standards while acknowledging and addressing the deep-seated grievances that fuel coups, such as insecurity, corruption, inequality, and marginalization in its member states. In rebuilding public trust and reforming from within ECOWAS, it can reposition itself as a legitimate and effective anchor of peace and integration in the region. It can also be noted and understood that the recent wave of coups in west Africa region is not just a political crisis, it is a wake-up call on ECOWAS as a regional body that holds democracy in high esteem and a strong voice against unconstitutional change of government. It has also exposed the fragility of democratic institutions in west Africa and the inadequacy of current regional mechanisms to protect them. Finally, for ECOWAS, this is not merely a challenge to confront, it is an opportunity to reinvent itself in the service of a more just, stable and democratic west Africa and in promotion of peace and security.

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