

**REGIONAL SECURITY AND MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA IN
THE 21ST CENTURY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out **FAVOUR ELOGHOSA OSAZEE** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for giving me the strength and wisdom to see it through to completion, and even throughout my stay in the University of Benin (UNIBEN). It is also dedicated to my parents who were there for me in the most supportive way a parent could be and for their love, support and guidance throughout my academic journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The political development of West African states, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century demonstrated that West African States have made significant efforts towards embracing democracy. This is to deter military involvement in civil and political matters. Nevertheless, military presence in African politics has been persistent. Claims can be made that the post-colonial state formation process in the continent which involved militarized liberation struggles through nationalist movements and in some cases negotiations, between African nationalists and colonizers, is responsible for the history of such military relationships in politics. However, this is not absolute because remote factors such as political instability, corruption, economic mismanagement are some of the basic factors to the rise of the military in political affairs. The transition from colonial administration to civilian rule never dictated that democracy would reign supreme as democracy was displaced by guns and uniforms at intervals due to the failure of the civilian governments to maintain and preserve the basics of democratic principles as well as establish favourable social conditions for the citizens.

The contemporary concept of coup d'état as the act of toppling an established political administration to install a new one has French roots. It could be traced back to the 18th century, when Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Revolutionary Directory from power on November 6, 1797 (18 Brumaire).¹ Thus, a coup d'état was described by Tuba Eldem as the sudden, often violent ousting of an established government by a small group.² Therefore, a military coup is a common instance of a political power grab carried out by the members of an armed forces against the nation's governing body. Also, Coup d'état according to military strategists Edward Luttwak is a forceful top-down overthrow of the current political order, usually carried out by a small group of armed professionals.³ Thompson defines a military coup as the removal or attempted removal of a state's chief executive by the regular armed forces through the use of threats.⁴

These definitions emphasize the fundamental characteristics of a military coup, particularly the use of force, by a segment of the military to overthrow the political system in place and gain power. The core responsibility of the military is to protect the existence of the state against external threats but the military has occasionally posed a security risk to their government while performing its primary function, this is as a result of their propensity to use force in the overthrow of governments.⁵

Africa and its contemporary challenges are frequently rooted in the past, coups are not a recent phenomenon in Africa. The African continent has experienced more military overthrows and political interventions in the 20th and 21st century than any other

continent.⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, West Africa arguably had a good amount of democratic transition through general elections which was aimed at building a good democratic institution. Due to the few instances of military coups in the region from early 2000 till 2015, coups were thought to be out of style.⁷ However, coups have become common in recent years, several military takeovers have occurred in West African countries like Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, Niger etc. Questions have frequently been raised regarding what triggered the recent increase in military activity in West Africa's political sphere. The growth of coups in West Africa can be ascribed to several factors, including political instability, soldiers' greed and grievances, slow economic growth, poverty, corruption within democratic regimes, unpopular governments that were established through electoral fraud, security issues and the rise of terrorist organizations. While many of these factors are domestic, foreign interference has also contributed to coups in West Africa. Some of them include colonial legacies, plots against governments and regimes that are opposed to the economic interests of foreign powerful states and financing of corrupt and indebted regimes.

The phenomenon of military coups has significantly shaped the political landscape of West Africa, particularly in nations such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger Republic, Guinea etc. As democratic institutions face threats through abrupt shifts in power, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has emerged as a force in addressing these challenges. Established to promote economic integration and

political stability, ECOWAS endeavors to ensure that member states adhere to democratic principles.⁸ The recent rise of coups in Mali highlights the urgent need for a strong and coordinated response to restore constitutional order and uphold democratic governance. This research will examine ECOWAS strategies and interventions in West Africa, assessing both the effectiveness of its measures and the broader implications for regional stability. Through this study, it becomes evident that the actions taken by ECOWAS are critical not only for the protection of democracy but also for the future of governance across West Africa

The research will investigate and study the response of ECOWAS to the military coups in West Africa as a means of maintaining regional security.. This first chapter is to create an understanding of the subject matter, that is, what is coups and factors that lead to coups in West Africa. The second chapter of the study will focus on the historical evolution of coups in West Africa. In the third chapter, the study examined ECOWAS policies and responses towards military coups in West Africa. In the fourth chapter, the study will concentrate on the causes, consequences and challenges against the elimination of military coups in Africa. This chapter will delve into the factors that led to coups in West African states as well as the nature and manifestations of the coups in the region. The fifth chapter will be the concluding chapter which sums the entire study, emphasis will be laid on the adequacy of ECOWAS response and reactions to the coups in West Africa.

Evaluating the West African region's progress toward democracy which has been undermined by the troubling resurgence of military coups in West Africa in the twenty-first century, this study aims to answer the question, “How has ECOWAS responded to the resurgence of military coups in West Africa?” Therefore, the study will examine the reasons why military personnel prefer to return to governmental positions over civilian leadership. Given the serious threat that military coups pose to regional democratic stability, this study will analyse ECOWAS’s role and responses to the military coups and countercoup attempts in West Africa in the 21st century.

The significance of the study on ‘Military Coups and Regional Security in West Africa in the 21st century West Africa’ lies in its contributions to academic knowledge, policy formulation, and regional stability. The study enriches literature on political studies, democracy promotion, and conflict resolution, by examining the complex dynamics that lead to coups in West Africa. Also, by analyzing the responses of ECOWAS to coups and the challenges it faces, the study will inform policymakers and regional organizations on the best methods to curb military coups. The findings will help to develop preventive measures, early warning systems, and diplomatic strategies to maintain democratic governance in the region. The study will also evaluate the effectiveness of ECOWAS’s actions in maintaining stability and recommend efficient strategies for rapid responses during political crises. This will foster long-term stability and sustainable development by averting conflicts stemming from coups. Finally, by

incorporating ideas from individuals and civil society, the research will ensure that the voices of those affected by military coups are included, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of ECOWAS operations. Ultimately, lessons learned from West Africa can guide regional organizations worldwide in addressing political crises and coup attempts effectively.

Scope of the Study

In order to maintain regional security, the study investigates ECOWAS's response to military coups in 21st-century West Africa, notably, coup troubled states like Mali, Burkina Faso etc.

The focus of the study will be the period when ECOWAS began to proactively address threats to regional peace and stability, with particular attention to the 21st century, that is from the year 2000 till date. This period marked a notable resurgence of coups in the region. To enrich the analysis, relevant historical context will also be provided.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to critically examine the responses of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) while the specific objectives of the study are;

1. To understand the background and historical evolution of military coups in West African States which has become a huge disturbance to the peace and stability of the region.
2. To identify and discuss the factors contributing to the resurgence of military coups in 21st century West Africa.
3. To examine the various approaches and procedures adopted by ECOWAS in response to military coups in West Africa.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness and impacts of ECOWAS responses to military coups in West Africa

Literature Review

Emma Birikorang, in *Coups d'état in Africa – a thing of the past?*, argues that unconstitutional changes of government and constitutional crises have increasingly infiltrated the political landscape of Africa. These events have occurred in nations such as Guinea, Mali, Guinea Bissau, and Togo. Organizations at Africa's regional and sub-regional levels are puzzled by this resurgence and hope to implement reactive measures to address this trend. The unanswered question remains: what accounts for this uptick in unlawful regime changes now that foreign influences and external entities can no longer be blamed? This policy brief evaluates the occurrence of unlawful regime changes in Africa, identifies their dangers and underlying causes, and proposes solutions for policymakers in the field.⁹

Falola I., in *Are coups back in Africa*, warns that this is a troubling trend for the continent's political evolution. The 20th and 21st centuries have seen an increase in military coups and political interventions across Africa. The alarming and contagious nature of these coups in West Africa has prompted numerous calls for action from the international community, particularly regional bodies like ECOWAS, to tackle this dire threat to democratic governance, security, and political stability in the area. In response to coups, ECOWAS has developed and adopted various strategies. These strategies include implementing economic sanctions, cutting diplomatic ties, suspending military leaders from the regional community, conducting joint military operations like ECOMOG, and engaging in mediation and negotiation efforts.¹⁰

According to Habiba and Ncube in *Political fragility in Africa: Are military coupes d'état a never ending phenomenon?*, it is asserted that each coup d'état possesses its own distinct history, motivations, and consequences. In Mali's situation, the military was primarily discontented with the government's management of the Tuareg-led insurrection in the northern region. Over the past five years, numerous other African countries, including Mauritania (in August 2008) and Guinea (in December 2008), have also been overtaken by armed forces. The research questions addressed in this study are crucial; they inquire into the sociopolitical factors contributing to Africa's volatility and the conditions that fostered discontent. Is there a discernible pattern of events that might help predict when military coups are likely to occur? The key question for this research is

whether there are measures that governments and regional or international organizations can undertake to reduce this risk. The questions and answers presented in this essay hold significant relevance for the research project.¹¹

In *ECOWAS Democratic Governance and the coups in Burkina Faso*, Olukayode Augustus analyzes the various mechanisms ECOWAS has implemented since 1991 to encourage democratic governance among member states while examining its role in safeguarding democratic regimes. He refers to and discusses the latest events in Burkina Faso, where military leaders led by Captain Ibrahim Traore took control due to the former military ruler's failure to tackle the rising Islamist insurgency and the nation's poverty crisis. The paper assesses ECOWAS's effectiveness in this area and concludes by highlighting lessons learned from both the successes and shortcomings of the ECOWAS experience.¹²

Nonetheless, Okon, Enoch Ndem's *ECOWAS Responses to the Conflicts in Mali 2012-2021* explores how ECOWAS responded to the Mali conflict from 2012 to 2021, aiming to elucidate why, despite its commitment and earlier accomplishments in the subregion, ECOWAS has struggled to resolve the Malian Conflict. The research reveals that ECOWAS's early successes in conflict resolution were hindered by the intense interest of Algeria and other neighboring nations in the turbulent northern Mali, along with France's involvement concerning its former colony. The paper proposes that ECOWAS initiated and took part in talks for a future peace agreement and that a timeline

for its execution should be established. Furthermore, the study indicates that ECOWAS has enhanced its capacity to respond to violent crises beyond smaller states and Anglophone communities in the region. ECOWAS should also tackle governance deficiencies in Mali and other regions within the subregion through a preliminary review process.¹³

According to Chilaka F.C. and Peter I.O., *Resurgence of Coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS*, this work investigates the concerning rise of military coups in West Africa over the past decade. It expresses serious worries about the effects of recent successful and failed coup attempts on the region's peace, security, and stability. The assertion that democracy is declining in the subregion is the root of this increasing anxiety. The paper points out that the subregion faces significant security, economic, and social challenges, such as growing poverty, sluggish economic growth, and leadership crises. These issues have led to problems such as banditry, terrorism, arms proliferation, and various criminal activities. Consequently, the coups have been linked to these challenges. ECOWAS, as a subregional body designed to promote political and economic development through integration, is unable to fulfill its objectives given the current climate of coups. The literature examines how these coups have influenced the capacity of the subregional organization to maintain democracy and promote peace. The paper argues that the existing strategy of employing sanctions in response to coups is ineffective because it tends to have a more severe impact on civilians than on the military.

This argument is based on the notion that citizens are casualties of a coup rather than participants, and the effects of sanctions can be detrimental to their survival. The study calls on ECOWAS to adopt a more proactive strategy in response to coups by supporting democracy in the subregion, promoting good governance, and addressing leadership challenges in West Africa.¹⁴

The ECOWAS protocol *A/Sp1/12/01 concerning Democracy and Good Governance*, which supplements *the protocol on conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security*, was established in 2001 as a reflection of a newfound collective political commitment among ECOWAS member states to advance crisis prevention and resolution and to achieve peace and security through the promotion of democracy and good governance. This protocol marks a crucial milestone in the political evolution of the subregion, which had long been characterized by significant military involvement in political decision-making. Since 2001, it has robustly argued that military rule and the military's engagement in politics are inconsistent with democracy and effective governance. The protocol symbolizes a pivotal moment in the political development of ECOWAS, serving as both a significant turning point and an essential element in the regional initiative to establish a system of democratic governance aimed at fostering social and economic progress in West Africa.¹⁵

Ultimately, the literature above indicates that a significant amount has been published regarding the nature of coups in West Africa and the responses of ECOWAS to

these events. From these writings, it is possible to infer that while individual authors and commentators on coups in West Africa express varied perspectives, there is a notable consistency in how ECOWAS responds to these situations. In this sense, the review of literature is crucial as it acts as a protective guide to the research topic by acknowledging the insights and opinions of other scholars on the issue.

Methodology

This study adopts a historical research methodology to examine how the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has responded to military coups in the 21st century. The historical method is appropriate because the research is rooted in the analysis of past and contemporary political events and policies of ECOWAS within a defined period. It focuses on identifying patterns of ECOWAS's interventions in some member states such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger that have been troubled by military coups. By tracing the evolution of ECOWAS's responses which notably include sanctions and mediation, the study situates each action within its political and regional context. The historical approach allows us to go beyond a simple description of events by examining the causes and consequences of ECOWAS's actions over time. This study focuses on understanding how past decisions, regional political developments, and experiences have shaped ECOWAS's present strategies toward military coups. Through this approach, the study reconstructs the sequence of events and interprets how earlier mechanisms influenced later ones. The historical method therefore provides a

deeper understanding of continuity and change in ECOWAS's policies, making it particularly suitable for research in International Studies and Diplomacy, where the evolution of institutions and their decisions must be analyzed within their political development patterns.

The research relies primarily on qualitative data obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data include official ECOWAS communiqués, treaty documents, summit declarations, and press releases that outline the organization's official stance and decisions on unconstitutional changes of government. Secondary sources comprise scholarly books, academic journals, conference papers, and credible internet articles that analyze ECOWAS's role in regional governance and security. Reports from international organizations such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), and International Crisis Group (ICG) are also used to provide comparative insights and external evaluations of ECOWAS's interventions. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring accurate citation of all sources, avoiding plagiarism, and respecting the intellectual contributions of previous scholars.

Chapterization

Chapter One: Background to the Study

The research work will run into five chapters. The first chapter being the background to the study which is a general summary of the research work. As an

introduction to the study, the chapter explores the historical introduction of coups to West African politics. It examines how post-colonial instability, economic mismanagement, and weak democratic frameworks have contributed to military interventions. The chapter outlines the statement of problem, scope of study, aim and objectives of the study, literature review, methodology and significance of the study. All these are focused on ECOWAS's role in addressing these challenges through policies aimed at promoting democracy and stability.

Chapter Two: Historical and Political Context of Military Coups in West Africa

This chapter offers a thorough historical examination of military coups in West Africa, specifically highlighting how the influences of colonialism, the Cold War, and the initial post-independence politics contributed to the rise of military governments. It follows the development of civil-military relations from the 1960s through the early 2000s, pinpointing patterns of military involvement and the factors that facilitated such interventions. Particular emphasis is placed on nations like Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo, which underwent numerous coups during the post-colonial period. The chapter further evaluates how the democratic transitions of the late 20th century raised hopes for political stability, only for the region to experience a renewed wave of coups in the 21st century. This analysis lays the groundwork for comprehending the ongoing patterns of political instability and the enduring conflict between military power and civilian leadership.

Chapter Three: Regional Security Mechanisms and Responses

This chapter looks at the transition of ECOWAS 'objective from an economic union to a political entity that addresses security and governance challenges in the region. It reviews major ECOWAS protocols such as the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression, the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. These policies prioritize democratic governance, conflict resolution, and sanctions for unconstitutional changes in government. The chapter emphasizes ECOWAS' commitment to promoting democratic principles and preventing political instability in the region.

Chapter Four: Causes, Consequences and Challenges against Military Coups in 21st Century West Africa

This chapter examines the fundamental reasons behind the recent surge in military coups across West Africa, highlighting both domestic and international factors. It explores how rampant insecurity (such as terrorism and insurgency), ineffective governance, corruption, fragile institutions, high youth unemployment, and manipulation of constitutions have diminished public trust in democratic governance. The chapter also looks into the socio-political implications of coups, such as interruptions in development, diplomatic isolation, regional instability, and humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, it outlines the difficulties encountered by regional and international bodies in averting

unconstitutional governmental changes, including concerns about state sovereignty, limited enforcement capacities, and inconsistent political resolve.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The concluding chapter presents a summary of the main findings from the earlier chapters and draws overarching conclusions regarding the link between regional security and the frequency of military coups in West Africa. It evaluates the efficacy of ECOWAS and other regional bodies in fostering democratic governance and maintaining political stability. Building on the study's insights, the chapter suggests practical recommendations for strengthening democratic institutions in West Africa, improving regional collaboration among states and regional bodies in the continent and across the globe, and tackling the fundamental causes of political unrest in the region. It emphasizes the importance and necessity for greater investment in good governance, civil-military reforms, inclusive political engagement of all citizens, and proactive diplomatic efforts aimed at protecting democratic institutions. The chapter concludes by highlighting the role of all political and non-political actors in protecting democracy in West Africa.

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CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY COUPS IN WEST
AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction

Military involvement in politics, (whether through direct rule by soldiers, known as military governments or regimes) has been a familiar feature in many countries, especially in the developing world. Globally, such military rule is seen as abnormal, yet in many African states it continues to pose a serious challenge to the growth of democracy.¹ This is not a new occurrence, as it has been an aged long phenomenon, for instance, in ancient Rome, military leaders sometimes seized political power. It was also

common during the feudal era and often appeared in moments of constitutional crises, including in Africa and other developing regions, especially after independence.²

In Europe, the 18th and 19th centuries saw a clearer separation between military and civilian authority, along with the development of professional and bureaucratic armed forces.³ This shaped the modern idea of military rule. Today, military interventions can still be found in both democracies and dictatorships. Because the military serves as the “national guard” of the state, it holds significant power, and when that power goes unchecked, it can escalate into a complete takeover of government institutions. Even in developed countries, while the armed forces are formally restricted to national defense and placed under civilian control, they still have influence over government policy.⁴

In Africa, military rule has been a major part of political life since independence in the 1950s. Many countries have repeatedly seen their civilian governments interrupted by military coups. These takeovers are often justified as a way to remove corrupt politicians, correct poor governance, or prevent instability and lawlessness. As a result, the military has often combined its traditional role of defending national borders with running governments.⁵ Globally, this is considered abnormal, but in Africa, military leaders have held political power for much of the last four decades.⁶

Therefore, the 21st century has seen West Africa cycle through moments of democratic optimism and abrupt reversals driven by coups. After the “third wave” of democratization in the 1990s, many states adopted multiparty constitutions, held

competitive elections, and acceded to regional protocols that condemned unconstitutional changes of government. Yet beginning in the 2010s and accelerating after 2020, military interventions returned to the center of West African politics. In several countries, soldiers justified their actions with a similar script such as; elected leaders had overstayed their mandates or violated constitutional norms, corruption and state fragility had deepened, jihadist violence was spreading, and citizens were frustrated that formal democratic procedures were not producing security or accountability.

Military Coups in Africa: Issues, Perspectives and the Roots

Over time, military coups have become a familiar and troubling feature of African politics. The removal of elected governments by the military has happened so often that in some circles it is almost treated as a normal way of changing regimes. This trend is deeply concerning for the political development of African countries. No other continent has experienced as many coups, both successful and failed as Africa, in both the 20th and 21st centuries.⁷

Coups in Africa began in the 1960s, soon after many countries gained independence, and since then, the continent has seen more than 200 attempts to overthrow governments. The main justification often given for these interventions is that the military steps in to restore political and economic stability. This includes responding to political instability, corruption, electoral disputes, armed insurgencies, authoritarian leaders who crush opposition, and other crises.⁸ Economically, the military sometimes claims it can manage resources better, create jobs, and improve living standards.⁹

However, critics like McBride argue that these claims are mostly false. They see coups as driven by the military's own greed and its desire to share in the wealth and privileges enjoyed by corrupt civilian leaders.¹⁰ From this perspective, military coups are less about saving a nation and more about personal enrichment. Scholars such as Luckham, Coleman, and Brice also argue that Africa's deep social divisions, especially ethnic loyalties make coups more likely. In many cases, soldiers pledge allegiance to their ethnic group rather than to the nation, and coup leaders often justify their actions with ethnic or tribal reasoning instead of national interest.¹¹

While some of the reasons given for military involvement in politics may reflect real problems such as the inability of many African governments to strengthen democracy and deliver policies that improve citizens' lives, the military itself has largely failed to bring meaningful political or economic change. In fact, military regimes have often made matters worse. They have deepened economic and political crises, restricted the activities of civil society, committed human rights abuses, carried out extrajudicial killings, and ignored constitutional rules.¹²

One major consequence of repeated coups in Africa, and particularly in West Africa, is the danger of democratic stagnation.¹³ Military governments, which are fundamentally at odds with democratic principles, typically suspend constitutions, dissolve parliaments, and create climates of fear that discourage civic participation. This undermines years of hard-won democratic progress.

The history of coups in Africa is long and troubled. In the early years after independence, coups quickly replaced civilian governments in most African nations. The first successful military coup in Africa happened in Egypt in July 1952, followed by Sudan in 1958. However, the 1966 overthrow of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah who was seen as the father of Pan-Africanism and a leading voice for African unity was a major turning point. It signaled the start of an era in which coups would dominate African politics for the next fifty years. From the 1960s into the 21st century, military takeovers became a common occurrence across the continent.¹⁴ Between the 1950s and 2010, Africa accounted for roughly 36.5% of all coups in the world.¹⁵ In some countries, coups even replaced other military governments, this happened when one group of soldiers ousted another for staying in power too long.

Ultimately, coups in Africa are both a cause and a symptom of failed governance. Their resurgence in West Africa today can be traced to the inability or unwillingness of many so-called democratic governments to uphold the rule of law, protect rights, and prevent authoritarianism. While the democratic wave of the 1990s promised reform, flawed elections and rising civilian impunity have, in some cases, made authoritarian practices worse instead of better. Recent events highlight this continuing trend. Between 2020 and 2023, countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger all experienced successful coups, often with broad public support at first. In many cases, citizens frustrated with corruption, insecurity, and poor governance saw the military as a quicker solution than slow-moving democratic institutions. However, over time, military rulers in

these countries have shown the same weaknesses and authoritarian tendencies they once criticized in civilian leaders.

Coups in West Africa: Historical Trends, Manifestations and Resurgence

The origins of military takeovers in West Africa may be linked to the post-independence era when colonial powers ceded their control over the region to newly independent states. The newly independent states struggled with the difficulties of nation-building, weak institutions and political inexperience. The lack of a strong democratic tradition fostered an environment that was favourable for the emergence of military coups as a feasible method of gaining power.

An early instance of a coup in West Africa occurred in Togo in 1963. Togo experienced its first military coup when President Sylvanus Olympio was overthrown and killed.¹⁶ This marked the series of coups that plagued the region. Subsequently, military coups followed in Nigeria in 1966 and Ghana in 1966 as well, and then other countries in the region followed suit as a trending means of governmental change in West Africa. Military coups became more common in West Africa in the 1960s and 1970s at the height of the Cold War. This was attributed to the quest of the superpowers to secure allies in the region and therefore extended support to different leaders and factions in support of their ideological objective.

The region accounts for 51.3% of coups in the early years of Africa's postcolonial phase between 1960 and 1969; from 1970 to 1989, 49.5% and surprisingly, from 1990 to 2010, 53.7%, even though this period was referred to as the decade of democratic wave in

Africa.¹⁷ Since military personnel continue to participate in the power struggle, West Africa has demonstrated that coups continue to be a constant component of the political environment of the region. Just as Suleiman noted that West Africa is aptly described as the “coup belt” of Africa.¹⁸

Although most countries in West Africa are described as democracies because they hold elections, protect fundamental human rights, operate multiparty systems, involve civil societies in governance, encourage broader political participation, and promote accountability and transparency. These democratic practices have not stopped military coups from happening. In recent years, the region has witnessed a resurgence of coups.¹⁹ Many of these recent military coups in West Africa have been met with public support and even applause. This trend has sparked a troubling question: Has democracy failed in West Africa? or is it even dying in the region?²⁰

Mushoriwa has expressed concern over this disturbing rise in coups and the reversal of democratic gains achieved since the 1990s, when Africa experienced its so-called fourth wave of democracy.²¹ The problem is highlighted by the occurrence of five coups across Africa in recent years, that is, four in West Africa and one in Sudan, North Africa. Even more worrying is how quickly these coups have happened and the way they seem to spread, echoing the patterns of the early 1960s.²²

Coups in West Africa, much like in other parts of Africa, reflect the deeper problems of weak governance across the continent. Many states in the region struggle with poor leadership, failing economies, widespread poverty, a rapidly growing youth

population facing massive unemployment, insecurity, flawed elections, and a lack of accountability, transparency, and respect for the rule of law. According to Mushoriwa, these challenges have created fertile ground for the resurgence of military coups in West Africa. In fact, of the five coups that recently took place in Africa, four occurred within the sub-region: Mali (twice in August 2020 and May 2021), Chad (April 2021), Guinea (September 2021), and Burkina Faso (2022).²⁴

In Mali, Colonel Assimi Goïta led the first coup in August 2020. The military capitalized on public anger over a disputed parliamentary election and the government's failure to protect citizens from armed groups and extremists. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was widely blamed for corruption, poor governance, and insecurity. Many Malians actually welcomed the coup, hoping it would bring change.²⁵ However, in May 2021, just nine months later, the military arrested interim civilian leaders and Goïta declared himself president. While many citizens still saw the military as incorruptible, civil society groups and the international community worried about the lack of a clear plan for democratic transition. Originally, elections were promised for 2022, but this was delayed to 2026. After pressure from ECOWAS and other international actors, the junta agreed to a 24-month transition timeline.

In Niger, an attempted coup occurred in March 2021, just days before the inauguration of President Mohamed Bazoum. The tension followed disputed election results, with Bazoum declared winner with 55.75% of the vote against opposition leader Mahamane Ousmane. Ousmane rejected the outcome, claiming victory, but the

constitutional court upheld Bazoum's win.²⁶ The coup attempt, however, underscored Niger's fragile stability. At the same time, jihadist violence killed over 130 people in the west of the country, further fueling fears of instability.²⁷ The African Union, ECOWAS, and Algeria strongly condemned the attempted takeover, emphasizing the need to safeguard Niger's fragile democracy in the face of terrorism and ethnic conflicts.

In Guinea, the ripple effects of regional coups became evident in September 2021, when President Alpha Condé was ousted by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya and his Special Forces. Doumbouya declared the coup the people's mission and a necessary intervention.²⁸ He justified the coup by accusing Condé of becoming increasingly authoritarian, especially after changing the constitution to seek a third term. Economic mismanagement and widespread corruption, reflected in poor infrastructure and weak public services, further fueled discontent. Surveys showed that a majority of Guineans believed corruption had worsened in recent years.²⁹ When the coup happened, many citizens celebrated, viewing the military as saviors against authoritarianism and bad governance. However, regional and international organizations, including ECOWAS, condemned the coup and imposed sanctions on the new military leadership.³⁰

In Burkina Faso, a coup took place in January 2022 when soldiers, frustrated by the government's inability to contain worsening jihadist violence, removed President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. The country had been facing relentless attacks from extremist groups, leading to thousands of deaths and mass displacement. Public trust in the government had collapsed, with many citizens angry over insecurity, corruption, and lack

of effective leadership. The military, led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, claimed it had no choice but to step in and restore order. While some Burkinabè citizens welcomed the takeover as a necessary step, others expressed concern that yet another coup reflected the region’s growing instability. By September 2022, Damiba himself was ousted in a second coup led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, highlighting deep divisions within the military and the country’s fragile political environment.³¹

Between 2010 and 2022, a key question has resurfaced. Are military coups a relic of the past, or are they now an unavoidable part of politics in Africa and West Africa? This period was supposed to represent a decade of deepening democracy across the continent, yet coups have dotted the political landscape. Unfortunately, holding elections has not translated into better governance or improved living standards. Suleiman and Onapajo noted that in just the last decade, there have been more than 40 coups in Africa and half of them in West Africa alone.³² This rising wave of coups poses a serious challenge to ECOWAS as the region’s primary political and economic body. History shows that coups can spread like wildfire, with far-reaching consequences for democratic progress and regional stability. They often trigger political unrest, economic decline, and social division. As Yabi observed, frequent coups across West Africa also carry enormous financial and human costs for ECOWAS.³³

Table 1: Timeline of 21st Century Military Coups in West Africa

Year	Country	Causes of the Coup	Coup leader(s)	Targeted Government	Nature of the Coup
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2003	Guinea-Bissau	Allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and unpaid salaries of soldiers	Gen. Veríssimo Correia Seabra	President Kumba Ialá	Successful
2005	Togo	Political crisis after death of long-time leader Gnassingbé Eyadéma	Military leadership backing Faure Gnassingbé	Transitional civilian Government	Successful
2008	Guinea	Death of President Lansana Conté; frustration with corruption and poor governance	Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara	Civilian government Lansana Conté	Successful
2010	Niger	President Mamadou Tandja's attempt to extend his term beyond limits	Salou Djibo	Mamadou Tandja's government	Successful
2012	Mali	Poor handling of Tuareg rebellion and insecurity	Capt. Amadou Sanogo	President Amadou Toumani Touré	Successful
2012	Guinea-Bissau	Frustration over elections	Maj. Gen. Mamadu	Interim government	Successful

		and alleged corruption	Ture Kuruma	Raimundo Pereira & Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior	
2015	Burkina Faso	Attempted reversal of 2014 uprising that ousted Blaise Compaoré	Gen. Gilbert Diendéré	Transitional government of Michel Kafando	Failed
2020 (Aug)	Mali	Anger over corruption, mismanagement, and insecurity	Col. Assimi Goïta & CNSP	President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta	Successful
2021 (May)	Mali	Dispute over transitional arrangements	Col. Assimi Goïta	Transitional government of Bah Ndaw & Moctar Ouane	Successful
2021 (Sept)	Guinea	Corruption, constitutional manipulation for 3rd term	Col. Mamady Doumbouya	President Alpha Condé	Successful
2022 (Jan)	Burkina Faso	Worsening jihadist violence, insecurity, public anger	Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Damiba	President Roch Marc Kaboré	Successful
2022 (Sept)	Burkina Faso	Continued insecurity and poor governance under	Capt. Ibrahim Traoré	Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Damiba	Successful

		Damiba			
2023 (July)	Niger	Allegations of poor governance, insecurity, corruption	Gen. Abdourahama ne Tchiani	President Mohamed Bazoum	Successful
2023 (Aug)	Guinea-Bissau	Political crisis and instability	Unidentified Military faction	President Umaro Sissoco Embaló	Failed

Source: Stacey Sam, “A timeline of coups in West Africa since 2000” *Asaase Radio*, September 25, 2023. Accessed August 17, 2025 at <https://www.asaaseradio.com/a-timeline-of-coups-in-west-africa-since-2000/>

Table 1 shows the chronological record of military coups in West Africa between 2003 and 2023. It detailed the countries affected by the coup phenomenon, the causes, the coup leaders, the governments overthrown, and if the coup was a success or failure in each state. Therefore, it is a tabular expression of the pattern of political instability in several West African countries such as Guinea, Mali, Togo, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Guinea-Bissau, where the military seized power (or tried to) due to issues like corruption, poor governance, constitutional manipulation, insecurity, and economic hardship.

Conclusion

The history of political and military coups in West Africa in the 21st century shows that this is not just an occasional problem but a recurring pattern shaped by deep political, economic, and social issues. While coups were common in the 1960s and 1970s, their recent return in the 2000s and 2010s proves that the root causes, like poor governance, corruption, weak institutions, and public frustration have not been resolved.

The examples of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and others reveal that coups often gain public support at first because people lose faith in civilian governments. However, the long-term effects tend to be harmful, leading to more instability and slowing down democratic growth. This chapter shows that in the 21st century, West Africa is still struggling to break away from the cycle of coups, and understanding their historical patterns is key to finding lasting solutions.

Therefore, the persistence and resurgence of coups in West Africa underscore a sobering reality. Democracy in the region remains fragile, vulnerable to both internal mismanagement and external contagion. While the stated justifications for the coups are unending corruption, restoring order, and fixing governance, history has shown that military regimes rarely deliver sustainable progress. Instead, they tend to entrench new cycles of instability and erode public trust in democratic systems. For West Africa to break free from this recurring pattern, leaders must address the underlying governance failures, ensuring fair elections, economic opportunities, and accountable institutions, while regional bodies like ECOWAS strengthen preventive mechanisms to deter unconstitutional changes of power. Without these reforms, the region risks remaining caught in an endless loop of failed democracies and repeated military takeovers.

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CHAPTER THREE

REGIONAL SECURITY MECHANISMS AND RESPONSES

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which was founded as a regional economic body has redefined its expanding roles through the lens of diplomacy and policy to accommodate emerging political objectives. This is motivated by the need to broaden the sociopolitical horizon of the sub-regional organization (ECOWAS) to include a variety of interests, especially to foster and enhance the political environment for democratic governance, to promote a solid corporate governmental pattern among member states and essentially to ensure consistency in the internationally

recognized governance pattern in Africa as set forth by the constitutions. As a result, all well-intentioned supporters of democracy and patriotism alike cease to give a place in their thoughts and minds to the developing trends of military occupation and interference in governments with the force of rifles. Hence, the pressing need and unwavering pursuit of strong political cooperation within the regional organization will enhance a system of government administration that is legally acceptable in all of its components and features.

The 1990 decade saw ECOWAS change roles from economic concerns to political issues, this was spurred by the responsibility to find solutions to the armed conflicts and other political crises that undermined the peace and security within the community. In the late nineties, ECOWAS operations were mostly focused on putting an end to civil hostilities comprising several armed rebel groups and the government of one of the member states. Liberia was under armed attack and the Assembly of Heads of States and Government was stepping in to help. The goal was to uphold the legitimacy of the current president and government not necessarily to uphold the political ideals that the community had embraced such as the observance of democratic principles.¹ Therefore, the conflicts in the region, most especially the crisis in Liberia were to push the regional organization into an eminent change in objectives. As noted by Loua and Zoumenou on the changing role of ECOWAS from economic to political roles “The Civil war that broke out in Liberia (December 1989) forced ECOWAS to review its initial position on regional economic integration based exclusively on economic cooperation. The military intervention by its newly created cease-fire monitoring group (ECOMOG) was the result

of a better understanding of the link between security and economic development. While ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia signified a widening of the organization's focus to issues of peace and security, several practical steps implemented subsequently consolidated it".²

So, in 1991, ECOWAS began to lay priority to measures that would ensure the inculcation of political principles into the community. This was to curb the outbreak of civil strife and the occurrence of military interference or overthrow in states. In July 1991, members agreed to a declaration of political principles committing them to uphold democracy and the rule of law. The limited scope of this declaration resulted in a further review of the treaty. The 1993 Revised Treaty was the result of the further review of the ECOWAS founding treaty. The community also adopted a mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, security and democratic stability in 1999. Another supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance was adopted in December 2001. The protocol made a clear connection between the desire to develop strong political principles such as the ECOWAS opposition to any attempt to gain political authority through unconstitutional means and the ability to exercise actions in the case of human rights violation. The goal is to effect conflict prevention and resolution as well as the removal of unconstitutional regimes.

ECOWAS Policies on Military Coups d'etat in West Africa

ECOWAS and Conflict: From Economic Objective to Political Intervention (1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression and 1981 Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance and Defense)

The first paragraph of the 1975 ECOWAS treaty (Lagos) captured the basic objective for the establishment of the Economic Union. It reads “It shall be the aim of the community to promote co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly in the fields of industry, transports, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and the social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people’s, of increasing and maintaining economic stability of fostering relations among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent”³ This implies that ECOWAS's priority or goal among others is to facilitate regional economic integration by eliminating custom duties between member states and ensuring “free movement of persons, services and capital”⁴ The treaty framework also established institutions that will facilitate the effective and smooth functioning of the community: such as the Authority of Heads of State and Governments, the Council of ministers, Executive Secretary and the Tribunal of the Community. To complement these institutions are technical and specialized commissions such as;

- The Trade, customs, immigration, monetary and payments Commission
- The Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources Commission
- The Social and Cultural Affairs Commission.

The Tribunal of the Community is a distinguished institution of the community. Its main objective as set out by the treaty was to settle disputes between member states. However, the tribunals' major limitation was that the treaty did not specify the course of action to be taken in the event of a conflict within or between states. The civil crisis such as the coup d'état which was becoming prevalent in the region inspired the community to consider the addition of a security framework to the organization.

The first of these policies that was established within the organization as a security framework was the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression adopted on 22 April 1978 in Lagos, Nigeria. The Protocol provides that member states should desist from the use or threat of force towards any member states and that conflicts should be solved through peaceful means in manners consistent with the charters of the United Nations.⁵ Importantly, Article 5(2) of the protocol on Non-Aggression provides a clear role and responsibility for ECOWAS in cases of violent conflicts by providing procedures to be followed in these cases. It states that "any dispute which cannot be settled peacefully among member states, shall be referred to a committee of the authority. In the event of failure of settlement by the aforementioned committee, the dispute shall finally go to the Authority."⁶ This pact can only be regarded as idealistic since there was no systematic way of putting it into effect.

However, in 1981, the protocol relating to Mutual Assistance on Defense (MAD) received ratification. The protocol further clarifies the collective security arrangement that henceforth should guide member states. Therefore, it authorized members of

ECOWAS to use force as long as it is not “incompatible with the aims of the United Nations” and has been approved by ECOWAS authority.⁷ This was done to maintain peace and Security because a threat to one state constituted a threat to the entire region. In addition, the ECOWAS authority was entrusted through the protocol with new powers, functions and institutional structures as regards peace and security. These powers included the power to decide on armed intervention as specified in Articles 13 and 15 of the protocol relating to Mutual Assistance on Defense.⁸ It also established the Authority on the task of creating an allied armed force of the community and looking into the problems of peace and security in the region. The protocol institutionalized Defence structures such as the Defence Council and Defence Committee.⁹ Sadly, due to the community’s excessive emphasis on averting external threats rather than preventing internal and civil strife, these institutions were partly administered. This would be quickly realized by ECOWAS when coup d’etats and civil conflicts became so prevalent in the region.

Historical political events in West Africa showed that political situations continued to deteriorate in the region. It was not until the first civil war in Liberia that ECOWAS had to transition into a peace and security community proper. This was spurred as a result of the level of human rights abuse and suffering in Liberia and the lack of interest on the part of the international community in ending the conflict.

1991 Declaration of Political Principles and the 1993 Revised ECOWAS Treaty

The civil wars starting in Liberia (1989) and Sierra-Leone (1991) resulted in the spread of refugees, widespread insecurity and humanitarian crisis in the region. Although these conflicts are internal it required ECOWAS to devise means that would enable it to intervene to prevent the proliferation of insecurity in the region. The subsequent result was the adoption of the 1991 Declaration of Political Principles.

The 1991 Declaration of Political was an instrument that outlines a set of principles that are meant to inform member states as well as emphasize the need and importance of mutual adherence to peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for human rights.¹⁰ After weeks of unproductive means to end the civil war in Liberia by the ECOWAS standing mediation Committee, ECOWAS established ECOMOG (ECOWAS ceasefire monitoring Group). It is worthy to note that the establishment of ECOMOG was a unilateral act of the organization, that is, without the permission of the United Nations Security Council. This action was taken because of the imminent need to curb human rights violations in the country. The formation of ECOMOG would start the transition of ECOWAS into a security community.

The lessons learned from the ECOMOG experience informed the community of the need to accelerate the process of regional integration and to address the issues of civil strife such as military inclusion in political affairs. Civil wars, and human rights abuse in some member states which is preventing the integration Agenda. To effect a change, the community needed a pivotal legal and normative instrument, thus the organization began the process of revising its foundational treaty and in 1993, the revised ECOWAS treaty

was adopted.¹¹ The revised treaty was far more comprehensive than the previous one. There was a power shift with the ratification of this treaty; each state within the community was to relinquish some of its political freedom for ECOWAS to function as a supranational organization. This was evidenced in the preamble of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty which reads that the Heads of State and Governments of ECOWAS are “convinced that the integration of the member states into a viable regional community may demand the partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the community within the context of a collective political will”¹² Article 4 on fundamental principles of the Revised Treaty which hitherto was absent in the original 1975 ECOWAS treaty is also important to the recent objective of the community. In this article, member states affirmed to adhere to a certain number of principles. Of utmost importance to this study is Article 4(J) where member states affirmed the “Promotion and Consolidation of a democratic system of governance in each member state as envisaged by the Declaration of Political principles adopted in Abuja on 6th July, 1991”¹³

Also, Chapter X of the revised Treaty contains Article 58(2) which established mechanisms for cooperation, prevention and resolution of conflicts within the region. The significance of this article is that for the first time in the organization's history, it addressed regional security issues. As illustrated in paragraphs C, F and G, member states provided for the use of mediation, conciliation, good offices in the peaceful settlement of disputes, the establishment of an observation system for regional security and democratic elections at the request of member states.¹⁴

1999 Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Resolution, Prevention, Management, Peace-Keeping and Security

The revision of the ECOWAS treaty and establishment of the Conflict Prevention and Management Mechanism did not eliminate the occurrence of civil strife in the region. Therefore, ECOWAS set out to pursue a more comprehensive legal instrument that would inform the organization's effort to address the political crisis. Thus, in December 1999, the protocol on the mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security (Protocol on the Mechanism) was adopted in Lome Togo.¹⁵ With significant emphasis on the organization's effort to achieve preventive diplomacy and mediation activities, the protocol established an additional regional peace and security structure to be added to the existing one. Article 2 of the protocol on the Mechanism defined its key principles. Paragraph C emphasizes the “promotion and consolidation of a democratic government as well as democratic institutions in each member state.”¹⁶

Additionally, the protocol specifies the requirements for the implementation of the Mechanism.¹⁷ It called for the release of the Mechanism in the event of aggression or armed conflict between member states, in the event of an internal crisis that poses a serious risk to regional peace and security. Also, it can be implemented in the event of grave human rights violations and the rule of law and in the event of toppling or attempted overthrow of a democratic government or any other security situation as may be determined by the Mediation and Security Council.

2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security

ECOWAS' determination to continuously guide its members was effected through new political policies and well-structured institutional standards to promote peace and security in the region. The efforts of establishing a well-defined political standard for the organization led to the formulation of another instrument on December 21, 2001, known as the supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.¹⁸ This is meant to complement the principles of the Mechanism set out in the 1999 protocol on the Mechanism. The supplementary protocol establishes an evident connection between the respect for democracy and good governance principles in member states which is an improvement in the security climate within the West African region. The protocol outlines the fundamental constitutional principles shared by all ECOWAS members such as the separation of powers between the three arms of Government (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary), the prohibition of unconstitutional change of government and the use of illegitimate methods to seize and hold onto power. Also, the protocol underlines that all powers in the region must be acquired through democratic elections. It places a strong emphasis on the idea of zero tolerance for the obtaining or maintaining of power through illegal means and upholds the primacy of democratically elected governments.

The supplementary protocol also provides electoral principles to be followed by member states as well as a support role and observation status for ECOWAS during elections in member states. For example, Article 2 and 3 of the supplementary protocol, provides that “No substantial modification shall be made to electoral laws in the last 6 months before elections except with the consent of a majority of political actors” and that “bodies responsible for organizing elections shall be independent and/or neutral and shall have the confidence of all political actors”¹⁹ At the request of member states, the protocol provides that ECOWAS can provide support and assistance and conduct of election in any form necessary, so long as the democratic principles are upheld.

Finally, the supplementary protocol provided for sanctions to be exercised by the Authority of Heads of States and Governments against a member state where democratic principles have been truncated or democratic regimes have been toppled and member states with cases of human rights violations. The sanctions may include refusal to support candidates presented by erring member states for elective positions in international organizations, suspensions of the country and leaders from all ECOWAS governing bodies. However, the supplementary protocol also provided that “ECOWAS will continue to monitor, encourage and support efforts made by member states suspended to return to normalcy and constitutional order.”²⁰

2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)

This instrument was adopted by the Mediation and Security Council of ECOWAS in January 2008. Although this instrument did not explicitly address military coups, it is a framework that seeks to address conflict and security situations in the region. The members of the mediation and Security Council adopted this framework as a reference point for ECOWAS member states to strengthen human security in the region since the causes of conflicts and socio-political crises are multiple and are not detected on time.

The ECPF aims to strengthen the human security architecture by including conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives. Some of the components of the ECPF are an early warning system, preventive diplomacy, Democracy and Political Governance, Security Governance etc. The ECPF remains a major action plan of the community to safeguard the West African States from threats and violence. The ECPF also stated that the “distribution of roles and responsibilities between ECOWAS and member states, between member states and Civil societies as well as between ECOWAS and external partners is weak, resulting in the utilization of limited instruments, interventions and late responses to the crisis”²¹ The importance of this is that it addressed the need for cooperation, preparedness and awareness between the member states to tackle civil strife and insecurity.

The instruments discussed in this chapter are policy frameworks by ECOWAS to tackle political instability in the region. The organization made plain the circumstances under which it would intervene, establishing that it would respond to humanitarian disasters, threats to peace and security for the sub-region and disorder occurring in the

wake of threats to a democratically elected government. These factors have their foundation in The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security which was adopted in October 1999. It is important to establish that these instruments uphold the respect for democratic governments. It created room for intervention in the case of illegitimate overthrow of democratic regimes and provided necessary sanctions as well for erring member states. Overall, it is expected that the security framework and sanctions will compel the illegitimate regimes into submission. Following the December 2022 pronouncement of ECOWAS which considered military coup d'état in whatever form a threat to collective security, it compelled the community to apply intervention in such states.

ECOWAS Response to Coups in West Africa

Although ECOWAS faces challenges in making its member states follow democratic rules and good governance, the organisation has been consistent in publicly opposing coups in the region. However, its ability to stop or reverse unconstitutional changes in leadership is limited. The main tools ECOWAS uses as coup response mechanisms are sanctions and suspensions, dialogue and negotiation, and threat of military intervention. But recently, these measures have not stopped military leaders from seizing power through coups. In Mali, for example, sanctions hurt ordinary people more than the leaders behind the coup. A better option might be targeted sanctions on individuals involved in the coup. However, this is difficult because ECOWAS itself struggles with issues of favoritism and bias among its leaders, who are also heads of state.

This lack of neutrality often makes the organisation's decisions weak and ineffective. ECOWAS also often demands a clear timetable for elections as a way to restore governance. But in many cases, this has not produced long-lasting stability. A better approach may be to first create an inclusive peace and mediation process that addresses the concerns of both military and civilian actors. This could help elections take place in a more stable environment.

Imposition of Sanctions

The first and most immediate tool of ECOWAS against military coups has been the imposition of sanctions. These measures are intended to isolate coup leaders diplomatically, cut them off from financial resources, and exert economic and political pressure to compel a return to civilian governance. Sanctions often include the suspension of the country from ECOWAS decision-making organs, closure of borders, trade restrictions, freezing of financial flows through the West African Central Bank, and travel bans or asset freezes on junta members.

Following the 2012 overthrow of the then Malian President, Amadou Toumani Touré by junior officers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, ECOWAS swiftly suspended Mali from its governing bodies and imposed economic sanctions. Borders were closed, trade was halted, and access to regional financial systems was blocked.²² These sanctions were deeply felt in Mali, a landlocked state dependent on trade with neighbors, and played a major role in compelling the junta to sign a Framework Agreement with

ECOWAS, which paved the way for civilian interim leadership which was headed by the president of the parliament Diocounde Traore.²³

Sanctions were used again in Mali's 2020 coup, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. ECOWAS closed borders, suspended financial transactions, and threatened wider penalties unless the junta committed to a short transition.²⁴ These measures pressured the coup leaders into agreeing to an 18-month transition framework. However, when the same officers staged another coup in May 2021, ECOWAS escalated sanctions by freezing assets and imposing travel bans on the military leaders, while demanding a clearer timetable for elections.²⁵ Although sanctions were meant to enforce compliance, their impact was limited by Mali's ability to seek alternative partnerships, particularly with non-Western powers.

In the 2021 Guinean coup, where Colonel Mamady Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Condé, ECOWAS suspended the country and quickly imposed targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes on coup leaders and their families.²⁶ The aim was to pressure the junta into committing to a quick transition. However, Guinean leaders argued that ECOWAS sanctions ignored the widespread domestic support for Condé's removal, thereby complicating enforcement. The Burkina Faso coups of 2022 reveal another dimension of sanctions. When soldiers first toppled President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in January, ECOWAS suspended the country and announced targeted sanctions.²⁷ Yet, these were applied less strictly than in Mali, given Burkina Faso's fragile humanitarian situation and its ongoing battle with jihadist insurgents. Following a

second coup in September, ECOWAS again maintained the previous suspension but avoided heavy economic restrictions, fearing they would worsen insecurity and popular suffering.

The Niger coup of July 2023 marked perhaps the strongest sanction response in ECOWAS history. After President Mohamed Bazoum was detained by his presidential guard, ECOWAS immediately suspended Niger, froze all financial transactions, halted trade, and imposed electricity cuts from Nigeria which was a critical blow since Nigeria supplies about 70% of Niger's power.²⁸ These measures plunged Niger into economic hardship, creating inflation, shortages, and financial isolation. By tightening sanctions so severely, ECOWAS sought to send a message that coups would no longer be tolerated.

Sanctions have therefore become the most common and consistent tool used by ECOWAS to respond to military takeovers in West Africa. They are designed to show unity among member states and to send a clear message that unconstitutional changes of government will not be accepted. In many cases, these sanctions demonstrate ECOWAS' political will to defend democratic values and discourage other would-be coup plotters. However, their actual success in reversing coups or forcing juntas to quickly hand back power has been limited. Often, military leaders find ways to adapt to the restrictions rather than give in to external pressure. Some juntas consolidate their control by tightening their grip on state institutions, silencing opposition voices, and strengthening loyalty within the armed forces. Others appeal to nationalist or anti-foreign sentiments,

portraying ECOWAS sanctions as foreign interference that punishes ordinary citizens rather than leaders. This tactic allows them to gain public sympathy and frame themselves as protectors of national sovereignty. In addition, many juntas look beyond ECOWAS for new allies. Some turn to non-Western powers such as Russia, China, or Turkey, who are willing to offer economic, political, or security support without attaching democratic conditions. Others rely on internal resources, alternative trade networks, or informal economies to survive the impact of sanctions. As a result, instead of forcing a return to constitutional order, sanctions sometimes harden the resolve of coup leaders, prolonging transitions and creating more instability.

Dialogue and Negotiation

Despite its use of sanctions, ECOWAS has always combined pressure with dialogue and negotiation. Mediation reflects ECOWAS's preference for political solutions and its recognition that sustainable peace requires agreement rather than coercion. The bloc usually appoints mediators, often respected former heads of state, to negotiate transitional roadmaps with coup leaders, political parties, and civil society. In the 2012 coup in Mali, ECOWAS appointed Burkina Faso's then-president Blaise Compaoré as mediator. The outcome was the "Framework Agreement" which allowed for the appointment of an interim civilian president and a timeline for elections.²⁹ Although this arrangement was imperfect, it showed ECOWAS's ability to blend sanctions with dialogue to produce compromise. Following the 2020 coup in Mali,

ECOWAS deployed former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan as special envoy. Through dialogue, Jonathan and other mediators convinced the junta to accept a transitional charter and an 18-month timeline for elections.³⁰ However, disagreements later emerged as the military extended its hold on power, showing how fragile negotiated arrangements can be when juntas resist external pressure.

In the 2021 coup in Guinea, ECOWAS mediation aimed at convincing Colonel Doumbouya to shorten the proposed transition period. High-level delegations visited Conakry, pressing for the release of Alpha Condé and an accelerated roadmap towards democratic regime. After negotiations, Guinea eventually accepted a 24-month transition, though critics saw this as too long and a victory for the junta.³¹ Burkina Faso also witnessed ECOWAS negotiation efforts after the 2022 January coup, ECOWAS mediators visited Ouagadougou to ensure that the junta committed to a transition timetable. Following talks, the military regime agreed to a 24 months transition plan.³² When another coup occurred in September 2022, ECOWAS repeated dialogue efforts, and despite the uncertainty, it managed to secure renewed commitments from Captain Ibrahim Traoré's junta to respect the existing timeline.

The Niger coup of 2023, however, demonstrated the limits of negotiation. ECOWAS sent several delegations, including one led by former Nigerian head of state Abdulsalami Abubakar and accompanied by Sultan Sa'ad Abubakar. These efforts were rejected by the junta, which refused to meet the envoys.³³ ECOWAS found itself unable

to open channels of communication, as Niger's new rulers positioned themselves against regional and international pressure. Overall, dialogue and negotiation remain central to ECOWAS's playbook. They reflect the bloc's emphasis on diplomacy and political settlements. Yet, as the Niger case shows, mediation only works when juntas are willing to cooperate. Where they are not, dialogue can stall or fail entirely.

In conclusion, examining these cases together reveals a clear pattern in ECOWAS responses to coups in the 21st century. Following the guidelines of the protocols, sanctions are almost always imposed first which is designed to punish and isolate coup leaders. Negotiation follows, with mediators attempting to create compromise solutions. Military threats are used sparingly, often as a last resort to emphasize the seriousness of ECOWAS's demands. These responses show both strengths and weaknesses because on one hand, ECOWAS has built strong regional norms against coups and developed mechanisms like sanctions and mediations that send a strong message that unconstitutional rule will not be tolerated. On the other hand, the persistence of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger show the limits of ECOWAS's influence. Sanctions can backfire by hurting civilians more than elites, negotiations depend on junta cooperation, and military intervention is often politically or militarily impractical. Nevertheless, ECOWAS remains one of the most active regional organizations in Africa in resisting coups. Its responses demonstrate a commitment to upholding democracy, even if outcomes are not always immediate or successful.

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CHAPTER FOUR
CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES AGAINST MILITARY
COUPS IN 21ST CENTURY WEST AFRICA

Introduction

“Gunfire and clashes that erupted in the capital of Guinea-Bissau this week were an 'attempted coup,'” according to President Umaro Sissoco Embaló while addressing the press on the failed coup that took place in Guinea-Bissau.¹ This statement referencing the turbulent events of December 2023, as well as other myriads of successful and attempted coups serves as a grim reminder that the phenomenon of the military coup d'état remains a potent, destructive, and persistent threat to democracy and stability in West Africa.

The early 21st century was once proclaimed as an era where the political landscape of Africa would be increasingly defined by democratic consolidation and good governance. Yet, the reality in West Africa, has dramatically drifted away from this optimistic projection. The past two decades have witnessed a troubling resurgence of military interventions, reversing hard-won democratic gains and embedding a cycle of instability.² The re-emergence of military coups has dominated governance debates and raised concerns among stakeholders about the effectiveness of regional institutions in

sustaining democracy in recent times. These military interventions have been attributed to deep-seated grievances, systemic corruption, and external pressures that characterize democratic governance on the continent.³ The growth of coups in West Africa can be ascribed to several factors, including political instability, soldiers' greed and grievances, slow economic growth, poverty, corruption within democratic regimes, unpopular governments that were established through electoral fraud, security issues and the rise of terrorist organizations. While many of these factors are domestic, foreign interference has also contributed to coups in West Africa. Some of them include colonial legacies, plots against governments and regimes that are opposed to the economic interests of foreign powerful states and financing of corrupt and indebted regimes. Aside from the frequent military coups in West Africa, the region has also seen several leaders manipulate constitutions to secure third terms or indefinite presidential mandates. Over the years, problems such as controversial re-elections and rampant corruption have become common features of governance. In 2015, ECOWAS discussed a proposal to ban third terms for presidents, but it was abandoned after opposition from the leaders of Togo and The Gambia, who had both extended their own tenures by amending national constitutions.⁴ This situation exposes a major weakness in the region's democracy, which is often limited to the holding of elections, regardless of whether those elections are free or fair. As long as a vote occurs, leaders claim democratic legitimacy, even when they violate constitutional principles. This contradiction is partly linked to the structure of ECOWAS itself, where the chairperson must be a sitting head of state, regardless of how

that leader came to power. In some cases, even leaders who seized power through coups have been allowed to occupy this position, thereby legitimizing their rule. A clear example is Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, who succeeded his father, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, in 2005 after the latter ruled for thirty-eight years. Faure's rise to power was widely seen as a coup, since he was declared president by the ruling party rather than through an election. The move sparked massive protests in which more than 1,000 people were reportedly killed by security forces.⁵ In response, ECOWAS suspended Togo and imposed sanctions, including travel bans and an arms embargo.⁶ However, after Faure Gnassingbé won the following presidential election, ECOWAS described it as free and fair and the sanctions were lifted. Despite violating ECOWAS's Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Gnassingbé remains an active member of the organization and even served as ECOWAS Chairperson in 2017.⁷

The aforementioned are some of the issues that trigger the military into pushing out democratic regimes. This chapter will assess the causes of these coups, the consequences and challenges that confront efforts to prevent or reverse coups. Some of these challenges include weak democratic institutions, entrenched corruption, poor leadership accountability, widespread poverty, and external interference by global powers competing for influence in the State. Together, these factors create a complex environment in which coups become both a symptom and a cause of instability. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of why military coups have regained momentum in West Africa, what their consequences have been on

national and regional levels, and what obstacles exist in curbing their recurrence. By identifying these patterns, the chapter contributes to a deeper appreciation of the crisis of governance confronting West Africa today and the urgent need for sustainable political reforms to strengthen democracy and stability in the region.

Causes of the Proliferation of Military Coups in West Africa

Internal and External; Coups in West Africa are motivated by lots of factors which can be either classified as internal or external. By internal factors, this study refers to events and actions that occur within a country. These actions are carried out by individuals, groups, or institutions, that eventually contribute to the fall of a civilian government. Some of these factors include poor performance by civilian leaders, such as bad governance, corruption, economic mismanagement, and widespread poverty. They also include the exclusion of opposition or minority groups from politics and internal divisions within ruling parties or governments. On the other hand, external factors refer to influences that originate outside a country's borders but play a significant role in encouraging or sustaining military coups. These include foreign interference, colonial legacies, international economic pressures, and shifting geopolitical alliances. In West Africa, former colonial powers, particularly France have maintained strong political and economic influence over their former colonies through defense agreements, control of currency systems, and access to natural resources. Such dependence often breeds resentment among citizens and the military, who view their governments as puppets of

foreign interests. Additionally, global power rivalries, such as the growing involvement of Russia and China in the region, have created new forms of external competition that indirectly affect political stability. These external dynamics often interact with internal weaknesses, creating fertile ground for coups and weakening democratic governance. These issues are often cited by both scholars and coup leaders as the main reasons for overthrowing civilian administrations.⁸

1. Weak Democratic Institutions and Constitutional Manipulation

One of the most persistent causes of coups in contemporary West Africa is the weakness of democratic institutions. In many states across the region, the core pillars of democracy which are the legislature, judiciary, and electoral commissions are fragile, underfunded, and often subject to executive control. Rather than serving as checks on the presidential power, these institutions frequently become tools for legitimizing authoritarian practices. As a result, the democratic framework becomes hollow, creating widespread frustration among citizens and providing justification for military actors to intervene in politics under the guise of national rescue.

In this context, a weak legislatures often fail to perform effective oversight functions. Instead of holding the executive accountable, parliaments in many West African countries tend to serve as extensions of the ruling party. Members of parliament may be co-opted through patronage networks, political favors, or fear of losing their seats. Consequently, crucial decisions such as constitutional amendments, budget approvals, and election oversight are made to serve the interests of the executive rather than the

people. This implies that when the legislative branch is unable to represent the public or challenge authoritarian tendencies, political tension grows, and the military often exploits this vacuum to present itself as a corrective force. Similarly, the judiciary in several West African states lacks full independence. Judges are often appointed based on political loyalty rather than competence, and court rulings in electoral disputes or cases of corruption involving government officials tend to favour incumbents. When citizens lose faith in the judiciary's ability to deliver justice, they become disillusioned with civilian rule. This erosion of confidence in legal institutions has historically created an environment in which coups are either welcomed or tolerated as a necessary evil to restore justice and order. Also, electoral commissions, which should guarantee fair and credible elections, are also vulnerable to manipulation. The appointment of electoral officials by ruling parties, inadequate funding, and interference during vote counting have repeatedly undermined public confidence in the electoral process. When elections are perceived as rigged or predetermined, opposition parties and citizens view the political system as closed and undemocratic. The military can then claim moral legitimacy to intervene in the name of restoring fairness and constitutionalism.

A notable example of constitutional manipulation occurred in Guinea. In 2021, President Alpha Condé, who had already served two terms, amended the constitution to allow himself a third term in office by way of a controversial referendum in March 2020. This move triggered mass protests and violent clashes. Despite opposition boycott of the referendum, the amendments passed, resetting the presidential term counter and enabling

Condé to run again.⁹ The public's frustration, coupled with Condé's disregard for constitutional limits, created the perfect conditions for the military takeover led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya in September 2021. The junta justified its action by claiming that it would restore constitutional order and end endemic corruption.¹⁰ A similar pattern was seen in Niger Republic, 2010, where President Mamadou Tandja attempted to stay in power beyond the constitutional two-term limit. In 2009 he dissolved parliament and the constitutional court in order to push through a referendum that would extend his tenure. His attempt destabilized the political system and prompted widespread protests and a constitutional crisis.¹¹ On 18 February 2010, the military, under the leadership of Major Salou Djibo, intervened and overthrew Tandja's government, claiming the action was needed to "restore the constitutional order."¹²

These cases highlight a recurring pattern in West African politics. When democratic institutions are too weak to restrain the executive, and when leaders manipulate constitutions to stay in power, they erode public trust in civilian governance. This institutional decay, combined with corruption and poor governance, fuels public anger and creates a vacuum of legitimacy that the military is often quick to fill. As a result, coups are not merely the product of military ambition but also a reflection of the failure of democratic consolidation.

2. Insecurity and the Rise of Violent Extremism

In recent years, the spread of jihadist groups and violent extremism in the Sahel region has become a significant factor that leads to coups and political instability. States such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have found themselves on the front line of insurgencies led by armed groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda or terrorist groups. These groups exploit weak state control, porous borders, marginalized communities and geographic remoteness to expand their influence. When the state loses control of significant parts of its territory or seems unable to prevent mass attacks that usually lead to displacement, this becomes a failure of the regime and often results political crisis. For instance, In Burkina Faso, it was reported that by late 2022, the government controlled only around 60 % or less of the territory.¹³ In such situations, the armed forces which are often poorly equipped and under-resourced may lose confidence in civilian leadership. The soldiers see themselves as a shield bearing the brunt of attacks while their governments who failed to provide them with the tools needed parade themselves as overlords. Such internal military frustration can lead to faction splits, and mobilization of the armed forces to take matters into their own hands by removing the civilian government they blame for the security collapse.

By 2022, In Burkina Faso, , the country had become one of the epicenters of jihadist violence in the Sahel, with parts of the country effectively outside state control.¹⁴ On 24 January 2022, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba led a military coup that ousted the democratically elected President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. One

of the chief justifications for the coup was the government's alleged failure to defeat Islamist insurgents and to protect the population. The military declared that the security crisis had become intolerable and that the civilian government had lost credibility.¹⁵ However, the insurgency did not reduce under Damiba's transitional rule. Assaults on military convoys, attacks on villages, blockade of roads and mass displacement of people continued sporadically, this undermined public faith in the new military regime's ability to deliver on its security promises. One such major attack was the "Gaskinde attack" of 26 September 2022, where jihadists killed 27 soldiers and 10 civilians. This is often cited as the direct trigger for the coup that followed later in the month.¹⁶ Consequently, on 30 September 2022, Captain Ibrahim Traoré led a second coup, ousting Lt.Col Damiba. Again, the public justification was the poor security performance of his regime which is far from liberating the occupied territories coupled with the fact that the once peaceful areas have also come under terrorist control.¹⁷ Thus, in less than a year, Burkina Faso experienced two successive military takeovers which were rooted in a context where the state was failing to curb violent extremism and the military was growing increasingly disillusioned.

3. Corruption, Poor Governance, and Economic Mismanagement

Rampant corruption and chronic mismanagement of public resources have long been among the most pervasive internal drivers of military coups in West Africa. Across the region, weak governance structures leads to lack of accountability. Lack of accountability can be referred to as the breeding ground for economic mismanagement

and poor governance. Elite capture of state institutions have eroded public confidence in civilian administrations. These conditions leads to economic inequality and poverty. These factors creates a sense of injustice that resonate deeply within both the citizenry and the military. In dire situations, the military becomes the institution often seen as a corrective force when civilian governments are viewed as irredeemably corrupt.

Corruption in governance promotes the diversion of funds meant for infrastructure, education, and healthcare. It also entrenches nepotism and political favoritism. Civil servants and military officers alike may go unpaid, while politicians and elites display conspicuous wealth. Over time, this fuels resentment, both among the general population and within the armed forces, especially lower-ranking soldiers who experience the same hardships as ordinary citizens. To restore integrity in the state system, Adefisoye and Braimah argued, “the perception of corruption delegitimizes elected governments, creating a fertile ground for coup justification under the guise of national rescue.”¹⁸ In such settings, military intervention is often framed as a patriotic act that would eliminate corrupt civilian leadership in the interest of restoring moral and economic order.

Guinea’s 2008 coup offers another vivid example of how corruption and economic mismanagement can pave the way for military intervention. The country had endured over two decades of authoritarian rule under President Lansana Conté, whose regime was marked by patronage, weak institutions, and systemic corruption. By the mid 2000s, Guinea’s vast mineral wealth (notably bauxite and iron ore) was being siphoned

by elites and foreign companies linked to the presidency. Meanwhile, public sector workers went months without salaries, inflation soared, and the infrastructure crumbled. The military was particularly aggrieved; many soldiers went unpaid or received inadequate rations, while the political class enriched itself through opaque deals. This resulted to a nation wide protest spearheaded by the defence forces vis-a-vis military, police etc.¹⁹ President Conté's failing health and eventual death in December 2008 left a vacuum in a deeply corrupted system. Within hours, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, head of the presidential guard, seized power, announcing the formation of the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD). Guinea's coup leader declared a zero tolerance policy on corruption, vowing to renegotiate the country's numerous mining contracts and warning that anyone who embezzles state funds will be executed. "For the person who embezzles money, there won't be a trial They'll be killed,"²⁰ Camara announced as the crowd went wild. His justification was clear: "Guinea is a country that has been turned into private property by a small clique of leaders. They spit on the faces of the poor continuously, enriching themselves at the population's expense. We are here to put an end to mismanagement and corruption."²¹ Camara's coup initially enjoyed popular support, particularly among young people and public sector workers disillusioned with decades of misrule. Crowds in Conakry cheered the soldiers, viewing them as 'saviours' who had finally overthrown a kleptocracy.

4. Socioeconomic Hardship and Youth Unemployment

Another important factor that drives coups in West Africa is the growing economic hardship and youth frustration that have persisted despite decades of democratic governance. Many countries in the region are experiencing rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and widening income inequality, which together fuel widespread disappointments with civilian governments. When democracy fails to deliver basic economic and social improvements, citizens, especially the young people begin to lose faith in political institutions. This creates a fertile ground for military intervention, as coup leaders exploit popular frustration by presenting themselves reformers committed to restoring national dignity and social justice.

According to a World Bank report in 2023, more than 60 percent of West Africa's population is under the age of 25, yet youth unemployment and underemployment remain alarmingly high.²² In urban centers of West Africa such as Lagos, Bamako, Niamey, and Conakry, thousands of educated young people are unable to find stable employment, while rural areas face declining agricultural productivity and climate-related challenges. The resulting economic stagnation has led to migration pressures, rising crime, and frequent protests which are all symptoms of social distress. When citizens perceive that democratic governments are unable or unwilling to address these economic realities, military actors often find public sympathy for their claims of wanting to correct failed leadership.

In Mali, the 2020 coup against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was not only a reaction to corruption and insecurity but also to worsening economic conditions. Before the coup, inflation and unemployment had increased sharply, while wages stagnated. Many Malians accused the government of prioritizing political elites and foreign contracts over ordinary citizens' welfare.²³ The M5-RFP coalition which declared support for the NCSP junta, mobilized mass protests leading up to the coup, the protest drew much of its strength from unemployed youth and urban workers who felt excluded from the benefits of economic growth. For them, the military's promise to rebuild the nation resonated deeply.²⁴ Coup leaders capitalized on these frustrations, to present themselves as national reformers who would restore hope, jobs, and dignity.

Niger's 2023 coup provides another example of how economic hardship can weaken a government's legitimacy and create opportunities for military intervention. Despite being one of the world's largest uranium exporters, Niger remains among the poorest countries globally, with over 40 percent of the population living below the poverty line.²⁵ Before the coup, President Mohamed Bazoum's administration faced mounting criticism for rising living costs, fuel shortages, and limited progress on job creation, youth unemployment, combined with growing insecurity from jihadist violence. These factors eroded confidence in civilian leadership. Just as it happened in Mali, protesters in Niamey and other towns accused the government of neglecting the people while aligning too closely with foreign powers. When the presidential guard detained

Bazoum in July 2023, the coup leaders cited poor governance, corruption, and worsening socioeconomic conditions as justification.²⁶ Despite ECOWAS sanctions and international condemnation, many Nigeriens initially celebrated the coup, interpreting it as a rebellion against poverty and inequality rather than a purely military takeover. Yet, as in many similar cases, the post-coup reality did not meet expectations. Economic mismanagement and international sanctions following the coup worsened living conditions, showing that military rule rarely provides a long-term solution to structural economic decline.

5. Foreign Influence and Historical Legacy

The legacy of colonialism and foreign interference has also contributed in shaping West Africa's coup dynamics. Many national armies in West Africa were structured during colonial rule to protect regimes rather than citizens, making them prone to political involvement. Moreover, the deep historical ties and economic dependence on past colonial powers have created an unstable and unequal environment that encourages military involvement in governance. The majority of these coup-ridden nations have remained impoverished because of the relationship known as neocolonialism, in which former colonial powers have an influence on African governments' actions.²⁷ Therefore, neocolonialism has been blamed for the chronic nature of poverty and development

challenges in West Africa. This has resulted in a general displeasure and grievances that might serve as fuel for military insurrections.²⁸

For instance, the French state and her former colonies have a strong connection through various agreements, one of which enables France to collect substantial sums each year from its former colonies for the use of the Francs CFA.²⁹ Another notable example is the exploitation of Nigeriens, through mining done by French-state-backed Orano's Somair, and the over-dependence of resources-rich Francophone African states on France.³⁰ Some of these instances are reasons for the several military overthrows that have happened recently. France has continuously pursued its interests in these nations, massively investing in their home politics and security cooperation, which has fostered anti-French sentiment among the indigenous people. It is based on this background that scholars stressed that the surge in military insurrections across Africa, mainly in former French colonies, is not a coincidence. Most citizens in these countries do not support this idea and usually back a strong stance against France.³¹ Therefore, most coup leaders receive popular support since they show themselves as opposed to the status quo. These military regimes have consistently opposed the French involvement in their domestic affairs. The regime usually assures the masses that their presence would guarantee the preservation of their nation's identity and sovereignty. In Niger for instance, the military has rescinded five military agreements with France, accusing the former president Mohamed Bazoum of serving French interests and accused France of exploiting the country's riches, such as uranium.³² The influence and relationship with former colonial

powers has left these former colonies worse-off, which has played a role in the many coups recorded in the region.

6. Geopolitics between the East and West Allied States

Another external factor that has shaped the pattern of coups in West Africa is the renewed geopolitical struggle between the East and the West. This rivalry, reminiscent of the Cold War era, has re-emerged on the African continent in recent years. Although the Cold War officially ended more than three decades ago, new forms of this rivalry have resurfaced, this time involving Russia and China on one side (representing the East) and the United States and the European Union countries on the other (representing the West). It could be observed that what once defined mid-20th-century world politics is now being replayed in Africa, particularly in West Africa, where coups and political instability have become common once again. In this new era, Russia has emerged as a key player. Through its private military company, the Wagner Group, Russia has become deeply involved in the political and security affairs of some West African states. From observations, it is safe to say that Russia and the Wagner Group played important roles in the 2020 and 2021 coups in Mali, and in the 2022 coup in Burkina Faso.³³

These West African countries, frustrated by Western influence especially from France and the United States turned to Russia for military and political support. The United States and European Union countries expressed concern that Russia's expanding

influence could undermine their interests and values on the continent. This has led to diplomatic tensions and competing alliances. For instance, when Western countries attempted to impose economic and border sanctions on Mali following its coup, Russia and China jointly blocked the move at the United Nations Security Council.³⁴ By doing so, they shielded Mali's junta from international pressure and strengthened their relationship with the new regime. This act reflected a broader East-West divide, where global superpowers take opposing sides based on strategic interests rather than democratic principles. This rivalry often influences how African military and political elites behave. Governments that align too closely with the West may be perceived by domestic opposition groups or rival factions as puppets of foreign powers, creating resentment among citizens. On the other hand, those that show openness to Russia or China may gain internal popularity for appearing to challenge Western dominance but also risk isolation or sanctions from Western institutions. Such tensions can destabilize fragile political systems, providing justification or opportunity for military takeovers. The political situations in Mali and Burkina Faso illustrates this dynamic clearly. Both countries had long-standing military and economic ties with France and the United States, but after years of insecurity and limited progress, sections of the military began to view these relationships as exploitative. The coups that followed were partly framed as efforts to reclaim national sovereignty and reduce dependence on Western powers. Once in power, these regimes turned to Russia for military cooperation and political backing,

reinforcing the notion that global power competition can directly influence domestic political change.

The geopolitical contest between the East and West has become a major external driver of coups in West Africa. It shapes how local actors justify their actions, where they seek support, and how foreign powers respond. When global powers compete for influence, weak states often become the battlegrounds of their rivalry. This ongoing struggle for control and loyalty has made it difficult for West African nations to build stable and independent political systems free from foreign interference.

Consequences of Military Coups in 21st Century West Africa

The effects of military coups in 21st century West Africa are complex and deeply detrimental to the region's progress toward democratic governance and sustainable development. While military leaders often justify their actions as necessary to rescue their nations from political stagnation, the aftermath of such takeovers have largely produced the opposite effect. For instance, coups have repeatedly disrupted constitutional order, weakened public institutions, undermined citizens' confidence in democracy, increased the chances of human rights violation and created a wave of sanctions which have far-reaching effects to the citizens of a state.

Politically, military rule has led to the suspension of constitutions, dissolution of parliaments which is a symbol for representative democracy, and restrictions on civil liberties, resulting in the gradual erosion of democratic culture. Economically, sanctions

imposed by regional and international bodies, particularly ECOWAS have isolated coup-led states from foreign trade and investments, therefore, worsening poverty and inflation. Coups have also intensified insecurity majorly erupting from political actors seeking recognition, these reels of insecurities most times displace thousands of citizens, and deepen existing grievances between governments and citizens. Moreover, the recurrence of coups in multiple West African countries has created a contagious effect where successful military interventions in one state appear to inspire similar actions in others. This trend threatens regional peace and integration, as seen in the strained relations between coup-led governments and democratic neighbors, a notable example is ECOWAS and its suspended members (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger Republic) that went on to establish the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).³⁵ Ultimately, the consequences of these coups extend beyond national borders, posing a serious challenge to collective security, governance, and the credibility of regional institutions like ECOWAS. Understanding these outcomes is essential in evaluating the long-term implications of military interventions for West Africa's stability and democratic future:

1. Political Instability and Democratic Reversal

One of the most damaging effects of military coups in West Africa is political instability and the reversal of democratic progress. Every coup disrupts the constitutional order of a state and replaces an elected government with a military regime that often rules without accountability. This constant interference in governance weakens the state institutions that are meant to promote popular participation in governance consequently eroding

public trust in democracy. It has been observed that success of coups influences other ambitious military actors to take up the same means to achieve a similar result, like in Burkina Faso where two coups occurred in one year (2022). When this is the case, it is then difficult to consolidate on a democratic system that would last the test of time.

In Mali, for example, the country has suffered three coups in less than a decade 2012, 2020, and 2021. Each military takeover was justified as a response to corruption and insecurity, but instead of restoring stability, the coups created deeper divisions and uncertainty within the state. After the 2020 coup that removed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, a transitional government was formed but later overthrown by the same military group led by Colonel Assimi Goïta. The military government have continuously postponed elections keeping the country under military rule. Similarly, Guinea's 2021 coup, led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, ended President Alpha Condé's controversial third term. Though many Guineans initially welcomed the coup, it soon became clear that democracy had taken another backward step through the suspension of the constitution, restriction of political parties activities and the refusal to make certain the timeline for civilian rule restoration.

2. Economic Sanctions and Isolation

Another major consequence of coups is economic isolation caused by regional and international sanctions. Organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) impose strict measures on countries where coups occur to pressure the military to return to civilian rule. These sanctions

usually include border closures, suspension from regional trade, freezing of state assets, and travel bans on coup leaders. In some cases, member states also suspend electricity supplies or halt financial aid. These measures are aimed at isolating the coup regime from the global economy and cutting off the financial resources that sustain its rule. While these sanctions are intended to punish military regimes and deter future coups, their economic and social impact has often been felt most severely by the civilian population rather than the political elites who carried out the coups.

For instance, after the 2020 and 2021 coups in Mali, ECOWAS imposed sanctions that blocked financial transactions, closed borders, and suspended Mali from regional decision-making. These measures caused shortages of essential goods, inflation, and economic hardship for ordinary citizens. Similarly, when soldiers overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum in Niger in July 2023, ECOWAS immediately suspended the country, froze its assets, and cut off electricity supplies from Nigeria, upon which Niger depends for about 70% of its power. These sanctions severely affected the daily life of citizens, leading to food shortages and rising prices.

Beyond the immediate economic effects, sanctions also result in diplomatic isolation. Coup-led governments are often suspended from international organizations and lose access to donor funding and foreign investment. This isolation weakens their capacity to engage in international cooperation, negotiate trade agreements, or receive development assistance. For instance, following the 2021 coup, Mali was faced with the withdrawal of Western military and financial support, prompting the junta to seek new alliances,

particularly with Russia. This shift altered regional geopolitics and demonstrated how sanctions can push isolated states to realign with nontraditional partners.

However, despite the intentions, sanctions have produced mixed results. In some cases, they have pressured juntas into negotiating transition timetables while in others, they have hardened military resistance and fueled nationalist rhetoric. Military leaders often capitalize on the situation by portraying sanctions as foreign aggression and intimidation, thereby rallying public sympathy to consolidate their rule at home. In Niger, for example, widespread public protests condemned ECOWAS sanctions, with citizens viewing them as collective punishment rather than a solution.

3. Decline in Representative Governance

One of the major consequences of military coups in 21st-century West Africa is the decline in representative governance. This occurs when the people lose their right to freely elect leaders and participate in the political process. Coups often replace elected governments with military rulers who rule by decrees. Most times, the first decree of military rulers is to suspend the constitution, then dissolve the parliaments, as well as all political institutions and civil societies that may protest against their reign. As a result, citizens are denied their voices in decision-making, and democratic values gradually disappear.

After each coup, military leaders usually promise to restore democracy, but in practice, they often extend transitional periods by delaying elections, and centralizing power in their own hands through the transitional council that is dominated by military

officers, this council replaces the elected parliament, giving the armed forces control over all key state institutions. The suspension of the constitution also removes essential checks and balances that hold leaders accountable, this allows military governments to operate without oversight. This pattern has been evident in several West African countries, where coups have reversed decades of progress toward participatory governance.

The decline in representative governance also weakens political parties and civil societies. Under military regimes, opposition groups are often viewed as threats, and freedom of speech and assembly are heavily restricted. Journalists face censorship, activists are detained, protests are also banned and elections when held are tightly controlled to favour the ruling junta. This creates an environment where citizens are unable to influence policies or hold leaders accountable for their actions. The presence of martial laws leads to breakdown of democratic norms and principles as well as the degradation of the rule of law.

4. Human Rights Violation

Another serious consequence of military coups in 21st-century West Africa is the violation of human rights. When military regimes take over power, they restrict freedoms and use force to maintain control. These actions lead to widespread abuses, including arbitrary arrests, torture, suppression of protests, censorship of the media, and even extrajudicial killings. In many cases, the coup leaders justify these violations by claiming that they are protecting national security or restoring order, but in reality, they create an atmosphere of fear and repression.

Following a coup, human rights conditions tend to worsen because military governments lack accountability. They rule by decree, meaning that citizens cannot question their actions or challenge them through legal or political means. The courts, parliaments, and independent institutions that usually protect human rights are dissolved or rendered powerless. As a result, military regimes act without checks and balances, leading to more violations. A clear example can be seen in Guinea after the September 2021 coup led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. Following the overthrow of President Alpha Condé, the junta suspended the constitution and restricted political activity. When citizens and civil societies groups began demanding a quick return to civilian rule, the military responded with violence. According to Human Rights Watch report in 2022, security forces used live ammunition against peaceful protesters, leading to deaths and injuries. Opposition leaders and activists were arrested, and several journalists were harassed for criticizing the junta.³⁶ These actions created a climate of fear that discouraged open political discussion.

Moreover, coups often occur in countries already struggling with insecurity, such as those in the Sahel region. Military governments frequently respond to violence with excessive force, leading to civilian casualties and displacement. This not only violates human rights but also worsens humanitarian crises by increasing the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. For instance, reports by the United Nations and Amnesty International documented cases where Malian soldiers and Wagner forces carried out mass killings of civilians in anti-terror operations.³⁷ One of the most serious

incidents occurred in Moura in 2022, where hundreds of civilians were allegedly killed during a military operation against jihadists.³⁸

Another form of human rights violation under military regimes is the **limitation of basic freedoms** such as speech, movement, assembly, expression etc. Military governments often impose curfews, restrict internet access, and control the press to prevent the spread of dissenting views. In some cases, they also target civil society organizations and human rights defenders, labeling them as threats to national security. These tactics are ensured to weaken civic participation thus preventing the citizens from expressing their grievances peacefully.

Human rights violations are among the most tragic and enduring consequences of coups in 21st-century West Africa. The absence of democratic accountability allows military rulers to abuse power without consequence by silencing opposition and violating the basic rights of the people they claim to protect. Instead of protecting the citizens, military governments have often turned their weapons against them, suppressing dissent and ruling through intimidation. These incidents reflect the growing disregard for human rights under military rule

5. ECOWAS's Credibility Crisis

One of the most significant consequences of the wave of military coups in 21st-century West Africa is the growing credibility crisis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Once seen as a strong regional body committed to promoting

peace, democracy, and stability, ECOWAS now faces serious questions about its effectiveness, consistency, and moral authority. The increasing number of coups in the region has exposed the weaknesses in ECOWAS's ability to enforce its own rules and maintain regional order.

ECOWAS has long presented itself as a champion of democracy in West Africa. Its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) clearly prohibits unconstitutional change of government and calls for sanctions against any regime that seizes power by force. However, the way ECOWAS has responded to recent coups has revealed deep inconsistencies in her mode of operations. In some cases, the organization acted swiftly and imposed tough sanctions; in others, it was slow or lenient, creating the perception of double standards. For instance, ECOWAS reacted strongly to coups in Mali (2020 and 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) by suspending the affected countries from the organization. ECOWAS also imposed economic sanctions and demanded quick transitions to civilian rule. In the case of Mali, ECOWAS closed their borders, froze state assets and restricted trade, while in Niger, it went as far as threatening military intervention to restore President Mohamed Bazoum. In contrast, when leaders in other member states such as Faure Gnassingbé in Togo and Alassane Ouattara in Côte d'Ivoire amended constitutions to extend their terms in power, ECOWAS remained largely silent. This selective approach has damaged the organization's credibility, as many West Africans now view it as tolerant of civilian

autocrats but harsh toward military revolutionaries. The credibility problem of ECOWAS also stems from its internal political contradictions. As earlier explained, the organization's chairperson is always a current head of state, this can create conflicts of interest especially when some of these leaders have questionable democratic credentials. For example, Togo's Faure Gnassingbé, was widely seen as unconstitutional, later served as ECOWAS Chairperson in 2017. Similarly, leaders who have manipulated constitutions to stay in power have often escaped criticism while those who gain power through coups faced harsh sanctions. This inconsistency makes it difficult for ECOWAS to claim moral authority in defending democratic principles. The perception of bias in ECOWAS has weakened public confidence and trust in the organization. Many citizens in countries under military rule see the organization not as a neutral defender of democracy, but as a body that protects entrenched elites and foreign interests. In Niger, after ECOWAS imposed heavy sanctions in 2023, large protests erupted in support of the military junta, with demonstrators accusing ECOWAS of punishing ordinary people instead of addressing the deeper issues that led to the coup. Similar resentment was seen in Mali and Burkina Faso, where populations accused ECOWAS of acting under the influence of Western powers, particularly France.

The limited success of ECOWAS enforcement strategies against military juntas has also contributed in its credibility crisis. Despite sanctions and suspensions, most of the recent juntas remain firmly in control. The military leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso, and

Niger have even formed a new alliance known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a security and political partnership created in 2023 as a response to what they saw as ECOWAS's interference. This development shows a clear breakdown of regional unity and highlights how ECOWAS's punitive approach has sometimes pushed member states further away rather than bringing them back into cooperation. ECOWAS's action-plan has been weakened by its over reliance on sanctions and threats, rather than on effective dialogue and conflict prevention mechanisms. While sanctions are meant to pressure coup leaders, they often harm the civilian population the most and fail to produce quick political change. This has made many citizens question whether ECOWAS truly represents the interests of West Africans or merely follows the dictates of powerful member states and foreign partners.

The inability of ECOWAS to prevent or reverse coups also exposes its limited capacity to address the root causes of instability, such as poor governance, corruption, and insecurity. Many coups in West Africa have been fueled by public frustration over failed civilian leadership, widespread poverty, and terrorism in the Sahel. Yet, ECOWAS has focused more on punishing the outcome (the coup itself) rather than tackling the underlying causes that make military interventions possible.

In conclusion, the causes and consequences of military coups in 21st-century West Africa reveal a complex web of political, economic, and social factors that continue to undermine the region's democratic progress and stability. The causes of these coups are deeply rooted in long-standing governance challenges. Internally, widespread

corruption, poor leadership, economic mismanagement, exclusion of opposition groups, and rising insecurity have eroded citizens' trust in civilian governments. Many leaders have failed to deliver good governance, allowing inequality, unemployment, and poverty to worsen. Additionally, attempts by some presidents to manipulate constitutions to secure third terms or indefinite rule have provoked public anger and created fertile ground for military intervention. Externally, factors such as foreign influence and international geopolitical rivalries have also shaped the political dynamics that lead to coups. These internal and external drivers together highlight how weak democratic institutions, coupled with external pressures, can push a country toward instability. The consequences of these coups have been severe and far-reaching. Politically, they have caused instability and democratic reversals, dismantling constitutional governments and eroding public confidence in democracy. Economically, countries under military rule have faced sanctions and isolation from international partners, resulting in declining investment. coups have triggered human rights abuses and restrictions on press freedom. Also, the frequent coups in the region have exposed a crisis of legitimacy within ECOWAS. While ECOWAS constantly condemns coups and imposes sanctions, its inconsistent responses especially its silence toward leaders who manipulate constitutions have raised questions about its fairness and effectiveness. Therefore, the recurrence of coups in West Africa reflects a deep governance crisis rather than a temporary disruption. The military often capitalizes on citizens' frustration with corrupt and inefficient civilian governments to assert themselves into governance and political spaces,

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The resurgence of military coups in West Africa presents serious challenges, not only for the states directly affected but also for all West Africa. This is as a result of the contagious nature of coups. The military whose primary duty in any state is to protect the state against external aggression and to assist internally in combating insurgency as well

as restore law and order when the police cannot contain such have derailed from their primary duty as stipulated in the law of the land to do the work of the civilian particularly the duty of the political class. This interference mode of the military has raised an eyebrow in military professionalism, particularly in West African states like Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger where coups have been frequent from 2020 till date. The military in affected states used insecurity, economic challenges, and corruption among others as an excuse to take over power from the civilian government. This has posed a significant threat to the political stability and democratic consolidation in West Africa.

This study examined the response of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the resurgence of military coups in the region in the 21st century. Although the organization was originally established in 1975 to promote regional economic integration, the evolution of political and security challenges in West Africa has transformed ECOWAS into a major peace and security actor. Over the past two decades, the region has experienced a worrying return of unconstitutional regime changes, particularly in Mali (2020 and 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023). These events have tested the credibility and capacity of ECOWAS in enforcing its democratic principles and upholding regional stability. The background to this research in Chapter One traced and established the central problem; that despite the existence of strong regional mechanisms designed to prevent unconstitutional changes of government, coups have re-emerged in the region. The chapter identified key research questions, objectives, and the significance of examining how ECOWAS has responded to

this democratic setback. It also outlined that the 21st century had been expected to consolidate democracy in West Africa after the wave of democratization in the 1990s, yet the recurrence of military takeovers indicates deep-rooted governance challenges that regional frameworks alone have not solved.

Furthermore, the study examined the historical dynamics of political and military coups in the region. The chapter established that the tradition of military intervention in politics is not a new phenomenon in West Africa. From the post-independence period of the 1960s through the 1980s, coups were a dominant feature of the political landscape. Soldiers often justified their actions as a necessary step to restore order or save the nation from misrule. However, the consequences of those interventions were mostly negative because most military regimes in most cases degenerate to authoritarianism and poor governance in many West African countries as with their civilian counterparts. The chapter further revealed that structural legacies of colonial rule created weak political institutions and unprofessional national armies who sort control contributed to the foundation for these military incursions. The historical transition of ECOWAS was laid during the early 1990s when ECOWAS began to shift from being an economic body to one that prioritized regional peace and democracy. Despite, efforts by ECOWAS to maintain political sanity in the region, military coups still persist. This shows that the lessons of the past remain prevalent till date. The study analyzed the regional security mechanisms developed by ECOWAS to deal with political instability and threats to constitutional order. It discussed key instruments such as the 1999 Mechanism for

Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security; the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; and the Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance in Defence etc. These instruments granted ECOWAS the legal and moral framework to intervene in cases of coups or civil wars in the region. The study noted that ECOWAS's approach to promoting peace and democracy involves a combination of mediums such as the application of preventive diplomacy, mediation, sanctions, and, in extreme cases, military intervention. These responses signified the organization's readiness to defend democracy.

However, in more recent coups such as in Mali (2020–2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023), ECOWAS relied mainly on sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and threats of force rather than immediate military intervention. The study found that although these mechanisms are theoretically strong, their implementation has been inconsistent due to the political interests of member states. Limited financial capacity and lack of collective political will is also another important factor that leads to inconsistent implementation of these mechanisms. Moreover, it was noted that ECOWAS appears reactive rather than preventive, responding to crises after they occur instead of addressing early warning signs such as constitutional manipulations, corruption, and electoral malpractice. Chapter Four explored the root causes and implications of coups in 21st century West Africa. Dividing the causative factors of coups into internal and external dimensions to aid comprehension of the study and to make clear distinctions. Internally, the major trigger to coups are factors such as poor governance, corruption, insecurity,

unemployment, manipulation of constitutions and loss of public trust in democratic institutions. Many West Africans have grown disillusioned with elected governments that fail to deliver basic services, thereby creating a moral vacuum that soldiers exploit to justify taking power. Externally, foreign influence and neocolonial ties, then global power rivalries were found to shape coup dynamics in subtle but powerful ways. For example, France's continued economic and military involvement in its former colonies has fueled resentment and anti-French sentiment, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Similarly, the new geopolitical contest between the West and emerging Eastern powers such as Russia and China has played out in West Africa. The diplomatic presence of Russia's Wagner Group in Mali and Burkina Faso have been perceived as alternatives to Western influence, deepening divisions and shaping post-coup alignments.

The study also highlighted the following to be the major consequences of these coups, these include; Political instability and democratic reversal, Economic sanctions and isolation, Decline in representative governance, Human rights violations. Coups derail democratic progress and weaken constitutional institutions, Military rulers often suspend constitutions and dissolve parliaments, concentrating power in the hands of a few officers. Military leaders has been accused of arbitrary arrests, which is aimed at suppression of dissent, and media restrictions. Due to human right violations associated with military regimes, ECOWAS and international partners often impose sanctions, which further deepen economic hardship for ordinary citizens.

The study argued that ECOWAS's response to military coups has been strong in principle but weak in enforcement. The organization has consistently condemned unconstitutional changes of government, suspended offending states, and demanded the restoration of civilian rule. However, its actions have not always produced the desired results. A major challenge to this is the erosion of ECOWAS's credibility among the citizens of member states. Many ordinary people perceive the organization as 'leaders club' tasked with the responsibility of defending fellow presidents or Head of States rather than protecting democracy. For instance, when ECOWAS refuses to call a president to order but reacts immediately that same president is ousted from power. Also, the sanctions imposed after a coup, often punishes the general population more than the coup leaders, fueling anti-ECOWAS sentiments. Additionally, the unequal treatment of member states like the harsh sanctions on Mali and Niger but softer responses to constitutional manipulations in other countries has exposed ECOWAS to accusations of bias and inconsistency. Furthermore, the limited resources available to ECOWAS has pushed the organization to depend on external support, and this has been a major factor that constrain its ability to enforce decisions or deploy military operations when needed. Without the financial and logistical backing of major powers, ECOWAS struggles to implement credible decisions. The lack of unity among member states has also weakened the authority of the organization. The reason for this is because some state leaders in ECOWAS sympathize with the juntas or fear similar uprisings in their own countries, this

fear has unlocked the idea of threading with caution instead of decisively upholding the principles and agreements of the organization.

The recurrence of military coups in West Africa and ECOWAS responses to the coups demonstrates that reactive measures alone are insufficient for maintaining peace and democratic stability. ECOWAS has consistently condemned unconstitutional changes in government and imposed sanctions, but these responses have often addressed the symptoms rather than the root causes of military coups in the region. Therefore, to strengthen the organization's capacity to respond effectively, the following strategic and long-term measures should be considered:

1. Prioritize Preventive Diplomacy and Early Engagement
2. Promoting Good Governance, Constitutionalism, and Rule of Law
3. Adopting Targeted Sanctions and Minimize Civilian Suffering
4. Strengthening Collaboration with the African Union and the United Nations
5. Professionalizing Civil-Military Relations in Member States
6. Building Popular Legitimacy and Public Trust
7. Addressing Socioeconomic Root Causes

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