

Resurgence of Coup D'état in West Africa and Democratic Consolidation: Assessing the Role of ECOWAS

Nwagbo Samuel N.C., Ofoke, Ikechukwu Innocent

Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400304>

Received: 14 April 2025; Accepted: 18 April 2025; Published: 12 May 2025

ABSTRACT

Over the years, there has been a continuous campaign for the adoption of democracy and democratic principles in not just Africa but in the world all over. This is owing to the inherent feature of fundamental human right in democracy. After about two decades which democracy has survived in Africa, recent resurgence of military coup seems to have thwarted democratic consolidation particularly in West African sub-region. This is exemplified by the recent military coup in Chad, Burkina-Faso, Mali, Sudan, Niger, Gabon, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. This trend is worrisome because of its contagious nature; as it has the potential to persist in the region by escalating from one country to another. However, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a sub-regional organization serving as a watchdog for the West African sub-region has a crucial role to play in maintaining democracy in the region. From the foregoing, this paper examined the resurgence of coup d'état in West Africa and the role of ECOWAS in sustaining democratic consolidation in the West African sub-region. Qualitative Research approach was adopted for the study; hence, secondary source of data was used for the study. Explanatory method of data analysis was adopted in analyzing the data. The result of the study revealed that the recent resurgence of military coup in West Africa is as a result of leadership failure which has led to disruption of democratic institutions and democratic consolidation in West African countries. The study recommends that in order to ensure the sustainability of democratic government in West Africa amidst the resurgence of coup d'état, ECOWAS should intensify effort in enhancing democratic, effective, transparent and corruption-free governance among member-states and as well be steadfast in issuing and enforcing serious sanction on any country or leader that violate the core principles of democracy and good governance in West Africa sub-region.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Military, Coup D'état, ECOWAS, West Africa

INTRODUCTION

In the world over and particularly in Africa, democracy is fast spreading due to its ability to provide basic requirements for good governance and development. Since the end of the Cold War and subsequent re-emergence of the New World Order, there was a significant interest on democracy. This development has brought an end to the struggle for supremacy as to which system of government is best due to hegemonic emergence of liberal democracy (Ardo, 2020). Democracy is a system of government that represent the desire and interest of the citizens. In democracy, fundamental human right and public opinion of the citizens are respected. Owuoye, Olanrewaju, Ojeka and Oluwakemi (2021) opined that in democracy, leaders are elected at regular intervals through voting. The citizens have the right to choose who governs them through election and the citizens enjoy basic freedom. This is to say that in democracy, state power and governance process lies with the people.

Contrast to democracy, military rule has inherent feature of lack of respect to rule of law, fundamental human right of the citizens and election. The military takes over power through coup. A coup d'etat, which is sometimes referred to as "coup," means the removal of a government or government official by a group of strong people, usually the military. As stated by Powell and Thyne (2011), a coup is the seizure of power or overthrow of the current government which leads to the suspension of the constitution and the legislature. For the military to take effective control of government in their intervention in politics there must be a coup d'état.

This is always carried out by a handful of conspirators who secretly plot against the incumbent office holders, to terminate their administration either by killing them such as the case of 1966 coup in Nigeria or by forcing them out of office such as the case of 1985 coup in Nigeria.

In coup, power runs through the barrel of the gun as against the ballot box in a democratic system. Dissidents are silenced and all the key incumbent government officials arrested or eliminated in order to remove resistance from taking over power. The military always suspend the existing constitution of the states in order to operate (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). In most cases, the constitution provides for the separation of power between the three arms of government as well as fundamental human right and other principles of democracy. In Nigeria for instance, the suspension of the First Republic constitution led to the formation of the Supreme Military Council, which was rebranded as Armed Forces Ruling Council by General Babangida in 1985 and Provisional Ruling Council by General Abacha. They all perform both executive and legislative functions with the suspension of the constitution (Ani, 2021). The suspension of the constitution always indicates that democracy is overruled by the military who rule by decrees and fiats.

Despite the rapid growth of democracy in Africa, especially as witnessed in the 1990s and early 2000s, there is a current resurgence of military coup especially in West African sub-region. This wave of democracy and democratic consolidation in Africa is being disrupted recently by rampant emergence of military coups. It is not just democratic processes within the nation-states of the region but also democratic relations and institutions among and across nation-states in subregion. ECOWAS as body has been serious socio-political and socio-economic dilemma since this recent coup d'état in the subregion. African Center for Strategic Studies (2021) recorded that in 2021 alone, there was serious surge in military coup in Africa generally; Chad had a coup in April 2021, Mali in May 2021, Guinea in September, 2021, and Sudan in October 2021. While Burkina Faso had a coup in September 2022, Niger had a coup in July 2023 and lately Gabon in August 2023. Though there was a coup in Mali in 2012 and a serious uprising that led to oust of government in Burkina Faso in 2014, but the recent case of Mali and Guinea is the most coups that have occurred in West Africa in a single year since 1999. In addition, coup attempts were witnessed in 2021 in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Niger (ICG, 2021).

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

From the foregoing, one would ask what are the reasons for resurgence of military coup in West Africa; and what role has the ECOWAS played in sustaining democracy in the region? These necessitate this study. This study adopts Qualitative Research design. The data for the study were collected from secondary source. The data were gathered from textbooks, research journals, official gazette, editorials, articles, newspapers and magazines. The data for the study was analyzed using thematic analysis method.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Coup D'état

The term "coup d'état" is a French word which means a sudden blow or strike. According to Ornela (2022), it was first used to describe Napoleon's seizure of power in France on November 9, 1799. Hence, coup d'état could be defined as a sudden, illegal, and mostly violent change of government, by a faction of the armed forces (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). Coup involves the unconstitutional takeover of government's power by

the military or other state security actors, either against a civilian-led government or the government by the military itself (Fatola, 2022). Coup d'état is essentially the forceful removal of a political leader or government regime by the military without adherence to the constitution or established rules of governance. Obi in Ani (2021) defined coup as a political act directed at the authority by seizure of power through the direct use of, or the threat of the use of violent force. As a show of force, the coup plotters also occupy strategic government position. From the foregoing, the key fact about military coup is that it is an abrupt overthrow of a government against popular will. This means that military coup is always carried out forcefully and unexpectedly without prior notice to the existing government; it is unlawful as it does not respect the constitution or established law. Before a coup is carried out, military forces are heavily involved. While an unsuccessful coup attempt is considered a rebellion with heavy consequences on the coup plotters, successful coup results in a sudden and significant change in the policies of the previous regime and the executive leadership. This is always marked by messianic messages from the coup plotters discrediting the activities of the incumbent and promising rosy future for the masses.

Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

According to the popular definition by Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the governance of the people, for the people and by the people. This implies that democracy is at the core of the principle of popular sovereignty; where citizens are actively engaged in the decision-making processes of the government (Owoeye, Ojeka & Oluwakemi, 2021). In other words, democracy represents a constitutional framework where the rights and responsibilities of both citizens and the state are exercised mutually. This conception of democracy is based on the liberal view where political power resides with the people. Especially in modern times, the political power can be exercised directly by the people through their decisions on sensitive matters which is expressed in form of plebiscite or referendum. On the other hand, it can be expressed indirectly through their representatives in government (Magstadt, 2019).

From the above, it is clear that democratic consolidation entails that government must be legitimate, leaders are chosen through free and fair elections, and there is respect to fundamental human rights. Edigheji (2015) added that democracy enhance accountability, transparency, rule of law and equality. In democracy, the decision makers are selected through fair, honest, periodic elections. Democratic consolidation enhances popular participation in the process of governance, equality among citizens, sovereignty of the people, promotion and protection of human rights and essential freedoms, limited government, supremacy of the rule of law, and separation of powers between the three arms of government (Ornella, 2022). This therefore means that democracy is a progressive and developmental process which encompasses the people. In other words, the people are the major stakeholders in democracy in the sense that when the people develop politically, then the democratic process would transform and become more realistic. The longer and uninterrupted democracy is in system the more transformed and consolidated it becomes. Hence, the democratic processes, especially in emerging states of Africa, constitute a learning process in which democratic attributes such as tolerance, accountability, effective organization, and transparency, justice, inclusion are learnt and manifested as part of democratic norm for the good of the society.

Resurgence of Coup D'état in West Africa

The recent resurgence of coup particularly in West Africa is very worrisome. According to De Oliveira and Verhoeven (2023), Africa has experienced more military takeovers and political interventions throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In early 1960s immediately after most of the countries in the continent gained its independence, most African coups in history started; most African countries were plunged into military coup. So far, West Africa has witnessed about 90 successful and unsuccessful coups. Therefore, it can be said that Africa is a continent that experiences coups frequently, with over 40 governments having either successfully or unsuccessfully staged coups (Ani, 2021). In West Africa within this period, countries like Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria etc. witnessed recurrent military coup (see table 1).

List of Coups in West Africa since 1960 till 2023

S/N	Country	Total coup attempt	Successful	Unsuccessful
1	Ghana	7	5	2
2	Nigeria	8	7	1
3	Ivory coast	4	1	3
4	Niger	7	5	2
5	Mali	7	5	2
6	Burkina-Faso	10	7	3
7	Liberia	4	2	2
8	Gambia	4	1	3
9	Guinea-Bissau	8	4	4
10	Mauritania	8	6	2
11	Togo	3	3	0
12	Guinea	4	3	1
13	Benin	7	5	2
14	Sierra Leone	8	6	2
15	Total	89	60	29

Source: Wikipedia 2025

Notably, the military coup in Burkina Faso was led by Thomas Sankara and later, Blaise Compaore took it up. In 1966, Nigeria witnessed a coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu that resulted in a civil war. This marked the offshoot of over 29 years of military rule in Nigeria with over 8 military coups and 8 military governments. Ghana also witnessed several coups in the 1970s prior to the Rawlings movement (Hutchful 1997). However, the results of coups vary. While some resulted in military dictatorships, others instigated more coups, and some others eventually brought their countries back to democracy (Ornel, 2022).

After many countries who were under the shackles of military dictatorship between the period of 1960s to 1990s were returned back to democracy, Africa celebrated with the hope that democratic dispensation would be able to bring the desired development Africa need. Surprisingly, there is recent resurgence of military coups especially in West African countries. According to African Center for Strategic Studies (2021), the West Africa sub-region has witnessed numerous successful and attempted coups since 2020, following the coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Niger Republic. This is the most recurrent coups period in Africa within a single year since 1999 (Marshall, 2022).

On August 19th 2020, the first coup took place in Mali which was followed by the second coup on May 24th 2021. Some of the major factor that triggered these military coups in Mali was malpractice in the electoral process; particularly the parliamentary elections, which raised national instability, and corruption. The both coups were led by Asimi Goita. In the first place, the coup of 2020 targeted the administration of President

Ibrahim Keita; while the second coup led to the overthrowing of President Bah Ndaw in 2021 (Chilaka, & Oyinmiebi, 2022).

Another military coup that took place was the coup in Guinea in September, 2021 which was led by Col. Mamady Doumbaya. Daudu, Osimen and Shuaibu (2023) noted that corruption and autocratic (civilian) governance, economic mismanagement, deteriorating and flawed democratic norms were the major factors that triggered the coup. These factors resulted in the overthrowing of the civilian government of President Alpha Conde; leading to the end of Conde's controversial third term following his heavily disputed election victory in 2020. The coup was fueled by frustrations over massive corruption, human rights abuse and lack of economic progress under Conde; which was compounded by the French prolonged imperialism in Francophone West Africa resulting to significant economic, political, and social regression in the sub-region (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023). The extraction of resources and establishment of colonial administrations during this period led to lack of local autonomy; hence, overdependence on France. This resulted in increased fragility in the region as the French prioritized their own interests over those of the indigenous populations (Ani, 2021).

Guinea Bissau also experienced a military intervention in 2022 as a result of several factors such as insecurity in the region, bad governance, youth unemployment, and citizens' discontent and so on. The coup targeted the leadership of President Umaro Embalo who was criticized by the coup plotters for his failing leadership (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023). Though, the coup was described as unsuccessful because it did not successfully overthrow President Umaro Embalo. Also, in January 2022, Burkina Faso witnessed a military coup which ousted the government of President RochMarc Christian Kabore. Soldiers led by a top military officer Lt. Col. Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba staged a coup because of increased level of insecurity in the region, political instability and corruption, lack of opportunity for the youth and growing population. The successful coup saw to the removal of the president and imposition of the military in the affairs of government. This was also orchestrated by anger over the government's failure to tackle a spiraling jihadist insurgency (Daudu, Osimen, & Shuaibu, 2023). Apart from those successful coups noted above, there are other unsuccessful coup attempts which further signal further instability. For instance, there was another military coup in Niger Republic in March, 2021; for near similar reasons bordering on government inefficiencies in areas of corruption, insecurity and lack of development. Though unsuccessful, the coup targeted the government and leadership of President-elect Mohammed Bazoum.

From the foregoing, one would understand that the military coup is a logical outcome of failed democratic leadership in the region. Bah and Jones (2021) revealed that the surge in violent extremism has weakened democratic government and opened the door for military takeovers, particularly in the Sahel nations of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. West African democracy has continued to suffer greatly from the rise of coups. This calls for immediate action to address the menace as well as the underlying reasons. While individuals continue to agitate for good governance that would tackle abuse of authority, corruption and rising poverty, regional organizations like ECOWAS should as a matter of urgency live up to their responsibility and intensify their effort in sustaining their core values.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Democratic Peace Theory

This paper anchors on the Democratic Peace Theory which states that countries with liberal democratic forms of government are less likely to go to war. Drawing from the ideologies of liberalism, the Democratic Peace Theory holds that democracies does not easily resort to war with other democratic countries. Notable proponent of this theory is a German scholar Immanuel Kant, who through his essay "Perpetual Peace" advocates for the formation of a federation of republics with democratic governance. Another proponent of the theory is former U.S president Woodrow Wilson who in his 1917 World WarI message to Congress stated that "The world must be made safe for democracy." He played a pivotal role in establishing League of Nations which was an early endeavour aimed at creating a global entity to foster peace and cooperation among different nations (Wilson, 1919). This evolved from the adoption of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine by the United States.

In Political Science, democratic peace theory postulates that states that practice democracy are generally more peaceful than states with other forms of government system. Hence, the main thrust of the theory is that democracies are less likely to enter into a state of war with one another. In general, many supporters of the theory propose that democratic states and its leaders behave more peacefully and are unlikely to approve of war in most circumstances than other types of states; because democratically elected leaders are constrained by popular opinion and other democratic values such as rule of law, individual freedom and equality through the utilisation of institutions and norms (Toprak, 2022).

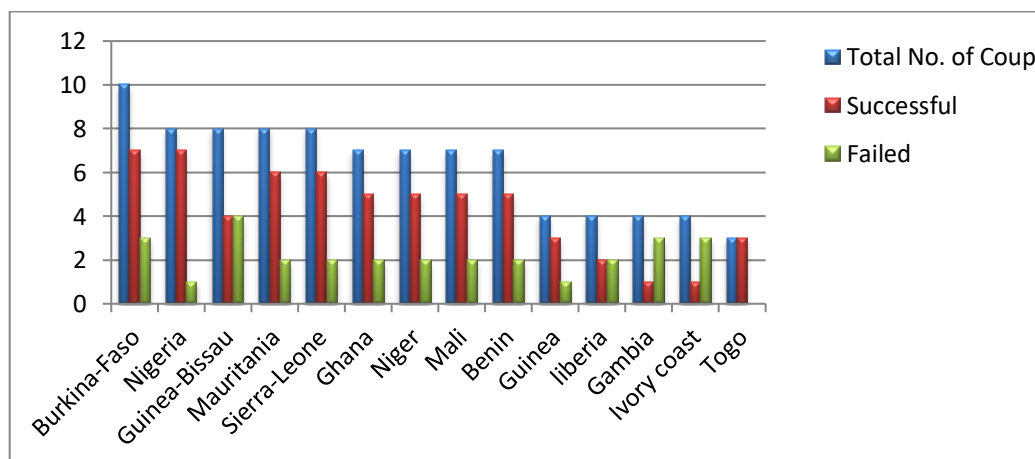
This theory is relevant to the present study in the sense that the theory seriously oppose military coup which defies democratic principles. In military government, power runs through the barrel of the gun as against the ballot box in a democratic system. The military always suspend the existing constitution that provides for fundamental human right and other principles of democracy which is the core of democratic peace theory. On the other hand, the democratic peace theory remains relevant in understanding the activities of the ECOWAS in providing frameworks for managing conflicts and maintaining peace and democratization in the West Africa.

In line with the main idea of the theory of democratic peace, the core values of ECOWAS reflect on democracy, rule of law and human rights which are necessary for a just, equitable and peaceful society. ECOWAS's commitment to these principles is evident in its various protocols and frameworks, such as the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This protocol highlights its dedication to strengthening and protecting democracy within member states. The swift condemnation of coups and other unconstitutional means of getting power by ECOWAS and its quest for the restoration of democratic order in West African states reflect its strong believe in democratic principles. This aligns with the assumption of the democratic peace theory that only democracy can guarantee internal and international peace. Furthermore, ECOWAS' use of diplomatic and economic pressure to encourage a peaceful resolution of conflict aligns with the democratic emphasis on peaceful conflict resolution and international cooperation. Hence, ECOWAS serves as a platform for dialogue and collective action against any action that can thwart democratic principles such as military coup among member states.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Reasons for the Resurgence of Coup D'état in West Africa

From the 1960s after independence of most African states, military coup has been a common occurrence in West Africa. Sadly, Falola (2022) reported that data indicate that democracy is not strengthening but rather failing. Suleiman and Onapajo (2022) estimate that out of the 40 successful and attempted coups in Africa, roughly 20 occurred in the West Africa sub-region; making up 50% of coups in recent decades. This may be associated with plural character of the sub-region and its malfeasance tendencies. The record of the frequency of coups in West Africa since 1960 till 2023 is shown in the graph below:



Source: culled from Wikipedia 2025

The overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali in August 2020 and the transitional government in Mali in May 2021 through military coups is evidence of the legitimacy crises which the civilian governments face as a result of corruption and weak democratic governance (Mechoulan, 2021). Similarly, the case of elite corruption and a failure to enhance citizens' welfare were also evident in the military coup in Guinea in September 2021 which led to the overthrow of President Alpha Condé (Diallo, 2022).

Afro-barometer surveys have revealed that public support for military takeovers has increased throughout the area. According to Lekalake and Buchanan-Clarke (2021), an average of 46% of participants across 18 nations revealed that they would support the military takeover of the country. Just before the coups of 2021, Mali had a highest percentage (61%) support for coups, followed by Guinea (59%). This is an indication that the region's civilian administrations have been overpowered by prevalent insecurity, including armed insurgencies, ethnic and communal conflicts, failed democratic transitions, predatory ruling elites and other factors (Chitiyo & Rupiya, 2021). These factors have contributed to the resurgence of coups. According to Falota (2022), another reason for the rise of coup in West Africa is the failure of democracy to intensify and deepen in the region. There are numerous instances of poor governance in West African region, evident in massive corruption, worsening security crises, lack of free, fair, and credible election, marginalization, domination and sit-tight syndrome. This account for the reason people celebrates the return of the military in politics. An example of this is the case of Guinea which has history of long serving presidents with poor governance, massive economic hardship and corruption. For instance, President Ahmed Sékou Touré served as president for 25 years while President Lansana Conté served for 24 years. Another example is the case of Togo where Gnassingbé Eyadéma made himself almost a lifetime president by ruling Togo for thirty-eight years; from 1967 until his death in 2005. He was succeeded by his son Faure Gnassingbé who took over power in 2005 in a very controversial way which led to a nationwide protest that led to the death of over 1,000 people who were killed by security forces (Mills, 2022). Woldense (2022) attribute the recent reoccurrence of coups in Africa to various factors such as inadequate leadership, lack of democratic practices, economic hardships, the avarice of military personnel, discontent among the youth and residents, and so on.

Furthermore, it is very unfortunate how many of the African leaders see politics as an opportunity for self perpetuation and aggrandizement; hence, they arrogated the power of the state to themselves without remorse. This led to patrimonialism which promotes personal ambitions of political leaders and corruption. The effect was the challenges of underdevelopment of civil and political institutions, massive economic hardship, corruption and worsening insecurity. With intolerance to opposition and the employment of the state resource for self-perpetuation, the only means of socio-political change is the military take over which was always welcome by the masses (Ani, 2021). Unfortunately, most of the states within the sub-region are plural states with difference in tribe, language, culture, origin and religion. For instance, the inter and intra party crises as experienced in Nigeria in the First Republic led to political violence, instability and general sense of insecurity which beckoned on the military as the last hope for restoration of law and order because of the military's perceived neutrality in the political landscape. Moreover, the military itself is part of the society; who see and understand the game of politics as access to political power and the control of the state resources. Hence, ambitious officers also use the military as a platform to actualize their ambition of ruling their respective countries and gain access to the state resources for personal and group gain as done by the politicians. Furthermore, interconnectedness of the global system makes for easy escalation of military coup. This may account for the succession of military intervention in Africa between 1960s and 80s. For example, Mobutu in Congo, November 1965, Soigho in Dahomey four days after, Bakassa of Central Africa Republic on January 1, 1966, Lamiza in Burkina Faso, four days after, and the five majors in Nigeria eleven days after. The trend continued as most of the African states were ruled by Military Juntas (Ornela, 2022).

Besides, the neo-colonial nature of Third World Countries that makes them too porous for external influence especially those that has Multi- National Corporations. These companies are willing to do anything to protect their interest. For instance, it is widely believed that the assassination of Murtala Mohammed in Nigeria was a fallout of his pro-eastern foreign policy against the west. Also, there were speculations that the coup against President Allendes of Chile was a fallout of his policy against the MNCs (Chilaka & Oyinmiebi, 2022). There is an indication that such scenario still plays out covertly in some of the coups in West Africa owing to the deliberate desperate effort by the two power blocs (Eastern and Western power blocs) to counter each other in

the politics of the third world where they recruited supports and alliance through support for military intervention for their ideological interest.

Despite that democratization has occupied a strategic position in the regional discourse, the continuous struggle for political power by the military especially in the West Africa is a proof that coups remain a persistent aspect of the political orientation in the region. Claims of electoral fraud and corruption by civilian regimes served as justifications for military interventions. However, evidence from years of military rule in various West African countries shows that military government is as incompetent, corrupt and despotic as civilian government too. Hence, this ugly development has justified a popular belief that Africa has suffered from lack of capable leadership since independence, regardless of whether it is by the military or by civilians.

Military Coup and Democratic Consolidation in West African States

Democracy has evolved as an ideology of people seeking for inclusion, equality, justice and freedom from oppression, dictatorship, abuse and non-inclusion (Nnoli 2003; Nwagbo, Ayogu & Chukwujekwu 2016). Military coup did not uphold these evolved characters of democracy thereby truncating its stabilization and consolidation in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. There is no election in military rule, it rather establishes platform for non-participation of citizens in governance and decision on who to govern them. In ideal democratic government, power to govern is obtained through competitive elections. It promotes citizens' concerns through legislative arms at both national, regional and grassroots levels as well as the engagement of government by the Non-Governmental Organizations and advocacy groups to ensure accountability, transparency and rule of law. ECOWAS as a sub-regional watchdog through its protocols is aimed at sustaining democratic consolidation in the West African sub-region. The effort of ECOWAS in sustaining democracy and rule of law has been jeopardized by the resurgence in coups in various countries in the region such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Buchan & Tsagourias, 2023). From historical turn of event, one can believe that military coup is contagious in nature therefore poses great threat to democratic institutions, processes and advocates (Ronceray, 2023).

As a regional body ECOWAS has been challenged in its efforts to democratize its processes by recent formation of another subregional organization by the countries under military rule in the subregion. ECOWAS efforts to improve trade, migration, economy, election and security have been greatly hampered as it is now fighting to gain control within the subregion as the new body called the Alliance des Etats du Sahel (AES) is consolidating its frontiers. AES is a confederation of countries under military governance in West Africa made up of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso. The confederation has gone ahead to establish its own institutions parallel to ECOWAS. It targets common market, common currency, free movement of persons, industrialization, uniform security architecture and over time to form common sovereign state. AES shifted its alliance to BRICS against ECOWAS non-alignment posture. These moves have caused more disintegration among ECOWAS members thereby tilting towards the argument of Democratic Choice Theory that non democratic states go to war whereas democratic states do not go to war rather interact diplomatic and consolidate democratically.

As noted earlier, coup marks the end of democracy and the inception of authoritarian military rule. One of the characteristics of military rule is the absence of rule of law as the constitution is always suspended. Hence, the military rule with decrees and edicts. This implies that military rule opposes the principles of democracy such as rule of law. Hence, there is always a case of gross violation of fundamental human right as reflect in lack of press freedom and arbitrary arrest just like Nigeria experienced especially during the military regime of Sani Abacha between 1994 and 1998 (Mahmud, 2001). In March 1995, Abacha accused many policy elites of a coup plot. The courts handed down over thirty death sentences on the accused. Following condemnation and threats of increased sanctions by international community, the death sentences were reduced to prison terms. However, the Government continued to enforce its arbitrary authority. In November 1995, Abacha executed nine leaders of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), including Ken Saro-Wiwa (Abegunrin, 2003). These acts reflect the extreme nature of military rule.

Following the recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, top civilians from those countries have been detained under house arrest. Sometimes, they are thrown into prison without trial. For example, Burkina Faso's former president Roch Kaboré was detained for more than two months. Similar situation occurred in Niger

where the deposed president and his cabinet members were detained without trial (Buchan & Tsagourias, 2023).

Lack of press freedom is a significant area of concern in military rule as there has been continuous report of military harassment, intimidation, and attacks directed at journalists who the juntas believe are threat to their government. Apart from direct attack on individual journalist, there has been occasions where local and international media are restricted or suspended from covering news pertaining the government. Example, in August 2023, the leader of the junta in Niger suspended the operations of Radio France and France 24 tv in the country. Immediately after the coup in Burkina Faso, two French reporters were expelled for alleged anti-coup reportage (Melly, 2023).

Once the military take over power, no anti-military protest is allowed. There is always excessive use of force and suppression on protesters. For instance, apart from pro-junta rallies in Bamako in Mali, Niamey in Niger, and Ouagadougou in Burkina-Faso, coup leaders have banned demonstrations by civil society organizations and opposition political parties in those countries respectively. In Guinea, security forces have in several occasions prevented demonstrations and attack protesters of the coup (Idris, 2024). The violent disperse and suppression of peaceful protesters sometimes leads to many deaths of innocent citizens. This act violates the citizen's right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. According to Bah and Jones (2021), under the regional ECOWAS law and the UN international law in line with the principles of democracy, the citizens have the right of peaceful assembly except if there is a genuine security threat emanating from the assembly.

Despite uproar regarding the fundamental human right violation, juntas have not made efforts in investigating it. The Russian Wagner Group and the Malian armed forces have been accused of killing civilians in Moura. Melly (2023) lament that in Burkina-Faso, allegations of civilian casualties during counterterrorism operations in the country have been mounting despite that deteriorating security situation is the accusation which the military held against the civilians as the reason for the coup. Acho and Tacham (2023) buttressed this and stated that despite being ruled by the military, Burkina Faso is currently facing worst humanitarian crises; junta leaders instead of providing good governance are rather making every effort to exonerate themselves from the extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and detentions of civilians. These are indications that military rule is the greatest enemy of democracy which truncates and jeopardizes democratic consolidation.

Role of ECOWAS in Sustaining Democratic Consolidation in West Africa

When the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 as a regional economic community, its primary aim was to facilitate trade among its members. However, as a result of continuous outbreak of leadership conflict in the region, ECOWAS gradually advanced its focus towards addressing military concerns in addition to the initial objectives which centered on economic development of the region. The experiences of the Liberia and Sierra Leonean civil wars vividly illustrated the connection between economic development, peace, and security in the region (Idris, 2024). According to Mills (2022), from the 1990s, ECOWAS has implemented various legal frameworks such as the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security to provide military support, mediation services, and assistance for peace building to its member countries. The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance which was adopted in 2001 contains a mechanism and principles for addressing unconstitutional change in government such as the case of military coup. The ECOWAS treaties Article 25 granted ECOWAS the right to interfere in situation of unconstitutional change of government by the military. This protocol also includes clauses about the democratic governance of ECOWAS members, encompassing aspects such as electoral processes, judicial impartiality, and the neutrality of security forces (ECOWAS, 2001).

ECOWAS has played strategic roles in enhancing stability and economic development of the countries in the West African sub-region. Besides intervening in military coups in the region, many other political developments such as cases of third terms or unlimited presidential terms, controversial re-elections of leaders, post-election violence and instances of alleged corruption of political leaders are other areas that ECOWAS has intervened in the region. For instance, ECOWAS intervened in 2016 post-election violence in Gambia between Adama Barrow and Yaya Jammeh. In early 2017, the ECOWAS delegation intervened and mediated

for peaceful resolution of the conflict (Chilaka, & Oyinmiebi, 2022). The union was able to intervene in Gambia and ensured handover of power by the defeated incumbent president who was refusing to hand over power. This was precautionary to political crisis that would have led to destabilization of already set democratic process and possible military intervention.

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

In the case of Guinea, the country has had a history of long-serving rulers. Ahmed Sékou Touré served as president for twenty-five years while Lansana Conté, served for twenty-four years. In 2020, the first president to be democratically elected in Guinea, Alpha Condé amended the constitution to enable him to serve for two more terms. Condé who was celebrated for representing a fresh start for Guinean democracy dashed the hope of people with this step of amending the constitution for his selfish reason. This step was met with resistance and nationwide protest. Mills (2022) stated that ECOWAS responded by mediating for dialogue. A year later, Condé was overthrown in a military coup which made ECOWAS to respond immediately by suspending and imposing sanctions on Guinea.

In Guinea Bissau, the union also played good roles to ensure democratic consolidation over leadership challenges that faced the nation in 2022. The United Nations and other Western partners were of great assistance to ECOWAS in advancing pressure on the juntas to hand over power. It engaged in mediation and later sanction on Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad over unconstitutional change of government by the military (Touray, 2024).

Furthermore, the most significant intervention of ECOWAS is seen Niger. In 2023, there was a coup in Niger Republic which led to the overthrow of President Mohamed Bazoum. This was due to the growing dissatisfaction with the inability to effectively handle security issues as witnessed in uprising threat of terrorism, allegations of embezzlement and the mismanagement of public funds (Zambakari, 2023). In response, ECOWAS condemned the coup and imposed serious sanctions which significantly affected trade and movement by closing land and air borders between Niger and other ECOWAS states. Furthermore, the assets of Niger held in foreign banks were frozen; with the aim of restricting the financial resources of the juntas. Additionally, ECOWAS halted all financial transactions between ECOWAS states and Niger. This made it difficult for the junta to access funds. All these were made in an effort to pressure the juntas to restore constitutional order. In addition to imposing sanctions, ECOWAS also suspended Niger on the ground of gross violation of democratic norms which is the core principles of ECOWAS which borders on adherence to democratic governance (Ronceray, 2023). Melly (2023) noted that ECOWAS got a popular support of the eight member-states of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) which facilitates the closing of all Nigerian borders with other states, freezing the country's assets held in foreign banks; thereby halting financial transactions. Hence, this regional unity demonstrates a collective stance against unconstitutional power grabs and as well strengthens the impact of the sanctions (International Crisis Group, 2023). The regional body issued a clear ultimatum to the coup plotters to reinstate the ousted president or face additional measures, including military intervention.

Though the ECOWAS' strong sanction and other efforts faced serious setback when there was joint withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS and their subsequent formation of new organization, Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) in January 2024, according to Melly (2023), the military takeover in Niger was a clear violation of ECOWAS principles; threatening regional stability and setting a dangerous pace. Hence, by suspending Niger, ECOWAS sent deterrence to other member states that military takeovers would not be tolerated and would come with severe consequences such as exclusion from joint security efforts and peacekeeping missions; exclusion from access to funding and technical assistance for economic and social development initiatives and restriction from participation in preferential trade agreements.

From the foregoing, it is evident that ECOWAS seems to have been more swiftly responsive to coups through measures such as imposing sanctions on coup leaders, suspending member states from the organization, and mediating dialogue between the military and civilian actors in the region (Buchan & Tsagourias, 2023). However, the recent resurgence of military coup in West Africa has raised questions about the effectiveness of ECOWAS in countering coups in the region.

One of the contributory factors which made it difficult for ECOWAS to fully implement its resolution as earlier noted is because the juntas enjoy popular support of the citizens as a result of pre-existing evidence of poor governance by the civilians. In the case of Niger, Premise Data from a survey conducted on the Niger coup revealed that 79% of the participants are in support of the coup. This high approval rating was attributed to the military junta's framing of the coup as a move to free Niger from France's influence. This widespread domestic support for the junta limited the effectiveness of sanctions and external pressure, as the population did not perceive the junta as illegitimate (Melly, 2023).

However, the inefficiencies in the structure of ECOWAS have been noted as a factor affecting the effectiveness of ECOWAS. According to Darko (2015), there was a proposition to prohibit third terms which was deliberated in 2015 but was put on hold following resistance from leaders of Togo and Gambia, who had already extended their tenures by amending term limits. Based on this premise, scholars criticized that the narrow framing of democracy give the leaders in the region the edge to debunk critiques that they are defying rules, so long as an election has taken place. This contention is rooted in ECOWAS structure which appears to ignore the excesses of the its officials especially those who are also serving leaders in their respective countries. Most notably is the provision of ECOWAS which state that the chairperson must be a current head of state. In ECOWAS structure, even leaders who attained political position through coups have been selected for this position. This compromises the principle of ECOWAS.

Apart from standing against military and unconstitutional change of government, ECOWAS has not been able to address other sociopolitical factors that always lead to internal crises which sometimes prompt military intervention in government especially as it concerns unethical amendment of constitution to extend tenure as experienced in Togo, Gambia, Senegal etc. Manipulation of electoral and election processes by the incumbent to remain in power has been a recurring experience in West Africa. Meanwhile, there has not been substantial effort by the ECOWAS or its judicial arm to condemn or reverse this trend as it continues to spread across countries and is almost becoming a regular norm which is not helping democratic consolidation within the sub-region (Barnett, 2023). This abuse of electoral processes by the civilian government can be regarded as civilian coup against the constitution, civilian wishes and general principles of democracy which is equal to military coup.

From the foregoing, the challenging situation in Niger presented ECOWAS with its most significant obstacle which serves as their litmus test over the years. West Africa has witnessed various regimes rise and fall. Consequently, ECOWAS needs to be committed to its rules through uncompromised implementation of its protocols notwithstanding who and what country that is involved. ECOWAS need to diligently work hard to address the challenges of insecurity, corruption, poverty, hunger and ethno-religious crises by ensuring human rights protection, inclusion, social justice and accountability among the countries of the West African sub-region.

This also affected unity among ECOWAS nations. Military controlled states have pulled out of ECOWAS to establish their own economic, political and military relations. This posed huge setback to economic and political integration and consolidation respectively among the members of the organization and sub-region; therefore, upholding the tenets of Democratic Peace Theory.

CONCLUSION

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

exploitation within the region. ECOWAS has made some efforts through dialogue, negotiation and lately sanctions deter military regime in the sub-region and discourage such from happening. This is in line with the tenets and spirit of ECOWAS's Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance 2001 and ECOWAS treaties Article 25 of the 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention which all the countries in the sub-region signed. Despite its effort, wave of military leadership through coup in recent times has been on the increase. The ugly experience has presented a big challenge to ECOWAS in sustaining democratic consolidation which is one of its core principles both in the internal affairs of its members and among member states relation. Absence of democratic practices and engagement both within a country and across its neighboring countries affects the socio-economic, political and economic development.

FINDINGS

From the foregoing, it is evident that there return of military in ECOWAS subregion since 2021. The democratic advances made both within the domestic countries involved and across the sub-region for some years now have been put under threat by the wave of coups. It abruptly stopped democratization in the affected countries and breach communication among members of the subregion state which weakens ECOWAS leadership and acceptability. Though the regional authority, ECOWAS has denounced the coups in Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali; and demanded the restoration of constitutional order, it is observed that there is a strong public support for military intervention in nations like Mali, Niger, and Guinea due to serious dissatisfaction with civilian authorities. Hence, motivation for military coup in the sub-region is anchored on bad governance, corruption by the civilian political leaders and demand for an end to such abuse by the populace even through military intervention. It is imperative to note that ECOWAS leadership has not been able to implement its agreement in ECOWAS's Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in 2001. This has increased the military quest to seize power within the region as a result weakness to enforce. The inability to enforce it sanctions in order to avert further military coup is causing more democratic backsliding, thereby necessitating socioeconomic problems such as poverty, insecurity, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, hunger and exist of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) in the region. ECOWAS court has not effectively address concerns of citizens of member states and institutional failure that necessitate military interventions. Also, there is no strong ECOWAS Electoral Commission that monitor and regulate electoral activities of ECOWAS member states to ensure compliance to rule of law and universally acceptable best democratic practices. Military takeovers distort democratic establishments and procedures, rule of law and human rights leading to instantaneous chaos and violence, breakdown of democratic norms and principles as well as the degradation of the rule of law and impede economic growth and foreign investment (Acho & Tacham, 2023). Conclusively, Military coup and leadership create a culture of political instability and ambiguity which erode public confidence in democratic institutions and procedures. Invariably, it makes it more difficult to establish a democratic system that will last. Except there is a discouragement to military intervention in governance, it will be difficult to consolidate democracy in West Africa subregion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. ECOWAS should take proactive step by engaging the leadership of the member-states to tackle the root causes of coups in the region by ensuring democratic governance, inclusiveness, transparent corruption-free governance and end to tenure elongation. This can be achieved through developing early mechanism framework through mediation and dialogue by addressing grievances, political intensions and economic deprivation before it materializes into internal crisis and call for military coup.
2. ECOWAS should ensure consistent enforcement of its sanctions and other measures against all coup perpetrators, irrespective of any other emerging factors (internally or externally) or personality involved which will serve as deterrence to coup plotters in line with its Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance 2001.
3. There is need to strengthen ECOWAS court in its adjudication and enforcement over civil and democratic concerns of the citizens of member states. This should include implementable sanctions against leader that

engage in constitutional and electoral abuses beyond the time they are in power. Also, Electoral Commission for ECOWAS region need to be established, given legal framework and well-funded to monitor and regulate activities of member states which necessitate concern for military incursion and sanction them accordingly. When there is a prove of a deliberate move for democratic consolidation within the subregion there will be peace, justice, development and unity thus military would not have any reason to intervene in governance.

REFERENCES

1. Accord. (2022). Military coups in Africa: A continuation of politics by other means? <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/military-coups-in-africa-a-continuation-of-politics-by-other-means/>
2. Akinola, A. O., & Makombe, R. (2024). Rethinking the Resurgence of Military Coups in Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 19 (1), 11-36.
3. Akwei, I. (2017). Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe is new ECOWAS chairperson. *African News*.<https://www.africanews.com/2017/06/04/togolese-president-faure-gnassingbe-is-new-ecowas-chairperson/>
4. Ani, N. C. (2021). Coup Resurgence in Africa: The Pitfalls of a Regional Response. *Accord*, September 30, 2021.
5. Bah, A.S. & Jones, N. (2021). West Africa's democratic tipping point? Reflections on the drivers of instability in the wake of Guinea's coup. *Brookings Africa in Focus*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/09/17/west-africas-democratic-tipping-point-reflections-on-the-drivers-of-instability-in-the-wake-of-guineas-coup/>
6. Buchan, R. & Tsagourias, N. (2023). The Niger coup and the prospect of ECOWAS military intervention: An international law appraisal. *Lieber Institute*. <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/niger-coup-ecowas-military-intervention-international-law-appraisal/>
7. Chilaka, F. C. & Oyinmiebi, P. (2022). Resurgence of military coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*. ISSN: 2689-5129, Volume 5, Issue 2, 2022 (p. 52-64).
8. Darko, S. (2015). West African leaders' shelve third-term ban proposal. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32808685>
9. Daudu, B. O., Osimen, G. U., & Shuaibu, K. (2023). Cyberbullying and social media: Implications for African digital space. Mohamed Lahby, Al-Sakib Khan Pathan & Yassine Maleh (eds.), *Combating cyberbullying in digital age with artificial intelligence*. 243-253. Chapman and Hall/CRC Press.
10. De Oliveira, R. S., & Verhoeven, H. (2023). Taming intervention: Sovereignty, statehood and political order in Africa, 60(2), 7-32. *Routledge*.
11. ECOWAS (2001). Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance <https://caselaw.ihrrda.org/fr/entity/gnhvkzf0aw9et1dhcq96n7b9>
12. Fatola, T. (2022). Are coups back in Africa. *The Premium Times*, Nigeria, January 29, 2022.
13. Hutchful, E. (1997). The civil society debate in Africa. *International Journal*, 53(1), 54-77. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40203383>
14. ICG. (2021). The Central Sahel: Scene of new climate wars? *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/b154-le-sahel-central-theatre-de-nouvelles-guerres-climatiques>
15. Idris, A. (2024). ECOWAS lifts sanctions on Niger amid tensions in West Africa bloc. *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/24/ecowas-lifts-sanctions-on-niger-amid-tensions-in-west-africa-bloc>
16. International Crisis Group (ICG). (2021). The return of West African coups. *Africa Briefing No. 173*. <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b173-the-return-of-west-african-coups.pdf>
17. Kant, I. (1795). *Perpetual peace: A philosophical sketch*. Hackett Publishing Company.
18. Lekalake, R. & Buchanan-Clarke, S. (2021). Support for military coups is rising in Africa, especially West Africa. *Afrobarometer Dispatch*, No. 515. <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad515-support-military-coups-rising-africa-especially-west-africa>
19. Marshall, M.G. (2022). Coup d'état events, 1946-2021. *Center for Systemic Peace*. <https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>

20. Melly, P. (2023). Niger coup underlines challenge to democracy across West Africa. Chatham house.<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/08/niger-coup-underlines-challenge-democracy-across-west-africa>
21. Mills, I. (2022). The effectiveness of ECOWAS in mitigating coups in West. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Leonie-Mills-Effectiveness-of-ECOWAS.pdf>
- Miller, M.K. (2011). Electoral authoritarianism and democracy: A formal model of regime transitions. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 24(2), 153-181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951629811429111>
22. Nnoli, O. (2003). Introduction to politics. Enugu, Snaap Press Ltd.
23. Nwagbo, S.N.C, Ayogu, C.E. & Chukwuebuka O.N. (2016). Authoritative allocation of values and ethnoreligious squabbles in Nigeria: militocracy in democracy. *South East Journal of Political Science*, Vol.2 No.2. ps 226-245.
24. Ornella, M. (2022). In Francophone West Africa, democracy continue to backside. Premium Times.Study.com.
25. Owoeye, G. Olanrewaju, O.P., Ojeka, R. & Oluwakemi, E.A. (2021). Democracy consolidation and election management in West Africa: Issues and challenges. Researchgate.net
26. Powell, J.M., & Thyne, C.L. (2011). Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 48(2), 249-259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397436>
27. Ronceray, M. (2023). Can ECOWAS still defend democracy in West Africa after the Niger coup? <https://ecdpm.org/work/can-ecowas-still-defend-democracy-west-africa-after-niger-coup>
28. Suleiman, M.N., & Onapajo, H. (2022). The proliferation of military coups in twenty-first century Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 002190962211406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221140692>
29. Toprak, B. (2022). Introduction to liberalism in international relations: Critical approach to liberalism and Covid 19. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361590646_Introduction_to_Liberalism_in_International_Relations_Critical_Approach_to_Liberalism_and_Covid_19
30. Touray, O. A. (2024). ECOWAS lifts sanctions on Niger. Abuja,
31. Woldense, J. (2022). What happens when coups fail? The problem of identifying and weakening the enemy within. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(7), 1236-1265.
32. Zambakari, C. (2023). Military coup in Niger: The legacies of colonialism and the US war on terror in West Africa. Accord. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/military-coup-in-niger-the-legacies-of-colonialism-and-the-us-war-on-terror-in-west-africa/>