

Original Article

West African Coups and the Debate on Junta-Led Tri-State Confederation

Chidi Onwubiko Ukaegbu^{1*}, Chidi Agodi Okoroafor², Chukwuma, Ogonna Ebenezer³

^{1,3} *Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.*

² *Department of Political Science, Evangel University, Okpoto, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.*

Received Date: 28th September 2025

Revised Date: 13th October 2025

Accepted Date: 26th October 2025

Published Date: 04th November 2025

Abstract - The re-emergence of coups in West Africa has become a critical issue for discussion within and outside the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region. With the recent spate of coups witnessed in West Africa: from Mali, Egypt, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Niger, and others, the trend and the issues it throws up poses fears as to what new dimensions and effect it would assume in the nearest future. Thus, the present research paper examines coups in West Africa and the debate on junta led tri-state confederation formed by the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) which came into being amid a decade of escalating unrest in the Sahel. This formation was fuelled by the aftermath of the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011 resulting from the instability caused by rampant arms trafficking and the rise of armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Specifically, the study examines how the formation of a Junta-led tri-state confederation affects the political landscape of West Africa. Anchored on both Frustration-Aggression theory and leadership substitute theory, the research adopts the qualitative approach of data collection which relies on secondary sources such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, official publications etc and content analysis for the data generated. Findings from the study show that recent coups in West Africa fuelled the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and the confederation will deliberately expand the operational space of the junta alliance and consolidate its military and economic partnership with Russia China, as well as Turkey and Iran. Their secession will undermine the legitimacy of ECOWAS and hinder regional economic and security integration and this will invariably complicate the return to democratization. Thus, the AES's rejection of ECOWAS's democratic norms and emphasis on military governance creates a stark contrast between the AES bloc and the rest of West Africa, leading to increased regional polarization. Based on these findings, the study recommends among other things, that ECOWAS should strengthen monitoring mechanisms to detect early signs of governance failures or instability within its regions. This includes but not limited to rising corruption, weakened democratic institutions and increasing security threats which could enable diplomatic intervention before a coup occurs as well as working with local actors to resolve governance issues before they give rise to coups.

Keywords - Coups, Confederation, ECOWAS, Tri-State, Frustration-Aggression.

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, military takeovers in West Africa have become commonplace, with certain states witnessing several takeovers than others. This seems to threaten the regional stability which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seeks to achieve. In 1963, the military overthrew President Sylvanus Olympio in Togo in one of the first coups in West Africa. In 1966, a group of young Nigerian soldiers overthrew the newly formed government of Tafawa Balewa leading to the death of many prominent Nigerians and the weakening of the new politically independent state. President Blaise Compaoré was overthrown in Burkina Faso in 2015 following a coup, while President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was overthrown in Mali in 2020 (The Guardian, 2015, British Broadcasting (BBC) News, 2020, Ogonna and Ume-Ezeoke, 2024). More recently, there have been other coups in nations like Niger



Republic, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau etc (Ojo, 2018, BBC News, 2020). Thus, coups in Africa seems to be on a steady rise. These coups do not just occur. According to Adebaniwa and Obadare (2011), Ojo (2018), there are a number of intricate and varied elements that contribute to coups in West Africa. This includes, but not limited to political unrest, economic hardships, corruption, socio-economic disparities, ethnic conflicts, and weak institutions. These coups, whose end is probably not in sight, seem to pose a threat to regional stability and democracy within West African sub-region judging by the contours introduced by the newly formed Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

The Alliance of Sahel States (Alliance des États du Sahel), a confederation formed by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in September, 2023 is considered a mutual defense and political alliance mechanism whose aim is to strengthen regional security, promote sovereignty, and coordinate efforts against terrorism within member states which are also states in the west African sub-region. Exponents of this outfit consider it as a significant geopolitical development, representing a strategic realignment by the three countries to pursue their own regional integration and development, moving away from ECOWAS and tactically disengaging from the traditional Western partnerships usually adopted by ECOWAS. Thus, On January 28, 2024, the junta-led countries announced their formal withdrawal from ECOWAS citing concerns that the ECOWAS organization has strayed from its founding principles and the spirit of Pan-Africanism. More specifically, the AES noted that the Community has failed to assist the states (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) in their existential fight against terrorism, political unrest, and insecurity.

As it were, coups can take different forms, depending largely on the players and techniques used. According to Kew (2019), institutional and constitutional forms of coups that have occurred in West African sub-region are the most prevalent. In order to overthrow a government, existing state institutions and structures like the Parliament, Political parties, the Courts etc can be manipulated. Thus, Political elites who control these institutions utilize them and justify their actions based on the dysfunctional condition of the institutions and structures of the state (Kew, 2019). As such, constitutional coups entail the use of legal tactics, such as impeachment or vote of no confidence to overthrow an administration. One example of this kind of coup is the overthrow of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso and Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali in August, 2020 (Kew, 2019). The coups were blamed on incompetence and corruption of Mali's political leadership; the same argument that was earlier traded by those that championed the three military takeovers that had occurred in West Africa in the last decades. That of Mali for instance, gave impetus to Guinea's coup in 2021 and that of Burkina Faso in 2022 setting off a chain reaction in other countries within the West African sub-region. The recently attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau, in February 2024 led by a few armed men raised the possibility of these kinds of assaults in the nearest future. Thus, the sixteen countries that make up the West Africa region (Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo had at one time or the other experimented different forms of coups leading to varied responses from ECOWAS. One of these responses resulted in the formation of The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in 2023.

In Africa's postcolonial history, periodic coups such as these have become commonplace, yet the principal actors and their goals have changed over time. Thus, the formation of the AES appears to be a response to this trend. Take for instance, the goal of the coups in Burkina Faso and Mali was to overthrow the elected government, which was considered unable to deal with the rise in terrorist attacks in their separate states. Aside the above, it was felt that the President of these states were subverting the constitution to maintain their hold on power amidst the growing terrorist attacks in their countries. Thus, coups were justified as a safeguard for the constitution and the AES as a mechanism to subvert terrorist invasion using coercive mechanism- a potent tool which ECOWAS obviously lack. The specific worry of the present paper is the effect of the formation of a Junta-led tri-state confederation on the political landscape of West Africa and how a Junta-led confederation would impact trade and economic cooperation. This worry is heightened by the fact that AES membership of ECOWAS has not fully complied with the provisions of Article 91 of ECOWAS Treaty which among other things provides a one year notice of withdrawal. To this end, the purported immediate withdrawal of (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) from ECOWAS is not in line with the prescribed procedure outlined in Article 91. Consequently, the status of these states with respect to their membership in the Community is

still ambiguous and yet to be affirmed yet they have continued in their effort at governance in a confederal manner having ceased membership of the Economic Community of West African state in defiance to the provision of article 91. It is this problematic that the present study sets out to investigate.

2. Literature Review

For the purposes of clarity and pursuant of the objective of this study, we shall approach are survey of literature from two stand points:

- ❖ Formation of a Junta-led tri-state confederation and the political landscape of West Africa
- ❖ Formation of a Junta-led confederation and economic cooperation within West Africa

2.1. Formation of a Junta-Led Tri-State Confederation and the Political Landscape of West Africa

Traditionally, ECOWAS is supposed to midwife economic integration, promote peace and stability and facilitate cooperation among member states but the activities of the AES has inadvertently disrupted regional political cohesion by their resistance to external pressures from organizations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and the international community (BBC News, 2020, Maiangwa, 2021). One reason for this specific survey is the fact that many believe that this Junta-led tri-state alliance in Africa (AES), comprising Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali has significant implications for the continent's political landscape, trade, and economic cooperation as well as the stability of ECOWAS. For one, it signals a shift in governance models that poses threat to the contents and context of the May, 28th, 1975 Treaty of Lagos which formally brought ECOWAS into existence. This model of governance presents a political union of sovereign states that have created a common body for specific, limited purposes. Unlike a federation, this model has central authority that is very weak, and the ultimate power and sovereignty remains with the individual member states. While no modern nation functions as pure confederations, the AES adopts the European Union model where member states remain sovereign at least, politically and the authority of the governing body is limited only to the extent of shared concerns such as defense, foreign policy, and economic cooperation. Thus, its decisions are not binding national law but depend on the member states for implementation. Consequently, member states retain the implicit right to withdraw from the confederation since it is a voluntary union (Ojo, 2018, Kew, 2019, Bloomfield, 2024 and Ukaegbu, 2025).

Generally, scholars speculate that the formation of a junta-led tri-state confederation in West Africa, such as The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) formed by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger Republic, would significantly alter the region's political landscape. Historically, military alliances in West Africa have been motivated by shared interests in regime survival and regional influence. According to McGowan (2003), military juntas often form alliances to consolidate power and suppress democratic pressures, and AES would likely follow this pattern. As Powell and Thyne (2011) noted, military regimes in West Africa tend to form alliances in response to common threats, such as economic instability, insurgencies, and external interventions. The creation of AES could therefore be seen as a strategy to safeguard military rule across member states, resisting both internal opposition and external diplomatic pressures.

Military regimes in the region have historically been drawn together by the need for mutual protection and legitimacy, as seen in previous alliances like the Mano River Union during the 1990s. Kande (2004) noted that these alliances often stem from shared vulnerabilities, such as internal dissent and the threat of regional isolation. AES, similarly, would likely be motivated by a desire to create a collective defense mechanism against both internal and external forces pushing for democratization. As Fosu (2008) argued, military juntas are more likely to resist democratic reforms when they can rely on support from neighboring regimes, suggesting that AES could significantly delay democratization efforts in the region.

The establishment of AES could also exacerbate political repression within its member states. According to Francis (2013), military regimes tend to prioritize security over governance reforms, often leading to widespread political crackdowns and violations of human rights. Theoretically and speculatively too, member states of AES would collaborate on policies aimed at suppressing opposition movements and curtailing political freedoms. Zounmenou and Loua (2011) observed that military alliances in West Africa often lead to an intensification of authoritarian rule as

regimes coordinate efforts to maintain control and suppress dissent. AES would likely follow this trajectory, reinforcing authoritarian governance across its member states and further destabilizing the region. By and large, the formation of AES would also lead to heightened tensions with ECOWAS. As Omorogbe (2011) noted, ECOWAS has played a key role in promoting democracy and resolving conflicts in West Africa, often intervening to restore constitutional governance in the wake of coups. However, AES could undermine ECOWAS's efforts by creating a bloc of states resistant to democratic reforms. Thurston (2020) suggested that the rise of military alliances in West Africa often weakens regional organizations, as juntas prioritize regime survival over regional stability. The formation of AES could significantly diminish ECOWAS's ability to enforce democratic norms, thereby weakening the region's political cohesion. In his work: *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*, Adebajo (2002) stated as follows:

the emergence of military confederations in West Africa poses a significant challenge to ECOWAS's mission of promoting democratic governance and regional stability, as these juntas often prioritize their interests over democratic reforms.

Furthermore, Kande (2004) in his work *Coups from below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa* argued that:

"The establishment of a junta-led confederation would likely dilute ECOWAS's capacity to mediate conflicts and promote democratic governance, as military governments tend to resist external pressures for change, viewing them as threats to their authority."

While the authors above were not directly discussing the subject matter of AES, they however addressed the problem of coup in West Africa and the tendency for junta-led states to want to form alliances and the possible implication of this union on the political landscape of Africa. Their studies indicate what this alliances would do to the West African terrain. Specifically, such confederations would have significant security implications for West Africa. Weiss (2020) pointed out that military regimes often adopt a security-first approach to governance, prioritizing military solutions to internal and regional conflicts. Thus, AES would likely emphasize joint military operations and intelligence sharing, particularly in response to the growing threat of jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel region. While this could lead to short-term security gains, McGowan (2003 and Ukaegbu, 2015) argued that militarized governance often worsens long-term political instability, as it fails to address the underlying socio-economic drivers of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and weak governance.

In addition, AES could inspire a proliferation of coups across the region and the formation of other sub-regional unions aside AES. According to Collier (2009), the success of one military regime often emboldens other military factions to seize power, creating a contagion effect and necessity to tackle such uprising by other means. The formation of AES could serve as a model for other military factions in West Africa, encouraging them to overthrow civilian governments and join the confederation. N'Guessan (2015) and Ukaegbu (2025) noted that the spread of military rule in West Africa has often been driven by regional alliances, as juntas collaborate to resist both domestic opposition and international condemnation. The formation of AES could therefore lead to a resurgence of coups across West Africa, further undermining democratic governance in the region. To this extent, international response to coups and the formation of AES would likely shape the future of West Africa's political landscape and fortunes. As Adebajo (2010) highlighted, international actors such as the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU) have been key players in promoting democratic transitions and condemning coups in West Africa which is the mainstay of mainstream western democratic movement (Ukaegbu, 2015). However, McGowan (2003) argued that military alliances often enable juntas to resist external pressures, as they can pool resources and offer mutual support. If AES emerges, it is likely that international actors would impose sanctions and diplomatic isolation on the confederation, but this could be met with resistance as AES turns to non-Western powers like Russia and China for support, further complicating the region's geopolitical landscape.

2.2. Formation of a Junta-Led Confederation and Economic Cooperation within West Africa

The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which includes Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, poses significant challenges to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its protocols regarding

economic cooperation and free movement of people and goods. One of the most pressing concerns is the potential for hostilities between AES member states and other ECOWAS countries, particularly Nigeria, which could undermine the foundational principles of regional integration and collaboration that ECOWAS has strived to establish. Historically, military regimes have demonstrated tendencies toward nationalism and protectionism, often viewing neighboring countries with suspicion. This dynamic is more pronounced in the context of the AES, where military juntas may perceive external influences, particularly from larger and more powerful states like Nigeria, as threats to their authority and stability. The militarization of politics in AES states could lead to a hardened stance against their neighbors, resulting in increased border controls and restrictive measures that contradict the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of people and goods.

The potential closure of borders by AES member states toward other ECOWAS countries, particularly Nigeria, poses a significant challenge to regional economic integration. The ECOWAS protocol, established to facilitate the free movement of people and goods across member states, aims to enhance trade, promote economic growth, and foster unity among West African nations. However, as Zounmenou and Loua (2011) highlighted, military alliances often prioritize internal security and regime stability over collaborative economic practices. This narrow focus can result in the implementation of stringent border controls and restrictions, effectively isolating AES member states from the broader ECOWAS economic community. Moreover, the increasing hostilities between AES members and other ECOWAS states could lead to retaliatory and predatory economic policies and measures, further complicating regional relations. As tensions rise, AES countries may justify closing their borders on the grounds of national security. This would undermine the trust and cooperation that ECOWAS seeks to promote. This trend could stifle trade and movement. Furthermore, If Nigeria, being the largest economy in the region plays a crucial role in facilitating economic activity among neighboring states, AES members may view her as a competitor or threat and may restrict trade routes and movement. Doing this directly contradicts ECOWAS's objectives.

The implications of this hostility extend beyond immediate economic concerns. The erosion of free movement protocols can lead to increased illegal border crossings and smuggling activities as individuals seek alternative routes to navigate the restrictions. This scenario not only poses challenges for regional security but also diminishes the efficacy of ECOWAS's efforts to regulate and formalize cross-border trade, as highlighted by N'Guessan (2015). In this context, the AES's military focus may also deter ECOWAS's role as a mediator in regional disputes. As tensions escalate, AES members could become less receptive to ECOWAS initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and cooperation. This resistance could further fracture the relationship between AES states and the broader ECOWAS community, complicating collective efforts to address security and economic challenges in the region.

In summary, the formation of the AES presents a significant threat to the goals of ECOWAS, particularly regarding economic cooperation and the free movement of people and goods. The increasing hostilities between AES member states and other ECOWAS countries, especially Nigeria, can lead to closed borders and restrictive measures that undermine the protocols established to facilitate trade and integration. The militarization of politics within AES may prioritize regime security over regional collaboration, resulting in a fragmented economic landscape and strained relationships among member states. As such, the AES could fundamentally challenge the principles of unity and cooperation that ECOWAS aims to uphold, posing risks not only to regional stability but also to the economic development of its member states. Existing literatures have argued that, the formation of a junta-led tri-state confederation could affect the integration and cooperation of ECOWAS in specific ways: The AES's military focus threatens to undermine the democratic principles that ECOWAS seeks to promote (Zounmenou & Loua, 2011); The AES may prioritize regime survival over regional economic collaboration, leading to disjointed development efforts (Collier, 2009); Historical mistrust among AES members could hinder cooperative relationships within ECOWAS, complicating collaborative economic practices (Powell & Thyne, 2011); The authoritarian nature of junta-led states could deter foreign investors, limiting economic growth opportunities for ECOWAS member states (Francis, 2013); The AES's restrictive policies may impede the enforcement of ECOWAS protocols on the free movement of people and goods, exacerbating regional isolation (N'Guessan, 2015); The alliance can impede West Africa's efforts toward

integration by destabilizing trade routes, undermining collective policies, and creating economic isolation (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). The uncertainty that hovers around the alliance threatens regional cooperation efforts like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the long conceived regional economic union which began during the 1972 meeting of Heads of West African states and whose target membership included members of AES and others currently trapped in coups and its disruptive effects (Tejpar & Albuquerque, 2015, ECOWAS, 2020). It is this existential threats and continuous relevance of ECOWAS that the present paper addresses itself to.

3. Theoretics and Methodological Approach

For one, the tri-state confederation calls to question the very essence, achievement and continuous relevance of the Economic Community of West African States and the need for a systematic theoretical expose' that is grounded in existing paradigmatic perspective that offers a clearer delineation of the trend and its likely impact on ECOWAS relevance in west African sub-region. For this, we turn to frustration-aggression theory and leadership substitute theory for in-depth insight and analytical assistance in our attempt to effectively interrogate the two key variables (X-Coups in West Africa, Y-the formation of tri-state confederation) under investigation.

The theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted in the present investigation offers valuable insights into the dynamics surrounding the recent coups in West Africa, particularly in the context of the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These countries have experienced escalating public frustration due to ineffective governance, economic instability, and rampant insecurity, which have collectively fueled the emergence of military regimes. The political and economic landscape in West Africa has indeed been marked by widespread dissatisfaction with leadership, a sentiment that has intensified due to a combination of deteriorating economic conditions and escalating security challenges posed by extremist groups linked to and funded by other international terrorist movements across Africa. For instance, Mali has experienced significant turmoil over the past decade. The 2020 coup, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, was not an isolated event but rather the culmination of years of public frustration fuelled by rampant corruption, poor governance, and inability to effectively combat violence from jihadist groups in the north and centre of the country. According to a 2020 report from the International Crisis Group, Mali saw a tripling of violent incidents between 2016 and 2020, with over 1,200 deaths attributed to militant attacks in the first half of 2020 alone (International Crisis Group, 2020). This pervasive violence contributed significantly to public disillusionment with the government, enabling the military to frame its intervention as a necessary step to restore stability.

Similarly, Burkina Faso has faced an alarming rise in extremist violence, which has profoundly affected public confidence in the civilian government and threatened the capability of ECOWAS to combat extremist movements across its region. Burkina Faso has experienced an increase in attacks attributed to both local and transnational jihadist groups, including affiliates of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In 2021, more than 1,000 civilians were killed in extremist-related violence, and around 1.5 million people were displaced due to insecurity (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021). The government's failure to provide security and address the growing humanitarian crisis has led to widespread protests and demands for military intervention and the goal of united progressive West Africa that it seeks to actualize. Membership and sponsorship of these extremists groups further bifurcates ECOWAS. The coup in January 2022 that ousted President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was driven by popular discontent, with protestors accusing him of failing to protect citizens from escalating violence and expressing a desire for military leaders who could promise a more effective response.

The frustration-aggression theory also known as the frustration-aggression-displacement theory, is a theory of aggression proposed by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer, and Robert Sears in 1939 and further developed by Neal Miller in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1969. The theory says aggression results from blocking or frustrating a person's efforts to attain a goal. Initially formulated, the theory held that frustration always precedes aggression, and aggression is the sure consequence of frustration. Accordingly, it holds that:

- ❖ Aggression is always based on frustration and

❖ That frustration always leads to aggression

These conceptions were far too general as it makes frustration both a necessary and sufficient condition for aggression, thus, reducing the theory to a single factor and effect analytical tool. Quite obviously, frustrations do not cause hostile or aggressive outbursts by necessity (Miller, 1941). Miller and Sears (1941) suggested that while frustration creates a need to respond, some form of aggression is one possible outcome. Therefore, while frustration prompts a behaviour that may or may not be aggressive, any aggressive behaviour results from frustration. Thus, frustration is insufficient but a necessary condition for aggression and this is expressed in form of recurrent demand for change of government imminent.

It is this demand for military intervention and the goal of united progressive West Africa that gave the initial impetus to alliance of states with common dynamics. Thus, as Kerr and Jermier (1978) argued, effective leadership in states ravaged by coups would require identifying situational variables that may substitute for the leader's behaviour, enabling the leader to adapt his or her behaviour accordingly. Substitutes for leadership are factors that replace leadership behaviours and diminish or attenuate the ability of leaders to influence subordinate criterion variables (Lisak *et al.*, 2022). Kerr and Jermier (1978). Kerr and Jermier (1978) explained that the core of the leadership substitute framework is the fact that managerial leadership works through technological, structural and other impersonal processes in the organisation to achieve its effects. Thus, leadership at all times should keep an eye on the desired leadership behaviour in different situations. As an offshoot of contingency theory, leadership substitute theory posits that ECOWAS leadership must identify the appropriate style of leadership behaviour and responses in different situations at all times and failure to achieve this, will result in the search for other options. Hence, the emergence of AES is a testament of the limited success of ECOWAS leadership in addressing the issues of coup and terrorism in West Africa.

While the first theory explains the causes of coup, the second explains the formation of alternative leadership to tackle the issues the initial leadership failed to address. According to Dollard *et al* (1939), frustration is the "condition which exists when a goal-response suffers interference". At the same time, aggression is defined as "an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism (or an organism surrogate)". The theory says that frustration causes aggression, but when the source cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. This theory is also used to explain riots and revolutions, both believed to be caused by poorer and more deprived sections of society who may express their bottled-up frustration and anger through violence or any other violent means recognized by the state. As Dollard *et al.* (1939) posited "the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression". In this context however, frustration is specified as the thwarting of a goal response, and a goal response is taken to mean reinforcing final operation in an ongoing behaviour sequence. Thus, 'frustration' refers not only to the process of blocking a person's attainment of a reinforcer but also to the reaction to such blocking. Consequently, 'being frustrated' means that one's access to reinforcers is being thwarted by another party (or possibly by particular circumstances) and that one's reaction to this thwarting is the expression of violence at any extent possible.

From the aforementioned, it appears to us that the historical method of data collection is appropriate since the present study was essentially tailored towards determining, evaluating and explaining past and present trends and using same as a basis for predicting future occurrences in West African sub-region. This method necessarily depends on secondary data sources. Thus, we collected data from already published documents as archival materials, press releases, books, journals, internet sources, Government gazettes, Periodicals, Television and Radio/TV presentations, conference papers, unpublished works, project reports, theses, magazines and newspapers for the analysis of the variables under investigation; Coups in West Africa (X) and ECOWAS stability (Y). Broadly, our study of these variables (X and Y) was anchored on qualitative research design. Specifically however, the study adopted explanatory research design that is based on logic, rigorous thinking, accessibility to sufficient extant evidences and alternative considerations both in the formulation of our research propositions and analysis of generated data which is at the nominal and ordinal levels.

The research design provided us with a structured plan and sources for answering the questions posed in the study. Its primary purpose was to help the researcher to fruitfully and theoretically explain the phenomenon of Coups in West Africa and the debate on junta-led confederation in Africa. This design helped us to explain variable X and the theoretical stance in support of against junta-led confederation in (Y). This was based on the key arguments of the theoretical framework of the present study. Given the nature of explanatory research design adopted to guide this study, data generated was analyzed qualitatively. A number of qualitative tools are available to us but, in order to achieve the goals of this research, the general analytic tool was adopted. The tool helped us to probe, argue and bring out a patterned and systematic understanding of the problematic or issues under focus in line with the specific theoretical framework of the study (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2006, Ukaegbu, Ojo and Ogonna, 2024). Hence, narrative and sequential analytic techniques were used. This was followed by constant comparative and analytic inductive techniques which involved a rough definition of phenomenon under investigation, formulation of a hypothetical explanation that guided the study and the logical argumentative analysis of same. The in depth study of specific cases of (X and Y) in West Africa led to the conclusions made in the study.

The theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted in the present investigation offers valuable insights into the dynamics surrounding the recent coups in West Africa, particularly in the context of the formation of the Alliance of Emergency States (AES) among Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These countries have experienced escalating public frustration due to ineffective governance, economic instability, and rampant insecurity, which have collectively fueled the emergence of military regimes. The political landscape in West Africa has indeed been marked by widespread dissatisfaction with leadership, a sentiment that has intensified due to a combination of deteriorating economic conditions and escalating security challenges posed by extremist groups. For instance, Mali has experienced significant turmoil over the past decade. The 2020 coup, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, was not an isolated event but rather the culmination of years of public frustration fuelled by rampant corruption, poor governance, and inability to effectively combat violence from jihadist groups in the north and centre of the country. According to a 2020 report from the International Crisis Group, Mali saw a tripling of violent incidents between 2016 and 2020, with over 1,200 deaths attributed to militant attacks in the first half of 2020 alone (International Crisis Group, 2020). This pervasive violence contributed significantly to public disillusionment with the government, enabling the military to frame its intervention as a necessary step to restore stability.

4. Discussion

From extant data presented in the foregoing discussion, one thing that stands clear is the fact that the primary causative factors of coups in West Africa include corruption, economic mismanagement and jihadist violence across the region. The later and its effect remains the specific worry of the present paper. This is partly because, the formation of a Junta-led tri-state confederation has significantly impacted the political landscape of West Africa. The Junta-led confederation has equally impacted trade and economic cooperation since its formation. This worry is further heightened by the fact that AES membership of ECOWAS has not fully complied with the provisions of Article 91 of ECOWAS Treaty which among other things provides a one year notice of withdrawal to the body organization. To this end, the purported immediate withdrawal of (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) from ECOWAS is not in line with the prescribed procedure outlined in Article 91. Consequently, the status of these states with respect to their membership in the Community is still ambiguous.

These issues have repeatedly questioned the value of civilian governments and paved the way for other possible military interventions across the region (Diallo, 2021, Smith, 2021, Ahmadu, 2023). Corruption is one of the most significant factors contributing to coups in West Africa. Many governments in the region have been plagued by corruption scandals, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among citizens. From the economic front, the study found out that leaders often misuse public resources and implement poor economic policies that further erode trust in democratic institutions. This helps to fuel public protests and create an environment conducive for military takeovers. These factors account for the coups that occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and the common denominator that has consequently led to the formation of the now anti-ECOWAS alliance in the Sahel (Ouédraogo, 2022).

Thus, the wave of coups in West Africa have had significant repercussions, not only for individual nations but also for the region as a whole. These coups as well as the operations of AES have weakened democratic institutions, undermined governance, and challenged the continuous relevance of ECOWAS. In the event of coups in these tri-states, ECOWAS had imposed sanctions and suspended membership for Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. However, these efforts have had limited success in reversing the coups or restoring democratic governance. For instance, despite ECOWAS's pressure on Mali to hold elections, the military government continues to delay the transition to civilian rule and it is very unlikely that election will ever hold in Mali in the nearest future judging by the goals and Modus Operandi of the AES (Diallo, 2021). Furthermore, the inability of ECOWAS to prevent or swiftly resolve crises in AES states and other states within the region has raised questions about its effectiveness as a regional body and heightened the possibility of an expanded AES membership (Ahmadu 2023). Aside its widespread consequences, coups in these states have left serious power vacuum that have allowed extremist groups to exploit the chaos. This is one outcome that Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso do not want to leave to chance. In this light, the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States confederation is considered a panacea to perceived anomalies in the governance structure in the Sahel and a stronger substitute to ECOWAS inability to holds its region in proper deportment.

This being the case, the tri-state Confederation formed by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has created a political bloc that seeks to counterbalance the influence of external powers in West Africa, leading to a reconfiguration of international relations in the region. The alliance has isolated the affected nations from ECOWAS, weakening regional cooperation and integration efforts. The AES's rejection of ECOWAS's democratic norms and emphasis on military governance creates a stark contrast between the AES bloc and the rest of West Africa, leading to increased regional polarization. Again, the study showed that the economic isolation caused by ECOWAS sanctions has forced AES countries to rely on informal trade networks and foreign alliances with non-Western powers. This could lead to further instability in the region and could reduce the prospects for long-term economic recovery in Africa as a whole. If this happens, Africa will remain the centerpiece of dependency in the international system.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that ECOWAS is faced with critical challenges due to the resurgence of coups and the formation of the AES. For one, the recurring military takeovers threaten the stability, economic growth, and democratic resilience of the region. ECOWAS, while remaining committed to its goals of promoting democracy and regional integration is currently faced with significant obstacles in dealing with entrenched military regimes. The AES's rejection of its principles not only weakens regional unity but also poses a direct challenge to the future of democratic governance in West Africa. Without a coordinated response that addresses both the political and economic dimensions of the crisis, the region risks further instability and fragmentation.

References

- [1] Adekeye Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 1-192, 2002. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [2] W. Adebani, and E. Obadare, "The Abrogation of the Postcolonial State: The Nigerian Experience," 2011.
- [3] Makodi Biereenu-Nnabugwu, *Methodology of Political Inquiry: Issues and Techniques of Research Methods in Political Science*, Quintagon Publishers, 2006. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [4] Bloomfield, Implications of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali's Announced Departure from the Economic Community of West African States, pp. 1-3, 2024. |[Publisher Site](#)|
- [5] BBC News, Mali Coup: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta Forced Out by Military, 2020.
- [6] P. Collier, "Military Coups and Structural Change: The Political Economy of Sub-Saharan Africa," *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 185-212, 1983.
- [7] Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, Harper Publishers, 2009. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [8] A.K. Fosu, "Democracy and Growth in Africa: Implications of Increasing Returns to Governance," *The Economics of Transition*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 491-516, 2008. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [9] International Crisis Group, "Sanctions and the Rise of Illicit Trade in Mali and Burkina Faso," *Africa Report*, no. 60, pp. 12-20, 2022.

- [10] Jimmy D. Kandeh, "Coups From Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa," *The Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 31, no. 102, pp. 349-366, 2004. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#) |
- [11] D. Kew, "The Dynamics of Political Instability in West Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 101-120, 2019.
- [12] B. Maingwa, "The AES and its Implications for ECOWAS: Regional Governance in the Age of Military Alliances," *West African Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 109-130, 2021.
- [13] E. O. Ojo, "Military Coups in West Africa: An Analytical Framework," *Journal of African Elections*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 39-58, 2018.
- [14] E. Y. Omorogbe, "ECOWAS and the Protection of Democracy in West Africa," *Journal of African Law*, vol. 55, no. 2, pp. 181-204, 2011.
- [15] B. Ouédraogo, "Security Challenges and Governance Collapse in Burkina Faso," *Sahel Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 23-39, 2022.
- [16] Jonathan M. Powell, and Clayton L. Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups From 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 249-259, 2011. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#) |
- [17] J. Tejpar, and A. Albuquerque, "Security in West Africa: Regional Integration, Peacebuilding, and State Capacity," *African Security Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 3-19, 2015.
- [18] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "West Africa Regional Report: Political Instability and Military Interventions," 2020. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#) |
- [19] C.O Ukaegbu, External Involvement in the Syrian Conflict and the Rise of Islamic State Movement, Unpublished Masters' Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 2015.
- [20] Chidi O. Ukaegbu, "Talcott Parsons' Theory of Social Action and the Preponderance of Civil Disorder in Nigeria," *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS)*, Vol. 8, no. 1, 2023. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#) |
- [21] Chidi O. Ukaegbu, et al "Talcott Parsons' Principle of Purposive Action and the Preponderance of Civil Disorder in Nigeria," *Irish International Journal of Law, Political Sciences and Administration*, 2024.
- [22] Chidi O. Ukaegbu1, Chidi A. Okoroafor, "West African Coups and Ecowas Stability, A Theoretical Discourse," *International Journal of Technological Research and Innovation*, 2025.
- [23] M Ogbonna, and E.E Ume- Ezeoke, "A History of Military Intervention and Administration in Nigeria, 1984-1999," *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, vol 11, 2024. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#) |
- [24] C.A Okoroafor, and C.O Ukaegbu, "Political Stability, Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Discourse in Comparative Analysis," *International Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, vol.16, no. 3, 2025.
- [25] D. Zounmenou, and R. Loua, "ECOWAS and the Challenges of Peacebuilding in West Africa," *African Security Review*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 80-96, 2011.