# West African Coups and Ecowas Stability a Theoretical Discourse

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***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 poses fears as to what new dimensions and effect it would assume in the nearest future. Thus, the present research paper examined coups in West Africa and its relationship with ECOWAS stability from a theoretical perspective. Specifically, the study examined how recent coups in West Africa have impacted the regional stability fostered by ECOWAS. Anchored on both Contagion and Frustration Aggression Theories, the research adopted 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 have led to a decline in regional stability as it undermined the democratic principles and governance structures promoted by ECOWAS. The coups created a political bloc that sought to counterbalance the influence of external powers in West Africa, leading to a reconfiguration of international relations in the region which tended to further weaken ECOWAS' stability. Based on these findings, the study recommended 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.**

***Index Terms*—West Africa, Coups, ECOWAS, Frustration- aggression, Stability.**

## I. 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. 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). 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 Adebanwi 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.

As it were, coups can take different forms, depending largely on the players and techniques used. According to Kew (2019), military, institutional, and constitutional forms of coups 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). One example of this kind of coup is the overthrow of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso. As such, constitutional coups entail the use of legal tactics, such as an impeachment or vote of no confidence, to overthrow

an administration. This is usually done when the majority of opposition parties or lawmakers use constitutional measures to overthrow the government (Kew, 2019). 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.

For instance, in August 2020, the armed forces in Mali toppled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The coup was 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. The coup in Mali, no doubt, 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. In Africa's postcolonial history, periodic coups such as these have become commonplace, yet the principal actors and their goals have changed over time. 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 President Conde of Guinea was subverting the constitution to maintain his hold on power amidst the growing terrorist attacks in his country. Thus, the coup was justified as a safeguard for the constitution.

Consequent on this, a Junta-led tri-state alliance in Africa, comprising Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali was established and this has had significant implications for the continent's political landscape, trade, and economic cooperation as well as the stability of ECOWAS. According to Maiangwa (2021), this alliance, known as the African Emancipation States (AES), 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. 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). Economically, this alliance could impede West Africa's efforts toward integration by destabilizing trade routes, undermining collective policies, and creating economic isolation (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). This uncertainty 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 countries like Gambia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Mali, Niger, Togo, Guinea Bissau etc. that are currently trapped in coups and its disruptive effects. (Tejpar & Albuquerque, 2015, ECOWAS, 2020). It is these existential threats and the stability of ECOWAS that the present paper addresses itself to.

Literature, Theoretics and Methodological Approach.

Africa has seen more coups or military interventions in politics than any other continent in the world (Falola, 2022). Historically, coups in Africa began almost immediately after the independence of African states in the 1960s. And so far, the continent has experienced over 200 successful and failed coups. Hence, one can describe Africa as a good bed for planning and executing coups, with about 41 states experiencing either failed or successful coups and West Africa being the epicentre of coups in the continent (Barka & Ncube, 2012, Suleiman, 2021). The general manifestations of coups in Africa in recent times have been attributed to several issues, such as the absence of or presence of dysfunctional democratic institutions and practices, leadership failure, economic crisis, the greed of military officers, youth and citizens' discontent, military mis/disorientation etc. (Isilow, 2022). The region accounts for 51.3 percent of coups in the early period of Africa's postcolonial history. Between 1960 and 1969, 49.5 percent and a shocking 53.7 percent from 1990 to 2023. Thus, out of the 200 coups that Africa has experienced (both failed and successful), West Africa alone, accounts for 108 (Barka & Ncube, 2012; World Atlas, 2022).

From the foregoing, it is clear that West Africa has been one of the regions most affected by coups, and this no doubt, has had serious consequences in shaping her political landscape. The first wave of coups in the region can be traced back to the post-independence

period in the 1960s, when newly formed African states grappled with the challenges of nation-building. Between 1960 and 1969, nine West African countries experienced coups, often as a response to weak political institutions and economic mismanagement (McGowan, 2003). Leaders who had initially been seen as liberators from colonial rule soon became the targets of military intervention, as their governments struggled to deliver on promises of economic development and political stability.

Thus, the first coup in West Africa occurred in Togo in 1963, when President Sylvanus Olympio was assassinated by a group of army officers led by Sergeant Etienne Eyadéma. Olympio's efforts to reduce the size of the military and his exclusion of former French soldiers from government positions created tension within the armed forces, leading to his downfall (Kandeh, 2004). Theoretically, this marked the beginning of a series of coups that would sweep across the region in the coming decades. The Togo coup set a precedent for military interventions in civilian politics, demonstrating, at least in theory, that the military could act as an arbiter in times of political crisis and Nigeria became the next hit.

Nigeria, the most populous country in West Africa, experienced its first coup in January 1966, when a group of young army officers, primarily from the Igbo ethnic group, overthrew Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's government. The coup was partly motivated by ethnic tensions and allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the government. The military's intervention, however, led to a counter-coup in July 1966, which resulted in the assassination of Nigeria's first military head of state, Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, and set the stage for the Nigerian Civil War (Collier, 2009). This period of coups in Nigeria, driven by both political and ethnic factors, reflects the complexity of military involvement in West African politics.

Another significant coup in the region occurred in Ghana in 1966 when the military, led by General Joseph Ankrah, overthrew President Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah had positioned himself as a leading figure in African socialism and Pan-Africanism; a vision which he held for the African continent based on his determination to liberate Ghana from the shackles of colonialism. This laudable vision notwithstanding, growing economic difficulties and allegations of authoritarian rule led to the removal of Nkrumah in a U.S.-backed coup. This was not only a blow to Ghana's experiment with socialist governance but also demonstrated how external actors could influence military interventions in West Africa (Adebajo, 2010). Of course, and following the trend established by previous coups in Africa, Ankrah's regime eventually gave way to a series of coups and counter-coups that destabilized Ghana's political landscape for decades.

During this period also, Burkina Faso, then known as Upper Volta, experienced series of coups culminating in the 1983 coup led by Captain Thomas Sankara. Sankara, a Marxist revolutionary, became a symbol of hope for many Africans, advocating for self-reliance, anti-imperialism, and widespread reforms. However, just four years later, Sankara was assassinated in another coup led by his former ally, Blaise Compaoré, who reversed many of Sankara's policies and ruled the country for 27 years (Finer, 1962). Theoretically, the coup against Sankara is emblematic and clearly shows how internal political rivalries and power struggles have driven military interventions in West Africa. Thus, between 1970s and 1980s, coups became an almost predictable occurrence in several West African states and perhaps, provided an example for other continents.

Clearly, by the 1990s, the wave of democratization sweeping across Africa following the end of the Cold War led to fewer coups in the region, as international and regional actors like ECOWAS began to take a stronger stance against unconstitutional changes of government. However, even in this period of relative democratic gains, West Africa was not immune to coups. Sierra Leone, for instance, experienced multiple coups in the 1990s during its brutal civil war. In 1997, a group of soldiers calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) overthrew the elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, plunging the country deeper into chaos (Francis, 2013). The Sierra Leone case highlighted the intersection of coups with civil conflict and calls to question, the factors implicated in this recurrent trend in west Africa.

Extant works reveal that the persistence of coups in West Africa is not amenable to any single factor. Several factors, including corruption, ethnic tension, bad governance, external interferences, the legacy of colonialism, which left many states with weak institutions and poorly defined national identities

among others are some of the identifiable causes. Further to this, the arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers often exacerbated ethnic divisions, creating fragile states that struggled to establish stable governance structures (Kandeh, 2004). Additionally, many post-colonial West African leaders, facing the monumental task of building new nations, were unable to manage the complex socio-economic challenges that accompanied independence. These governance failures created an environment where the military, often seen as the most organized institution in society, stepped in to occupy the corridors of power.

To this end, the nomenclature, membership and goals of ECOWAS notwithstanding, economic instability has been a significant driver of coups in West Africa. As Fosu (2008) noted, periods of economic decline, worsened by global economic trends and deepened by the outcry of the populace, often, have led to widespread dissatisfaction with civilian governments. The military, capitalizing on this discontent, often justifies its intervention as necessary to prevent national collapse. For instance, in Niger, series of coups in the 1990s and 2000s were driven by economic hardship and the failure of civilian governments to address widespread poverty and corruption (Powell & Thyne, 2011).

The worry of the present research work is, despite significant improvement in the economic fortunes of sovereign states in west Africa championed by ECOWAS and the decline in the number of coups in the early part of the 21st century, recent events suggest that the threat of military intervention in West African politics has not disappeared completely; rather, what is observed is a recent reappearance and perhaps surge; with even more sophisticated manifestations in many parts of Africa as though ECOWAS as a regional body has been disarmed in tackling this menace. Thus, what it has not/cannot stop or control, tend to weaken its stability and existential relevance. To a large extent, they demonstrate the weakness of the institutions of the state despite the presence and role of ECOWAS (Thurston, 2020). Since this does not provide a comprehensive analysis, a systematic and theoretical investigation becomes necessary to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the present state of affairs in West Africa.

Accordingly, McGowan (2003), observed that coups have been a persistent feature in African politics, particularly in West Africa, where fragile political systems struggle to withstand economic and social pressures. To him, the frequency of coups in West Africa is directly proportional to the volume or number of weak political institutions operated in Africa. This weakness is manifested in her weak democratic institutions and practices; socio-political instability, and leadership failures that run through almost all African states. This, according to (Finer, 1962, Kandeh, 2004 and Ogban-Iyan, 2025) is not entirely disconnected from the legacy of colonialism and its impact on state formation in West Africa. To this end, African states are unable to establish a stable political and economic culture that can prevent military intervention. The effect is, cycles of coups and counter-coups in West Africa that further polarises the continent and make it more vulnerable to external manipulation.

The instability that follows a coup often leads to further military interventions at close or distant intervals. This creates a pattern of governance that oscillates between military and civilian rule in many parts of West Africa. As Collier (2009) pointed out, the cyclical nature of coups in West Africa is driven by deep-seated institutional deficiencies, which undermine democratic processes and promote the view that the military is a solution to political challenges. If this view is sustained, especially judging by the reasons for such take-over and the spontaneous benefits it holds, then, Coups in West Africa becomes an indispensable part of the historical development of any state in the region, without which the political evolution of independent states in Africa is considered incomplete. To this end, Fosu (2008) argues that the absence of effective governance frameworks inevitably leads to a normalization of coups as a tool for political change. This view and its persistence reinforce coups and further destabilizes the region. Theoretically, it calls to question the very essence and or achievement of the Economic Community of West African States and the need for a systematic theoretical expose' grounded in existing paradigmatic perspective that offers a clearer delineation of the trend and its likely impact on ECOWAS stability. For this, we turn to the frustration-aggression theory and the contagion theory for in-depth insight and analytical assistance.

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

(a) Aggression is always based on frustration and
(b) 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, making frustration insufficient but a necessary condition for aggression. Contagion theory on the other hand, explains the spontaneous spread of behaviour, emotions or conditions through a group or network. Developed by Herbert Blumer in 1939, this theory assumes that the recurrence of coup in Africa is simply a continuation of the political process and leadership by another means. Herbert Blumer, along with Gustave Le Bon and Robert Park had argued that individuals in a crowd can be influenced by the collective behavior of the group, leading to irrational or violent actions (Blumer, Bon and Gustave, 1939). The theory suggests that people in crowds can lose their sense of individual responsibility and become susceptible to the dominant mood or actions of the group, essentially acting as if under a hypnotic influence. This is the spirit of coup d'état in West Africa. It suggests that West Africa has only two political parties/systems that oscillates- namely, the political class and the military class; one working at the deficiency of the other.

While the first theory explains the causes of coup, the second explains the dynamism of its spread. 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. This design helped us to explain variable X and its impact on the stability of Africa as well as the likelihood of its continued recurrence (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, 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.

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 bifurcate 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.

Contagiously, Niger republic has also faced similar challenges, grappling with the spill over effects of violence from neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso. The country's military has conducted several operations against jihadist groups, but persistent attacks have contributed to a sense of insecurity among the population. As of early 2022, Niger recorded over 400 attacks, resulting in significant casualties and displacement (Institute for Security Studies, 2022). The inability of the government to maintain law and order led to increased calls for military intervention as a means to restore stability. This illustrates a broader trend across the region where declining economic prospects, high unemployment rates, and escalating violence have converged to create an environment ripe for military intervention. According to the World Bank, West Africa is home to

some of the highest youth unemployment rates globally, with figures exceeding 20% in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso (World Bank, 2021). This economic malaise, coupled with the relentless threat of extremism, has fostered a cycle of frustration that military juntas are exploiting to gain power and until it is decisively dealt with, coup in West Africa will continue as part of her political system.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Theoretically and indeed as proven empirically, the populist unrest in West Africa is exacerbated by the nuances of external influence and the widespread frustration that goes with it. External interferences in the governance process and mechanism in Africa has no doubt, cultivated a pervasive sense of national discontent and disenchantment among the populations of countries like Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger etc. Many citizens perceive foreign intervention and influence as a threat to their sovereignty, with historical legacies of colonialism contributing to deep-seated resentment against perceived neo-colonial practices by Western powers. This can be witnessed with how the citizens of Niger took to the streets to celebrate the successful coup in 2023 and how citizens of Burkina Faso turned out en masse to support and, in some reports, protect Ibrahim Traore and how a cross section of Nigerians express frustration with the political management of their country and the need for military intervention as a way out.

Foreign military bases, particularly those established by Western nations, have been a focal point of public frustration. The presence of these bases is often justified by mainstream liberal scholarship as part of international efforts to combat terrorism and stabilize the region. However, many citizens, including objective African scholars, see them as instruments of destabilizing Africa; symbols of foreign dominance and centres for manipulating the states where they are located. For example, France maintains several military bases across West Africa, including significant installations in Mali and Niger, which are perceived as part of its broader counter-terrorism strategy known as Operation Barkhane. This military presence has faced increasing criticism from local populations who believe it undermines their national sovereignty and autonomy (Vidal, 2021). As violent incidents increase, so too does the call for the removal of foreign troops, with protests erupting in Mali and Burkina Faso against the perceived ineffectiveness of these foreign military missions.

The extension of this manipulation is the use of foreign loans and aid. This has been a significant source of frustration for West African nations. Many countries in the region are heavily reliant on international financial assistance, which often comes with strings attached. Critics argue that these loans effectively bind these nations to Western powers, perpetuating a cycle of dependency that stifles true economic independence and self-determination (Fofana, 2018). This dependency has led to public outrage, as citizens perceive their governments as being beholden to foreign interests rather than addressing the needs and aspirations of their own populations. The frustration surrounding these loans was notably evident in the protests leading up to the recent coups, where citizens expressed dissatisfaction with governments perceived as more committed to satisfying foreign lenders than to fulfilling the needs of their own citizens. This resentment towards foreign control and the negative perception of economic loans intertwines with broader governance issues in these countries. Poor governance, marked by corruption and inefficiency, has exacerbated the sense of frustration among citizens. Governments that are seen as collaborating with foreign entities—whether through military agreements or economic loans—are often viewed with suspicion, leading to a disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. In many instances, military juntas have capitalized on this disillusionment, presenting themselves as a bulwark against foreign manipulation and promising to prioritize national interests; an extension of the very goals ECOWAS seeks to achieve.

In this light, the formation of the AES can be understood as a direct response to these underlying frustrations. By consolidating military authority among member states, the AES aims to address common security threats and enhance regime stability. The alliance reflects a desire to counter perceived external threats, particularly from larger ECOWAS states such as Nigeria, which are often viewed with suspicion by the military leadership in these countries. As highlighted by Zounmenou and Loua (2011), military regimes may engage in aggressive posturing against perceived rivals as a way to consolidate internal power and quell dissent. Clearly, the AES's

aggressive stance exacerbates tensions with other ECOWAS member states. The perceived threat of military encroachment on democratic governance raises concerns about regional stability and cooperation contrary to the main pursuit of ECOWAS. Powell and Thyne (2011) argue that military regimes often prioritize internal security and regime survival over collaboration, leading to heightened hostilities between AES member states and their neighbours. This dynamics creates a cycle of frustration and aggression that undermines the potential for cooperative regional solutions to shared challenges as championed by the Economic Community of West African States. Moreover, the AES hinders the effectiveness of ECOWAS in promoting democratic governance and regional integration. The organization has long championed principles of democracy and good governance, but the rise of military alliances poses a direct challenge to these ideals. As noted by N'Guessan (2015), the military focus of AES member states could undermine ECOWAS's protocols regarding the free movement of people and goods, leading to increased border restrictions and trade disruptions. This scenario not only hampers economic cooperation but also heightens regional tensions, as member states may retaliate against perceived encroachments on their sovereignty.

The Frustration-Aggression Theory and the contagion theory thus provides a compelling lens to analyse the ongoing political upheaval in West Africa. The frustrations rooted in economic hardship, insecurity, and ineffective governance have created an environment ripe for military intervention. As the AES seeks to consolidate power in the face of these frustrations, the potential for aggressive actions against both internal dissenters and external actors increase. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for regional stakeholders that aim to address the underlying grievances and foster a more stable and cooperative West Africa.

The alarming and contagious nature of these coups in West Africa has led to several calls on the international community, especially regional institutions such as ECOWAS, to respond to this existential threat to democratic rule, security and political stability in the region. The regional body (ECOWAS) has initiated and adopted different modalities to respond to coups. These modalities include the imposition of economic sanctions, severance of diplomatic relations, suspension of military leaders from the international community, etc. However, the resurfacing of coups in West Africa exposes the inadequacies of these measures with several political, economic and security implications for ECOWAS. One evident implication is the capacity of ECOWAS to sustain democracy in the sub-region. Thus, as argued by scholars and rightly too, the increasing spate of coups in West Africa is a signpost that democracy has continued to fail in the region (Barka &Ncube, 2012; Falola, 2022; Suleiman, 2021; Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022, Ukaegbu, 2023). The failure of democracy in the region casts serious doubts on ECOWAS capacity to maintain regional peace and security.

## III. CONCLUSIONS

The resurgence of coups in West Africa presents a significant challenge to both regional stability and the democratic aspirations that ECOWAS and other international bodies have long promoted. This is partly because, coups, by their very nature, undermine governance structures, resulting in decline in public trust and the weakening of the provision of essential services to the people. Coups create room for disruptions and illicit activities to thrive, further destabilizing affected nations. This poses long-term risks for peace, economic growth, and cooperation, especially within the frameworks established by ECOWAS. To mitigate its recurrence, sanctions have been applied. However, ill-conceived and applied sanctions have driven states further into economic isolation, creating conditions that foster the growth of informal and illicit markets, and other commercial sharp practices within the region; this further exacerbates regional instability. To this end and based on the theoretical postulations made in this study, it is recommended that; a coordinated regional and international response be adopted in countering coup-related tendencies in Africa. ECOWAS and perhaps, other regional organizations must prioritize diplomatic efforts and early warning systems to detect and correct governance failures before they escalate into coups. The legitimization of military rule by international actors, including France, the United States, and emerging powers like China, must be collectively discouraged. Ultimately, the path forward for West Africa must involve a balance between enforcing democratic principles and addressing the underlying

political, economic, and social issues that drive coup and instability. This can be achieved through fostering partnerships that promote governance reform, economic resilience, and regional unity. By this, the region can begin to overcome the entrenched challenges posed by military interventions and the growing influence of military alliances that can destabilize ECOWAS.

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