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**LEGON CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DIPLOMACY**  
**(LECIAD)**



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**ECOWAS AND THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION: AN  
EXAMINATION OF MEMBER STATES CONTESTATION AND  
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS**

**BY**

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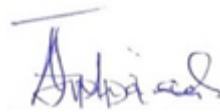
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**INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS**

**NOVEMBER, 2024**

**DECLARATION**

I REGINA AKPENE ATSUTSE, hereby declare that this dissertation which I am submitting to the Legon Center for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), towards the award of a Master of Affairs (MA) degree in International Affairs is the product of my own research. All sources to which I am indebted have been appropriately cited in the references. To the best of my knowledge, this work has not been previously accepted, either in whole or in part, for any academic degree, nor is it currently under consideration for any other qualification.



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## DEDICATION

I am immensely thankful to God for granting me the grace to embark on this academic journey.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to my entire family, particularly my parents, Madam Gertrude Agbenyo and Mr. Raymond Atsutse, for their steadfast support and encouragement throughout my academic journey.



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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AU	- African Union
AES	- Alliance of Sahel States
CSO	- Civil Society Organization
ECOMOG	- Economic Community
ECOWAS	- Economic Community of West African States
ESF	- ECOWAS Standby Force
EU	- European Union
GIZ	- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IO	- International Organization
MINUSMA	- United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAU	- Organisation of African Unity
UK	- United Kingdom
UN	- United Nations,
UNFPA	- United Nations Population Fund
WAEMU	- West African Economic and Monetary Union

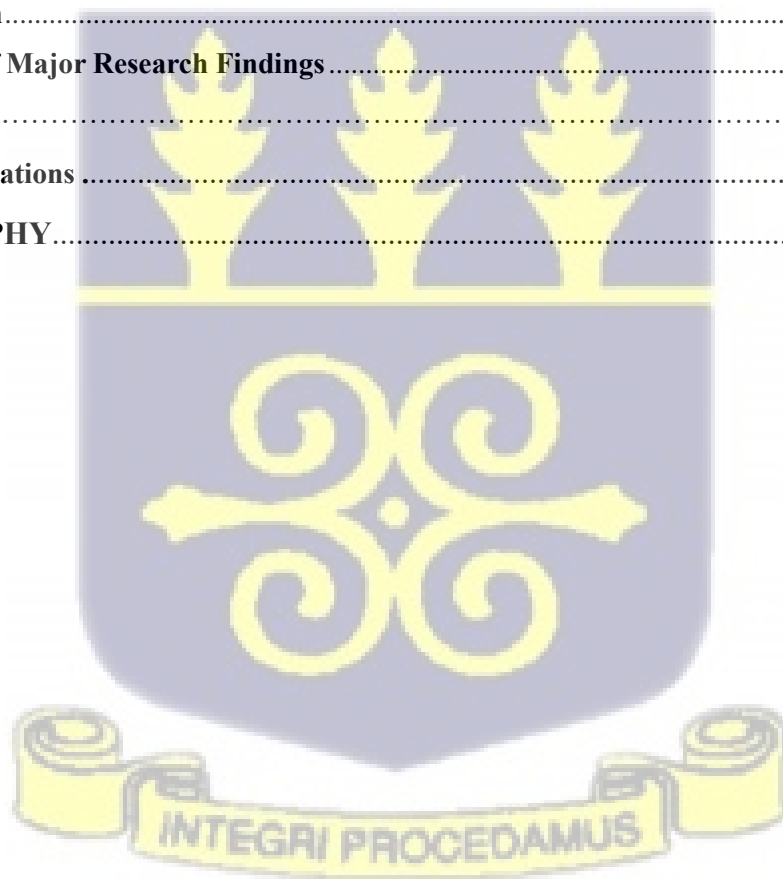


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### Abstract

One of the most laudable initiatives undertaken by the pioneers of integration in West Africa was the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Notwithstanding its initial focus on economic integration, the ECOWAS has undergone a significant transformation in its mandate, expanding from an economic organization to include issues of security and governance. After 49 years of largely maintaining stability in the sub-region and upholding its principles despite challenges, three of its founding members—Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso—announced their unilateral decision to leave the sub-regional body. The study employed Neo-Functionalism as a theoretical framework to examine the root causes of member state contestation within the ECOWAS and its implications for the organization's effectiveness as a unifying body in West Africa. A qualitative methodological approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews with experts and academics, alongside an analysis of the ECOWAS protocols, policy documents, reports, and books. The findings reveal that bad governance, frustration with the ECOWAS's inconsistent approach to governance, inconsistent application of its protocols, neo-colonial influence, and a lack of pragmatism in addressing regional insecurity as a result of institutional challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of skilled personnel for complex operations, poor coordination, logistical inefficiencies among member states, are key factors contributing to member state contestation. The withdrawal of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso presents considerable challenges to West Africa's regional integration efforts, particularly in areas such as security, trade, governance, economic development, and has the potential of weakening the ECOWAS's collective influence and solidarity on the international stage. The absence of the ECOWAS oversight in the Sahel risks exacerbating instability, with potential spill over effects undermining security in coastal states and emboldening extremist groups. The study recommends investing in preventive diplomacy and mediation to address political crises, strengthening the ECOWAS's institutional capacity and national governance to uphold democratic norms, diversifying funding sources for sustainability, promoting grassroots mobilization for regional integration, and fostering dialogue and research to enhance policymaking and regional cooperation.



## CHAPTER ONE

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 1.0 Introduction

The chapter highlights key issues concerning the ECOWAS and its regional integration efforts which are being challenged by member state contestations. It presents competing issues in the problem statement, which guides the study in seeking solutions. Additionally, it situated the investigation within a scholarly context related to the discourse on democracy and security.

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The growth of international organizations and the intensification of regional integration efforts globally since the latter part of the twentieth century stands out as a noteworthy development in international relations. While these entities are crucial in fostering cooperation on transnational issues, their authority has faced growing challenges from member states in recent years. The manifestations of these contestations include the withholding of assessed contributions, threats of exit, and actual withdrawal from the organizations, leading to a re-evaluation of their power and influence (Hirschmann, 2021).

Despite seven decades of deliberate integration efforts, marked by significant achievements, the European Union (EU) has faced challenges from member state contestation, commonly referred to as Euroscepticism. One instance is the French government's withdrawal from the Council of Ministers during the "Empty Chair Crisis" (1965-1966), which was driven by its opposition to proposed changes in the European Economic Community (Caraffini, 2015). Greece's potential departure from the Eurozone, dubbed "Grexit," further highlighted these tensions during the Greek government-debt crisis, particularly in 2015. Intense negotiations between Greece and EU leaders sparked concerns about the Union's ability to maintain

solidarity among its member states. Although Greece ultimately remained in the Eurozone, the crisis undermined the eurozone's integrity (Nelson, & Jackson, 2015).

These instances of member state contestation and near exit set the stage for one of the most significant manifestations of Euroscepticism: the UK's exit from the EU on economic and political grounds. The result of the Brexit referendum triggered a phase of significant economic and political uncertainty for both the UK and the EU (Vasilopoulou, 2016).

Parallel to the European experience, the African Union has also recorded instances of member state contestation and legitimation struggles, with the withdrawal of Morocco from the regional bloc serving as a notable example. Morocco's desire for sovereignty over the Western Sahara Desert led to a conflict with the OAU's recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic's membership, resulting in Morocco's withdrawal from the organization in 1984. This exit culminated in diplomatic isolation, precluding Morocco's participation in regional development initiatives (Hasnoui, 2017). However, on January 31st, 2017, Morocco made a pragmatic decision to rejoin the AU, seeking to benefit from more favourable terms and reengage with the regional organization (Hernando de Larramendi & Tomé-Alonso, 2017).

As opined by Aryeetey (2001), the motivation behind West Africa's pursuit of regional integration primarily stemmed from the necessity to overcome the constraints posed by small economic sizes that hinder efficient industrialization. As noted by Grimm (1999), this pursuit of integration and socio-economic development led 15 West African states to sign the Treaty of Lagos on May 28, 1975, leading to the founding of ECOWAS. Since its formation, the ECOWAS has established a borderless interconnected region, enabling its members to benefit from shared resources and opportunities that transcend their national boundaries.

Notwithstanding its initial focus on economic integration, the ECOWAS has undergone a significant transformation in its mandate, as evidenced by the 1993 modification of the

ECOWAS Treaty and the subsequent adoption of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001. This expansion has led to a broadening of the ECOWAS's scope to encompass political and security issues, with the consolidation of democratic principles in the sub-region emerging as a critical concern for the ECOWAS (Aning & Bjarnesen, 2024). Throughout the years, the ECOWAS has played a prominent role in promoting democratic governance and regional security in West Africa. The bloc's interventions in various West African countries such as Ivory Coast (2003), Liberia (2003), have contributed to the restoration of peace, security, and democratic governance in the sub-region (Ojo & Adedayo, 2022).

As noted by Anning and Bjarnesen (2024), in recent years, the ECOWAS has encountered significant challenges in enforcing compliance with its democratic principles among member states. In 2015, the bloc considered a proposal to impose a two-term limit on presidential mandates; but the idea was opposed by the presidents of Togo and Gambia. Since 2020, a series of military coups have occurred in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Mali, with the perpetrators citing insecurity and corruption as justifications for their actions (Aning et al., 2024). To uphold its democratic norms, ECOWAS threatened military intervention in Niger in July 2023. In response, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso formed the "Alliance des États du Sahel" (Alliance of Sahel States) in September 2023 as a collective defense pact (Wilén, 2024). The situation escalated further when the founding members of the ECOWAS jointly announced their withdrawal from the regional bloc on January 28, 2024, stating that it had "drifted from the ideals of its founding fathers and the spirit of Pan-Africanism". Despite lifting sanctions on Niger, the ECOWAS's appears to be ineffective in reversing the coups (Obadare & Patel, 2024).

In a subsequent move, the military regimes of the Sahel States solidified their breakaway from the ECOWAS by signing a landmark treaty of confederation on July 6th, 2024. This landmark

agreement unites 72 million people under the umbrella of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), marking a fundamental realignment in the regional political landscape (Okoli, 2024).

In a related development, in April 2024, the provision outlined in Article 2.1 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which disallows significant alterations to electoral laws within six months of elections unless agreed upon by a majority of political stakeholders, was contested when Togo amended its constitution, shifting from a presidential to a parliamentary system, just before its parliamentary elections, with incumbent President Faure Gnassingbe remaining in office (Avoulete, 2024). The ECOWAS's lack of vigorous criticism towards Togo's constitutional revisions raises questions about its commitment to enforcing democratic values in the region among member states (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

The aforementioned instances of member state contestation has prompted this dissertation and a need to examine the factors contributing to member states' varying levels of support for the ECOWAS, as well as the organization's future trajectory as the primary driver of regional integration efforts in West Africa.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

As noted by Balima (2024), the ECOWAS broadened its mandate beyond economic integration, incorporating security and good governance through the 1993 Revised Treaty and subsequent protocols, notably the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. He further acknowledged that despite experiencing sporadic civil wars and conflicts, the ECOWAS has largely maintained stability in the subregion and upheld its principles. The West African bloc has however witnessed escalating

tensions among member states in recent years, testing its ability to drive regional integration. This growing contestation has raised concerns about the organization's effectiveness in promoting economic cooperation, peace, and security in the region.

Six successful military coups occurred in the sub-region between 2020 and 2023, including in Guinea, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, with repeated putsches in Mali and Burkina Faso (Pichon, 2024).

The ECOWAS, however, has appeared ineffective in its efforts to restore civilian rule. The organization faces a significant challenge as transitional military governments have taken hold in four member states: Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The ECOWAS faces a diplomatic dilemma in responding to unconstitutional changes of government, particularly with its sanctions attracting criticism and prompting the threat of withdrawal of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso from the regional community (Anning & Bjarneses, 2024). It is indeed puzzling that three of the world's poorest landlocked nations—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—would choose to exit a regional bloc like the ECOWAS, which is structured to enhance economic integration and facilitate the free movement of people, goods, and services (Walther, 2024).

The West African bloc is facing criticism for its inconsistent stance on democratic values. As argued by Olubiyo and Ayodele (2024), while the organization strongly condemns military coups, it's often lenient towards authoritarian tactics employed by civilian leaders to maintain power. Examples of such inconsistencies include former Guinean President Alpha Condé's manipulation of the constitution in 2020 to serve two additional terms. Similarly, Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé's actions in 2024 have raised concerns (Avoulete, 2024).

Further, the organization's reputation, built over three decades, is at risk, and its ability to achieve the ECOWAS Agenda 2050 goals of promoting regional economic integration, development, good governance, and security is being threatened. Moreover, the potential for

further unconstitutional changes of government in other member states, emboldened by weak regional responses, poses a significant threat to regional stability.

While there have been numerous studies on member state contestation in the UN, European Union, ASEAN, and other International Organizations, by authors such as Hirschmann (2021), Hurd (2008), and Witt (2019), the ECOWAS has not received the same level of attention.

The core problem this dissertation seeks to address is the growing member state contestation within the ECOWAS, which has undermined its credibility as a unifying body in West Africa. Specifically, this study investigates the root causes of these contestations and explores whether the ECOWAS with its evolving mandate is adequately equipped to handle the increasing challenges posed by its member states. Moreover, the dissertation assesses the broader implications of member state contestations on the ECOWAS's overall effectiveness as a regional organization.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. How has the mandate of the ECOWAS evolved over time in response to regional dynamics and member state contestation?
2. What are the root causes of member state contestation within the ECOWAS?
3. How does member state contestation affect the ECOWAS as a unifying body in West Africa?
4. What measures can be taken to strengthen the ECOWAS and prevent further fragmentation?

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the evolution of the ECOWAS' mandate in response to regional dynamics and member state contestation

2. To investigate the root causes of member state contestation within the ECOWAS
3. To assess the implications of member state contestations on the organization's effectiveness as a unifying body in West Africa
4. To recommend measures to strengthen the ECOWAS and prevent further fragmentation

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This research examines the dynamics of member state contestation within the ECOWAS from 2020 to 2024. The chosen timeframe is pivotal for this study, as it marks a period of unprecedented political and institutional challenges within the ECOWAS. Notably, the West African region witnessed a surge in military coups starting in 2020, leading to Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso's intention to withdraw from the bloc.

Using the potential withdrawal of the three states as a case study, the study investigates the factors fuelling contestation among ECOWAS member states and the implications for West African integration.

The research draws on primary and secondary data sourced from semi-structured interviews, from books, journals, newspapers, policy documents, online resources, among others.

### **1.6 Rationale of the Study**

This research is both timely and highly relevant taking into account recent developments in West African politics. The focus on the ECOWAS is motivated by the need to address a significant gap in the existing literature on member state contestation. Despite the growing importance of ECOWAS in promoting regional integration and peacebuilding in West Africa, recent events highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of member state contestation within the bloc. The ECOWAS is at a critical juncture, facing the threat of

further fragmentation. The next decades of its existence will be significantly influenced by how effectively it can tackle its current internal challenges. Understanding the root causes of varying levels of member state support is critical to determining how ECOWAS can adapt and respond to the evolving dynamics within the region.

Thus, this study provides actionable strategies for the ECOWAS to implement meaningful reforms and overcome its current obstacles. The findings continue to serve as a vital resource for policymakers, stakeholders, and scholars in West Africa, informing efforts to advance regional integration and bolster the bloc's cohesion, ultimately contributing to the academic discourse on the survival and termination of regional organizations.

### **1.7.0 Theoretical Framework**

The study employs a neo-functional approach, drawing on both the core foundations of neo-functionalism and its subsequent revised versions.

### **1.7.1 Main Arguments about Neo-Functionalism**

Regional integration is a key aspect of International Relations, and scholars develop theories to explain its workings. According to Niemann and Schmitter (2009), the intellectual foundations of neo-functionalism emerge from the convergence of functionalist, federalist, and communication theories, supplemented by subtle influences from the American group theorists' perspective. Notable neo-functionalists who developed this theory to explain the integration process in Europe after World War II include Ernst Haas, Joseph Nye, Stuart Scheingold, and Philippe Schmitter.

They posit that similar to functionalism, neo-functionalism stresses the importance of expert-driven decision-making, gradual evolution, and adaptive learning. Nevertheless, neo-functionalists diverge from functionalists by attributing considerable importance to the autonomous role of supranational bodies and the evolving influence of organized groups. In contrast to functionalism, which does not restrict integration to a particular geographic area, neo-functionalism specifically focuses on regional integration.

Haas and Lindberg's conceptualization of integration foreshadows key tenets of the theory. According to Haas (1958), integration is "the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states. The end result of a process of political integration is a new political community, superimposed over the pre-existing ones." According to Lindberg (1963), integration encompasses two main processes: (1) the relinquishment of national independence in policy-making, replaced by joint decision-making or the delegation of authority to central organs; and (2) the reorientation of political actors' expectations and activities towards a new central entity.

Firstly, integration is conceptualized as a processual phenomenon, distinct from inter-governmentalism's emphasis on isolated incidents, notably Treaty negotiations, which are regarded as manifestations of an unchanging power politics paradigm. This process-oriented perspective inherently suggests that integration unfolds and adapts over time (Niemann & Schmitter, 2009).

Second, neo-functionalism adopts a pluralist stance, diverging from traditional realist theories that posit states as monolithic entities and sole actors. This approach acknowledges that regional integration involves a multitude of actors, characterized by diversity, fluidity, and

transnational interactions, extending beyond domestic politics to encompass cross-border coalitions and bureaucratic collaborations (Haas, 1964).

Third, Niemann & Schmitter (2009) observe that rational, self-interested actors who adapt through cooperative interactions drive decision-making. Their expectations, actions, and allegiances shift toward a new central authority, primarily motivated by self-interest. However, these interests are not fixed; instead, they evolve as actors recognize the advantages of regional policies and refine their strategies through collaborative decision-making.

Fourth, the authors posit that incremental decision-making takes precedence over large-scale plans, as minor changes are often driven by the unanticipated outcomes of prior decisions.

Fifth, neo-functionalists challenge the traditional realist assumption that inter-actor interactions are inherently zero-sum games. Instead, they contend that positive-sum outcomes and supranational decision-making characterize community interactions, where participants pursue mutually beneficial agreements through compromise and collective interest optimization (Haas, 1964).

The driving force behind neo-functionalist change is concisely captured by the concept of 'spillover': functional, political and cultivated spillover (Niemann, Edwards & Jakobi, 2021). Functional spillover is a concept used to describe how the interconnectedness of policy sectors can drive integration, as the challenges and contradictions that arise from their interdependence necessitate further cooperative steps to achieve coherence and effective governance (Haas, 1958). Political spillover occurs when national elites, faced with significant domestic challenges that require cross-border cooperation, turn to regional-level solutions, thereby fueling a political momentum that drives further integration. Cultivated spillover is a self-reinforcing process where supranational institutions foster integration to increase their

influence, leading to unintended autonomy and difficulty in control by their creators (Niemann et al., 2021).

Neo-functionalism has faced criticism for its overly ambitious theoretical claims. As observed by Niemann & Schmitter (2009), critics contend that the theory falls short of offering a universally applicable framework for understanding regional integration across diverse contexts, particularly in explaining the initial stages of integration. This is because neo-functionalism relies on assumptions that member states possess advanced and diversified economies, as well as democratic systems of governance. Moreover, its analytical tools are mainly suited for exploring integration dynamics, rather than providing a comprehensive theory of regional integration.

In addition, they assert that critics suggest that neo-functionalism overestimates the impact of key actors, such as supranational officials and interest group representatives. They emphasize the need to balance agency with structural explanations.

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2006) notes that Hoffman critiqued neo-functionalists for their overly inward-looking approach, arguing that they underestimated the significance of the broader international context and the potential obstacles arising from interactions with external actors.

He further observes that intergovernmentalists contested the idea of spillover, questioning the assumption of automaticity in integration processes. In their view, states exercise control, choosing whether to integrate or not based on their priorities. Moravcsik's criticism of neo-functionalism underscores the limitation of prioritizing supranational institutions at the expense of national sovereignty (Moravcsik, 2005).

### 1.7.2 Revised Neo-functionalism

In response to the criticisms, Philippe Schmitter, Zoe Lefkofridi, along with other neo-functionalists embarked on a comprehensive re-evaluation of the theory (Niemann, Lefkofridi, & Schmitter, 2019). Schmitter's reformulation efforts commenced in the 1970s, followed by a revisitation of his ideas thirty years thereafter (Niemann & Schmitter, P. (2009). Schmitter highlights the fundamental drivers of integration by emphasizing both internal tensions and contradictions within the process—such as the coexistence of a unified market with exchange rate instability resulting from the retention of national currencies—and the influence of external factors, which can act not only as obstacles but also as catalysts for further integration (Niemann et al., 2019).

Niemann's reconceptualization of neo-functionalism presents a nuanced theoretical framework, wherein integration is redefined as a contextually contingent, dialectical, and condition-dependent process, diverging from the traditional notion of automatic progression (Tranholm-Mikkelsen, 1991).

Neo-functionalist approaches share a consistent foundational framework rooted in historical institutionalism: path dependence (Schimmelfennig, 2018). The latter emphasizes the significance of historical context, suggesting that outcomes are shaped by prior events and decisions, which subsequently become self-sustaining (Rixen, & Viola, 2016). Neofunctionalism views integration as an incremental process, driven by the interaction of spillover effects and path-dependent dynamics that shape the course of integration (Schimmelfennig, 2018). The consequences of earlier integration initiatives can lead to unforeseen crises, however, the accumulated costs and commitments complicate efforts to alter or abandon the integration path (Hooghe & Marks 2019).

Philippe Schmitter challenges the traditional notion of automatic spillover in regional integration, instead proposing alternative strategic responses. In his framework, he states that regional integration can unfold through various pathways, including the emergence of

independent but strictly intergovernmental, institutions focused on specific issues (spill-around), strengthening supranational capacity without broadening its mandate (build-up), adapting cooperation without institutional reform (muddle-about), or even reversing integration progress through member state withdrawal - spill-back (Niemann & Schmitter, 2009).

Neo-functionalism encompasses a dual perspective, encompassing both the processes of integration and disintegration. Thus, it seeks to elucidate not only the factors driving successful integration but also the conditions leading to its failure (Baykara, 2021).

Schmitter & Lefkofridi (2016) assess neo-functionalism's role in understanding disintegration, founded on the premise that regional integration succeeds when cooperation yields mutual benefits in highly interdependent policy domains.

They further posit that, regional interdependence is anticipated to yield net benefits, including greater security. Those benefiting from these advantages will recognize and value them, with the expectation that the benefits will be fairly shared across member states. If these benefits are unevenly distributed among the member states however, the likelihood of disintegration becomes greater (Kowalski, 2018).

Schmitter & Lefkofridi (2016) further argue that neo-functionalism confers a pivotal role on experts, encompassing those within supranational entities as well as national bureaucracies. These experts are assumed to be eager to enhance their decision-making influence and, consequently, inclined to propose innovative measures when opportunities arise. Differences in preferences between regional institutions and member states can trigger disintegration (Kowalski, 2018).

Furthermore, the authors contend that regional integration is a gradual process that involves a series of interconnected decisions. This process is characterized by incremental progress,

without sudden, drastic changes or highly contentious decisions that would require a completely new approach to decision-making or conflict resolution. If these conflicts become too significant, they can escalate, mobilizing a wider public with diverse opinions (Kowalski, 2018).

The revised neo-functionalism was criticized for its growing reliance on ad hoc factors, leading to indeterminate conclusions that offered little guidance for future research. Nevertheless, a number of scholars such as Stanley Hoffman and Robert Keohane have acknowledged the lasting value of neo-functionalism, identifying within it valuable theoretical components to inform and shape other modern theoretical approaches (Niemann, Lefkofridi, & Schmitter, P. C. (2019). The theory best fits this study because it emphasizes the gradual process of integration driven by spillover effects. Functional spillover can be seen in the ECOWAS' evolution from primarily economic cooperation to handling political and security issues, such as peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution efforts, particularly in West Africa's recent crises.

Neo-functionalism offers a dual perspective—explaining both integration and disintegration. The dissatisfaction of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso mirrors the disintegrative forces described by neo-functionalist theory. It acknowledges that variations in priorities between member states and regional bodies can lead to disintegration. Neofunctionalism posits that enhanced security should be a primary benefit of integration—a factor that resonates with critiques of the ECOWAS for its perceived failure to maintain regional security. Thus, neo-functionalism provides a valuable lens for understanding both the integrative strides and the tensions that challenge the ECOWAS' role as a unifying body in West Africa.

In addition, the theory's path dependence aspect and the enduring effects of initial institutional choices provide a powerful lens for understanding the long-term trajectory of the ECOWAS.

This aspect of the theory is critical for understanding how the ECOWAS evolved into its current form and why discontent has emerged after decades of relatively stable regional integration. By highlighting these path-dependent dynamics, neo-functionalism provides a lens through which the consequences of earlier integration initiatives, leading to unintended crises, like the withdrawal of the Sahel states can be understood.

### **1.8.0 Literature Review**

This section of the research provides an in-depth analysis and integration of existing knowledge on the topic, synthesizing relevant literature to provide a foundation for the study. This literature review addresses a significant knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of member state contestation in the ECOWAS, drawing on insights from five key themes: (1) responses to member state contestation in international organizations, (2) legitimacy and membership dynamics, (3) factors influencing withdrawal and contestation, (4) strategies for navigating internal disagreements in regional organizations, and (5) the impact of regional norms on governance and contestation. By integrating these perspectives, this review provides a nuanced understanding of the complex challenges posed by member state contestation to the ECOWAS's regional integration efforts.

### **1.8.1 Responses to Member State Contestation in International Organizations**

Gisela Hirschmann's article, "International Organizations' Responses to Member State Contestation: From Inertia to Resilience," how international organizations (IOs) respond to member state contestation. The article identifies three distinct categories of bureaucratic reactions, specifically adaptation, inertia and resilience building. Hirschmann defines inertia as

the lack of a prompt response by an IO to member state contestation, which can result from either a strategic decision or organizational blind spots. Additionally, the writer defines adaptation as the process of modifying IO policies to address the demands of the contesting member state, often through framing and negotiation. Moreover, Hirschmann conceptualizes resilience building as the development of organizational capacities to mitigate and counter contestation, encompassing strategies such as coalition building, shaming and professionalization (Hirschmann, 2021).

The article presents a compelling case study of the UNFPA to analyze the bureaucratic responses of international organizations to member state contestation. The study sheds light on the challenges faced by UNFPA, which has experienced repeated budget cuts from the United States government, and how the organization's responses have evolved. According to the author, initially, UNFPA adopted a defensive approach, attempting to negotiate with the US government. However, as the threat subsided, the organization shifted its strategy to build resilience by professionalizing fundraising, diversifying resources, forming supportive coalitions, and engaging with private actors. The study identifies the severity of the threat, the stance of other member states, and leadership strategies as potential factors influencing the differences in bureaucratic reactions to contestation.

Despite its insightful findings, a limitation of the article is its exclusive focus on bureaucratic responses to contestation, without exploring the underlying motivations and drivers of contestation, for instance political, economic, and social factors, or external influences. This omission leaves a gap in our understanding of the complex dynamics driving member state contestation.

Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas (2022) posit in their work, "To Yield or Shield? Comparing International Public Administrations' Responses to Member States' Policy Contestation" that

International Organizations (IOs) with autonomous and empowered bureaucracies tend to employ conciliatory language, whereas those with less institutional autonomy exhibit more assertive self-defense strategies when confronted by influential member states.

Another dimension to this argument is that internal dynamics influence International Organizations' (IOs) responses to these contestations. Hirschmann's work, "Crisis management in international organisations: the League of Nations' response to early challenges," uses the League of Nations as a historical case study to demonstrate how a cohesive and timely understanding of a crisis enables IOs to respond more assertively and substantively (Hirschmann, 2023).

### **1.8.2 Legitimacy and Membership Dynamics in International Organizations**

In Ian Hurd's article "Myths of Membership: The Politics of Legitimation in UN Security Council Reform," the author delves into the intricate relationship between membership and legitimacy within the United Nations Security Council. He scrutinizes various assertions proposed in Council reform initiatives and delineates five specific hypotheses concerning the nexus between membership and legitimacy. These hypotheses explore how representation, diversity, state membership, participation in deliberations, and the level of deliberation affect the Council's legitimacy (Hurd, 2008).

Based on the hypothesis, a state is more likely to view the Council as legitimate to the degree that:

HI: the membership of the Council is representative of the General Assembly membership.

H2: the membership of the Council is diverse.

H3: the state is a member of the Council.

H4: the state has an opportunity to participate in deliberations at the Council.

H5: the level of deliberation at the Council is high.

The author examined these hypotheses, analysing their underlying assumptions and limitations. The assessment revealed that hypotheses H1 and H2 rely on shared values and metrics, while H3 is limited to individual states. Hypotheses H4 and H5 depend on the quality and quantity of deliberation, which may be constrained by formal and informal Council processes.

Hurd (2008) however concludes that none of these hypotheses are strongly supported and that discussions about legitimacy may be a cover for political interests. The author's analysis revealed weaknesses in each hypothesis, relying on questionable assumptions such as shared metrics for diversity and representation or the prioritization of deliberative quality over status distinctions. These gaps in logic may stem from incompatible notions of legitimation, suggesting that states' references to these hypotheses may be insincere. The author's findings suggest that member state contestation is not only about competing interests but also about conflicting notions of legitimation, which underlie the debates on Council reform.

Schmidtke and Lenz's work, "Expanding or defending legitimacy? Why international organizations intensify self-legitimation," was written in 2023. It sheds light on International Organizations' (IOs) strategic legitimacy-building efforts. Their research reveals that IOs proactively expand their legitimacy to bolster authority, rather than merely responding to criticism. The authors suggest that the intensity of self-legitimation differs across organizational life stages, with greater authority prompting more assertive legitimacy.

Stephen's work, "The legitimacy and legitimation of international organizations: introduction and framework, written in 2018 examines the legitimacy challenges faced by international organizations. He attributes these deficits to factors such as inability to adapt to evolving environments, unfulfilled commitments, and shifts in stakeholder perceptions. Stephen introduces the concept of "legitimacy drift" and explores organizational responses, including re-legitimation through reforms.

### **1.8.3 Factors Influencing Contestation in International Organizations**

In their 2019 article "Hello, Goodbye: When do States Withdraw from International Organizations?" Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas explore the intricate factors that drive states to exit IOs. These authors argue that domestic politics, internal political factors, such as changes in leadership, public opinion, or regime transitions, significantly influence a state's calculation of the costs and benefits associated with membership.

Furthermore, von Borzyskowski and Vabulas(2019) examine how shifts in global power dynamics and alliances can lead states to reevaluate their participation in international organizations. They posit that, if a state perceives that its interests no longer align with those of other member states due to changes in global power structures, it may consider withdrawal.

Moreover, the authors also investigate how changes in an organization's purpose, or effectiveness can prompt states to consider exit strategies. They assert that if a state believes that an organization has strayed from its original objectives or is no longer effectively achieving its goals, it may seek alternative means of pursuing its interests globally. The article highlights the importance of domestic politics and internal political factors in shaping a state's decision to withdraw from international organizations.

They further argue in their work, “When Do Withdrawal Threats Achieve Reform in International Organizations?”, published in 2023, that fewer than half of such threats are tied to reform demands. States resort to exit threats due to bilateral conflicts or for face-saving purposes, rather than seeking organizational change. Exit threats may serve as a final attempt to prompt reform after failed earlier attempts.

#### **1.8.4 Strategies for Navigating Internal Disagreements in Regional Organizations**

In their 2024 article, "Engagement against All Odds? Navigating Member States' Contestation of EU Policy on Kosovo," Pol Bargués, Assem Dandashly, Hylke Dijkstra, and Gergana Noutcheva explore the challenges facing the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EUFSP) due to disagreements among member states, particularly regarding the Kosovo-Serbia conflict. Expanding on the work of Alcaro and Dijkstra (2024), the authors investigate how the EU overcomes member states' vetoes and addresses contestation, seeking to understand the strategies employed to navigate these obstacles and promote effective EU foreign policy.

The authors cited the work of Baracani (2020) who argues that the EU has employed a functional approach to navigate contentious issues, leveraging technical language and methodologies that emphasize governance. According to the article, the European Union has employed a multifaceted approach, harnessing institutional, technical, and diplomatic instruments to avoid internal discord and support Kosovo. Notably, this has involved cultivating strategic partnerships with key international actors, such as the US and NATO, thereby facilitating effective solutions despite intra-EU disagreements.

### 1.8.5 Impact of Regional Norms on Governance and Contestation

Antonia Witt's article, "Where Regional Norms Matter: Contestation and the Domestic Impact of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance", published in 2019, explores the profound impact of regional norms on domestic dynamics in African countries. Witt illustrates the significance of regional norms in shaping political dynamics among AU member states.

The article reveals that the African Union's Charter has exerted a profound influence on the political landscape of member states, transcending its mere textual existence. Through an in-depth examination of case studies in Burkina Faso and Madagascar, the research indicates how the Charter's provisions serve as a legal framework for national and regional decision-makers to delineate the attainment of state authority and establish the boundaries of legitimate rule.

The author notes that the implementation of Article 25(4) has been a subject of contention, which highlights the lack of consensus among the different AU member states. Article 25(4) of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance sets forth the rules regarding who can participate in transitional elections after an unconstitutional takeover of government.

The article explicitly states:

"Perpetrators of [an] unconstitutional change of government shall not be allowed to participate in elections held to restore the democratic order or hold any position of responsibility in political institutions of their State."

Normatively, the application of Article 25(4) has had ambiguous consequences. While it aims to uphold democratic principles, it also restricts democratic rights by curbing the electorate's choices. For example, ECOWAS judges viewed such interventions as overly intrusive. Understanding the nuanced application and contestation of the Charter provides essential empirical insights for making normative judgments about its impact on democratic processes within member states. While Witt's article explores the impact of regional norms on domestic

dynamics in African countries, it focuses on the African Union and its Charter, without specifically examining the challenges of regional integration in the ECOWAS.

### **1.8.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this literature review has laid the foundation for exploring the complex dynamics of member state contestation within the ECOWAS. By synthesizing insights from the authors, this research aimed at developing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the sub-regional bloc. By building on this literature review, the study intends to enrich the understanding of regional integration, international organizations, and conflict resolution, ultimately providing actionable recommendations to strengthen ECOWAS's effectiveness in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in West Africa.

### **1.9.0 Research Methodology**

Research methodology refers to the organized framework employed in the conduct of research and collecting data to address research questions or explore a particular issue. It details the methods, strategies, and instruments researchers utilize to design, implement, and evaluate their studies. A clear and robust research methodology is essential for ensuring the validity, reliability and credibility of the research outcomes (Khan et al., 2023). This study, therefore, includes the following sections: Research Design, Study Population, Sampling Methods, Sample Size, Data Collection Instruments, Data Collection Procedures, Sources of Data, Data Processing, Data Analysis, Reliability and Validity and Ethical Considerations.

### 1.9.1 Research Design

Research designs serve as comprehensive blueprints that outline the research process, from fundamental premises to explicit methods for gathering and interpreting data (Creswell, 2009). This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research involves conducting studies that produce findings through non-statistical analytical techniques (Rahman, 2017).

According to Van Maanen (1979), qualitative research encompasses a range of interpretive methods aimed at unravelling the meaning and significance of social phenomena, rather than quantifying their frequency. It seeks to obtain a thorough understanding of social phenomena in their real-life settings. The focus of this study is to understand the phenomenon under investigation, making the qualitative research methodology most appropriate as it enabled an exploratory and contextualized examination of the complex dynamics underlying member state contestation within the ECOWAS. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and meanings attributed to these instances of contestation by key stakeholders, including policymakers and experts (Ibid).

Furthermore, the use of qualitative research is based on the social constructivist belief that individuals create subjective meanings from their experiences (Creswell, 2009). In the context of the ECOWAS, the subjective perspectives of member states are extremely important. This approach allowed the researcher to uncover the underlying reasons for contestations within the organization, and how member states perceive the ECOWAS's role in regional integration.

Moreover, building on Crotty's ideas (as cited by Cresswell), this study acknowledges that meaning generation is a social phenomenon, rooted in and influenced by interpersonal interactions and communal relationships (Ibid). Ultimately, qualitative research facilitated a

deeper understanding of the evolving attitudes toward the ECOWAS and provided a platform to capture the voices of the aggrieved member states.

To further enrich this qualitative study, a case study approach was employed. According to Yin, case study involves empirical research into a real-life situation, focusing on a phenomenon where the distinction between it and its context is not clearly defined (Yin, 2003). Bryman describes it as an in-depth investigation of a specific instance, which could involve a person, organization, or community, aiming to explore its complexities in detail (Bryman, 2001).

Since 2020, West Africa has experienced a resurgence of coups, alongside increasing instances of non-compliance with the ECOWAS protocols and growing discontent within the organization. While these coups—both constitutional and unconstitutional—form part of the broader context, this study specifically focused on the unprecedented decisions by Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso to withdraw from the ECOWAS. By adopting a case study approach, this research offered a comprehensive examination of the underlying factors behind the rising discontent among the ECOWAS member states, particularly in relation to these withdrawals. The case study approach enabled an in-depth exploration of why these states chose to sever ties with the organization, the complex forces at play, and the broader implications for regional integration in West Africa. Through this focused analysis, the study also investigated the ECOWAS's responses to these contestations and proposed actionable strategies for the ECOWAS to implement meaningful reforms and overcome its current obstacles.

### 1.9.2 Study Population

In research, the concept of population is essential for establishing a solid foundation for making valid and significant conclusions (Ahmad, et al., 2023). A population consists of a group of individuals, items, or cases that are of particular interest in a study. The population for this

study comprises a diverse group of stakeholders who play key roles in regional integration efforts, particularly those related to the ECOWAS. Specifically, the population includes key officials from the ECOWAS, experts in political, economic, and security issues pertinent to regional integration, academics specializing in political science and international relations, policymakers who are actively engaged in formulating and implementing policies related to West African integration. The inclusion criteria for the population were designed to ensure representativeness from various perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics regarding member state contestation within the ECOWAS, in line with the study's objectives. Given the vast and diverse nature of the population, it was impractical to collect data from every individual, necessitating the use of sampling methods.

### 1.9.3 Sample Methods

A sample is a subset of the population selected for the purposes of a study (Ibid). Sampling facilitates research by narrowing focus to a representative group within expansive populations. This study leveraged a dual sampling approach, integrating purposive and snowball techniques, to ensure that the most relevant participants were selected, while also allowing for the discovery of additional key individuals who might not have been immediately identifiable. Purposive sampling involves the strategic selection of participants possessing specialized knowledge, experience, or status, enabling in-depth exploration of relevant issues that align with the research objectives (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

In purposive sampling, the researcher exercises discretion in choosing the units to be studied based on their judgment (Ibid). The use of this sampling technique in this study allowed for the inclusion of experts with significant professional experience in political, economic, and security issues relevant to regional integration, academics specializing in Political Science and

International Relations, and Foreign Service Officials. Additionally, elements of deviant case sampling—a type of purposive sampling—are also present, as the withdrawal of these founding members marks a significant and unprecedented deviation from the organization’s historical trajectory of regional integration.

To further enhance the scope and depth of the research, snowball sampling was used to augment the purposive sampling strategy. This technique allowed the identification of additional informants through participant referrals, leveraging the networks of those already involved in the study. By asking initial participants if they could recommend others with similar expertise or experiences, individuals who were difficult to reach became accessible (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017).

By drawing on both purposive and snowball sampling, the research benefited from the credibility and relevance of expert knowledge. From the foregoing, the inclusion criteria for this study required participants to have direct involvement or expertise in regional integration-related issues in line with the research objectives. Only individuals who were accessible and provided informed consent were sampled. Conversely, those who lacked the relevant expertise, were not accessible, or did not give their informed consent were excluded from the study.

#### **1.9.4 Sample Size**

Determining the appropriate sample size for a study required careful consideration of several factors, including the study's scope, the data's quality, and the overall study design. In the context of the study exploring the factors accounting for member state contestation within the ECOWAS and its implications of the withdrawals of the three Sahel states on the ECOWAS, the overarching intention was to determine an appropriate sample size that balances breadth and depth, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the phenomenon while enabling detailed case-

specific research (Morse, 2000). The sample size for this study was nine (9) participants in total due to time duration of the study and availability of these participants.

The number allowed for diverse perspectives from experts with significant professional experience in political, economic, and security issues relevant to regional integration, academics specializing in Political Science and International Relations, and Foreign Service Officials. This qualitative study employed a saturation-driven approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews until no additional meaningful information emerged to address the research question (Sharma et al., 2024).

#### **1.9.5 Data Collection Instrument**

Data collection instruments are the tools or techniques employed to gather data for a study (Goyal, 2022). The main data collection method employed in this study was semi-structured interviews as a result of their alignment with the research objectives which focus on understanding member state contestation within the ECOWAS. The flexible nature of these interviews enabled a deep examination of participant responses, moving beyond surface-level answers to uncover the underlying dynamics of political, economic, and security issues impacting the ECOWAS.

Throughout the interviews, verbal and non-verbal cues were valuable in revealing hidden insights about the factors driving dissatisfaction among member states. Thus, an interview guide, aligned with core research themes was created to explore the research topic in-depth and elicit relevant responses from participants.

### **1.9.6 Data Collection Procedure**

This study gathered data through semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed an interview guide that was aligned with the research question and focused on key thematic areas. Additionally, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy. Potential respondents were identified based on their expertise and relevant background. A list of participants with their contact information was compiled. Appointments were scheduled with participants, and they provided consent before each interview. Following this, interviews were carried out face-to-face and virtual platforms, based on the preferences of the participants. To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded (with participants' consent) and additional notes were taken during the sessions.

### **1.9.7.0 Data Sources**

The success of this study hinged on the meticulous collection of data from both primary and secondary sources to provide a thorough insight into the issues being addressed.

### **1.9.7.1 Primary Data**

To achieve the objectives of the exploratory and case study approach adopted in this study, the primary data collection method for this study were semi-structured interviews. Experts with significant professional experience in political, economic, and security issues relevant to regional integration, academics specializing in Political Science and International Relations and Foreign Service Officials. The interviews aligned with the exploratory nature of the research by allowing participants to share their perspectives regarding the ECOWAS's declining popularity among the three Sahel States.

Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews mitigated researcher-centric biases. A highly structured approach may impose the researcher's preconceptions onto the data, potentially overlooking critical events and experiences. This method allowed participants to speak freely about delicate issues, enabling the researcher to pose spontaneous questions and capture unforeseen yet pertinent data that shed light on the nuances of the research questions.

#### **1.9.7.2 Secondary Data**

In this study, the secondary data supported and reinforced certain aspects of the primary data. Secondary data collection refers to obtaining information previously gathered by someone other than the original researcher (Goyal, 2022). Extensive desk research was conducted by reviewing ECOWAS protocols, reports, policy documents, books, journals, online resources, among others. Secondary data proved invaluable to this research as it saved time and provided access to a vast range of data. This significantly reduced the cost and effort of data collection. They also offered context on the broader trends of political instability and regional integration challenges. Together, the combination of primary and secondary data aligned with the research design, providing both a historical foundation and real-time insights into the complex factors behind the ECOWAS's declining popularity among some of its key member states.

#### **1.9.7.3 Data Processing**

The interviews were in English and French. There was no need for an external translator since the researcher spoke French. The data underwent translation and transcription, followed by a thorough review and editing to ensure accuracy and clarity. Afterward, the data was analysed in line with the research objectives, focusing on identifying key themes and insights relevant to member state contestation within the ECOWAS.

#### 1.9.7.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves transforming raw data into actionable insights, rendering it comprehensible and meaningful. It involves dismantling complex data into simpler segments and reconfiguring them to reveal meaningful patterns and relationships (Alem, 2020). A thematic analysis approach was adopted to analyse and interpret the study's data. Thematic Analysis involves systematically identifying and organizing patterns of meaning to uncover underlying themes, shedding light on commonalities and shared experiences within the data (Rosairo, 2023).

Thematic analysis serves as a valuable qualitative data analysis technique. By breaking down texts into manageable themes and coding segments, researchers can systematically categorize and synthesize findings. This approach proves particularly useful for examining subjective data, including personal opinions, attitudes, emotions, and descriptive narratives. Importantly, thematic analysis is useful as it provides a structured approach to qualitative research, equipping researchers with systematic coding and data analysis techniques. By distinguishing qualitative insights from broader debates, it enhances research accessibility to a diverse audience (Ibid).

Guided by Braun & Clarke (2012)'s six-phase approach to thematic analysis, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcript was reviewed multiple times to become familiar with the data and identify pertinent aspects related to the research question (Ibid). The text was then organized and prepared for coding, which was conducted using an inductive approach. An inductive approach to data analysis is characterized as a 'bottom-up' method, focusing on the information present in the data. This suggests that the codes and themes are generated from the content, allowing the researcher's analysis to closely reflect the original data. Each unit was assigned a code corresponding to a specific idea or concept.

Subsequently, themes were identified by aggregating the results of the coding process, which involved organizing the codes into broader categories based on their relationships that reflect the topics being analysed. Next, the themes were reviewed to ensure quality. The researcher then revisited the coded data extracts to evaluate how effectively the themes align with and support the data. Following this review, some themes were refined and renamed. During this refinement phase, it was crucial to articulate what was distinctive and specific about each theme. Finally, the six-phase process concluded with a comprehensive write-up of the findings.

In conclusion, thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable method for this study due to its flexibility and capacity to yield in-depth insights from complex qualitative data. This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the subjective perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, which is crucial for understanding the dynamics of member state contestation within the ECOWAS.

#### **1.9.7.4 Reliability and Validity**

In this study, the reliability and validity of the research findings were taken into consideration. Reliability is the quality that ensures consistent results across multiple observations of the same phenomenon (Babbie, 2008). The study's reliability was enhanced through several strategic measures aimed at ensuring consistency, transparency, and replicability. One key approach involved maintaining control and uniformity within the interview. However, as Alvesson. (2003) suggests, too much structure can sometimes inhibit participants from providing full and candid responses (Coleman, 2022). To address this, a balance was maintained between structure and flexibility, allowing participants to express their perspectives freely while ensuring that all key thematic areas were covered. Additionally, a transparent audit trail was created by documenting every stage of the research process, including sampling strategies, interview protocols, and the rationale behind each decision to facilitate the replication of the study (Creswell, 2009).

The concept of validity in qualitative research differs significantly from its quantitative equivalent. It is not a synonym of reliability. Instead, qualitative validity involves verifying the accuracy of results through specific methodological checks. To ensure the validity and robustness of the research, a triangulation method was utilized, by integrating insights from semi-structured interviews with experts, academics specializing in Political Science and International Relations, and Foreign Service Officials from the ECOWAS member states and supplementing them with secondary data. This approach lends credibility to the findings (Ibid). The study's findings were further validated through peer debriefing, which involved engaging an independent reviewer to pose probing questions about its qualitative dimensions and critique the research.

### **1.10 Ethical Considerations**

Throughout this research, ethical considerations remained paramount. Grounded in the ethical framework of the Belmont Report (1979), this research prioritized the well-being and autonomy of participants, while ensuring authentic and accurate data representation. Importantly, this study commenced by obtaining informed consent from participants, who received clear explanations of the research parameters. Research participants can provide informed consent only when they thoroughly understand all the pertinent details (Israel & Hay, 2006). Participants were informed of their rights, including the option to discontinue their involvement in the study at any time without consequence or penalty.

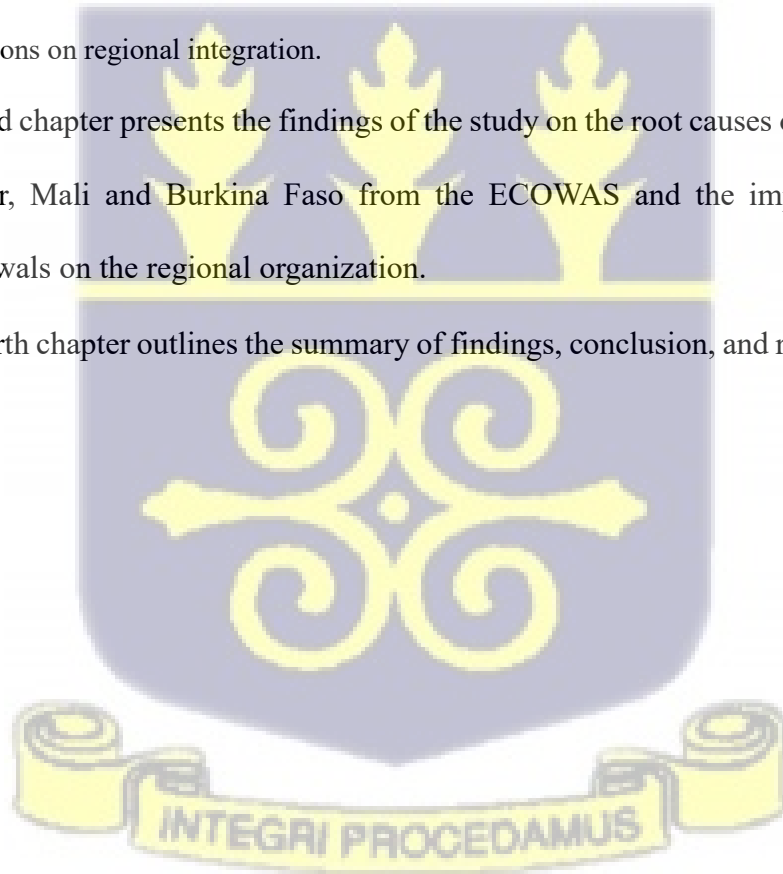
Furthermore, in adherence to ethical principles, this study carefully navigated the fine line between informed consent and potential manipulation. Recognizing Faden and Beauchamp(1989) 's notion that manipulation can occur through altered choices or perceptions, participants were not coerced or persuaded. Moreover, to safeguard participants' privacy, this study maintained stringent confidentiality and anonymity protocols. In adherence to Ghana's

Data Protection Act 2012, all data including interview transcripts were securely handled, stored, and protected from unauthorized access. In summary, this research prioritized informed consent, voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality, upholding the highest standards of ethical integrity. The rigorous ethical considerations in this study provide a foundation for future research.

### 1.11 Arrangement of Chapters

This research has four chapters:

- The first chapter is an Introduction to the study.
- The second chapter is an Overview of the ECOWAS' and membership contestation and its implications on regional integration.
- The third chapter presents the findings of the study on the root causes of the withdrawal of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso from the ECOWAS and the implications of the withdrawals on the regional organization.
- The fourth chapter outlines the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE ECOWAS' APPROACHES TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION DYNAMICS AND MEMBER STATE CONTESTATION

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter comprehensively analyses the frameworks of the ECOWAS and its responses to regional challenges, specifically in security, governance, and member state contestation. It commences with a historical overview of the ECOWAS's original mandate for economic integration, which later expanded to include peace and security, driven by the need to address the region's evolving political and security dynamics. This expansion introduced a series of protocols and mechanisms, including the pivotal 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, as well as the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

These foundational documents outline ECOWAS's legal and institutional frameworks for managing crises and maintaining stability among member states. Furthermore, it reviews the resurgence of military coups and analyses ECOWAS's responses and challenges in restoring democratic governance. The chapter then explores how external factors influence the organization's approach to regional integration. Finally, it considers ECOWAS' response to contestation by its member states.

#### 2.1 Historical Overview of the ECOWAS

In the aftermath of gaining political independence in the 1960s, African countries quickly recognized the importance of economic independence. To achieve this, they realized that pooling their resources was crucial. Regional integration emerged as the key to unlocking economic independence, transforming from a theoretical concept to a practical reality across the continent. In West Africa, the ECOWAS was established through the signing of the Lagos

Treaty on May 28, 1975, (Fayomi & Adeola, 2015) by 15 founding member states, including Benin (formerly Dahomey), Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, with Cape Verde joining the community in 1977 (Clark, 2014).

The ECOWAS was established to promote regional economic autonomy and self-reliance among its member states. As a regional trading union, its primary objective is to create a unified and robust economic bloc through collaborative efforts. The ECOWAS vision is centred on establishing a harmonized and barrier-free region, empowering its population to tap into abundant resources, unlock potential opportunities, and promote sustainable development (ECOWAS, 2024). According to General Yakubu Gowon, one of the ECOWAS' founding fathers, the community's core objective went beyond promoting trade; it was about facilitating the free movement of labour and other production factors. The goal was to dismantle colonial barriers hindering economic growth and foster cooperation and mutual support among member states (Gowon, 1984).

Thus, the ECOWAS stands out as the largest and most inclusive intergovernmental organization in the sub-region, comprising 15 member states. These members reflect a diverse linguistic and cultural heritage, with seven francophone countries affiliated with the Communauté Economique del' Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) and three members from the Mano River Union (MANU). The remaining countries are Anglophone and Lusophone nations. Notably, Mauritania was a founding member but withdrew from the ECOWAS in 2000 (Fayomi & Adeola, 2015). The governance architecture of the ECOWAS features three distinct yet interconnected branches: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. The organization's highest authority is the Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, who serves a one-year term appointed by fellow Heads of State.

It is worth noting that ECOWAS has evolved from a sub-regional integration initiative focused on economic growth, modernization, and development to a multifaceted organization addressing diverse regional needs. Over time, its objectives, scope, and authority have expanded to tackle emerging challenges and developments. Notably, the ECOWAS has pioneered innovative security strategies, garnering global recognition for its conflict prevention and management efforts (Ibid). ECOWAS evolved from a sub-regional integration initiative focused on economic growth, modernization, and development to a multifaceted organization addressing diverse regional needs. Over time, its objectives, scope, and authority have expanded to tackle emerging challenges and developments. Notably, the ECOWAS has pioneered innovative security strategies, garnering global recognition for its conflict prevention and management efforts (United Nations, 2024).

The ECOWAS has transformed from a mere organization to a thriving regional community. The ECOWAS has made significant strides in developing a robust framework of norms and policies which have guided its interventions in regional conflicts, earning recognition from international partners as a key achievement. Notable examples include the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008) (ISPI, 2024).

The ECOWAS has indeed struggled with internal divisions and disagreements on tackling critical situations and violent conflicts. Despite making progress in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which laid out a shared vision for the region, interpreting core principles and practices remains contentious. The situation is further complicated by transnational organized crime and violent extremism, which have become major concerns for the ECOWAS (Obadare & Patel, 2024). The West African body has been facing significant challenges in its response to the recent coups in the sub-region, particularly with the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The AES was created on September 16, 2023, and

its member states announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS on January 28, 2024. It has been mediating to bring Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso back to the bloc (Francis, 2009).

## **2.2 The Evolution of the ECOWAS' Security Architecture**

The ECOWAS was established on May 28, 1975, with the primary aim on achieving economic integration, with no explicit security role. However, a series of alarming events soon compelled the ECOWAS to reassess its priorities and expand its focus to include regional security, stability, and peace. The attempted coup in Benin in 1977, allegedly backed by other African states, marked a turning point. Ongoing border disputes between Togo and Ghana over the Volta Region, as well as Togo's accusations of interference by Ghana and Burkina Faso in its internal affairs, further underscored the need for the ECOWAS to address regional security concerns (Odobó et al., 2017).

In response to growing domestic and external security concerns, the ECOWAS member states took proactive measures to ensure collective defense and stability. As Senegal's former President Leopold Sedar Senghor aptly noted, sustainable development can only thrive in an environment free from insecurity. Consequently, the ECOWAS adopted the Protocol on Non-aggression in 1978 and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence in 1981 (Francis, 2009).

### **2.2.1 The Protocol on Non-aggression**

Pursuant to Article 52 of the UN Charter, which encourages regional organizations to address issues of peace and security, the ECOWAS initiated its security framework with the adoption of the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression. The latter tackled inter-state conflicts within the West

African sub-region, fostering a peaceful resolution framework among ECOWAS member states (Okere, 2017).

Article 1 emphasizes the importance of refraining from aggressive actions or threats against fellow member states' territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty, and political unity. Furthermore, Article 5(2) prohibits actions that could compromise the security, stability, or territorial integrity of any member state, ensuring a secure environment for regional cooperation. Despite its efforts, the protocol failed to alleviate escalating concerns about regional instability (Ibid).

### **2.2.2 The Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence**

The protocol promotes regional cooperation among ECOWAS member states, encouraging them to pool their defense resources to address aggression in West Africa, particularly those supported by external forces (Odoboo et al., 2017). Article 2 of the Protocol obliges ECOWAS member states to offer reciprocal support in the event of an armed threat or aggression against any member state, while Article 13 delineates the protocol's decision-making processes and command structures for intervention.

Despite their peace-promoting efforts, the two instruments failed to consider the profound impact of domestic security threats on regional stability. Notably, ethno-religious conflicts, political repression, governance deficits and human rights violations perpetrated by state security forces were overlooked. The inadequacies necessitated the development of an all-encompassing conflict management mechanism (Francis, 2009).

### **2.2.3 The 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security**

The revision of the ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 laid the groundwork for enhanced regional security cooperation, culminating in the adoption of the 1999 Protocol, establishing the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The primary goals of the mechanism include conflict prevention, management, and resolution, encompassing both intra-state and inter-state disputes (Okere, 2017). Article 4 of the Protocol establishes the institutional framework for the mechanism: the Authority of Heads of State and Government; the Mediation and Security Council; the ECOWAS Commission, and any additional institutions that the Authority may establish to support the mechanism.

#### **2.2.3.1. The Authority of Heads of State and Government**

As stated in Article 11 of the Protocol, the Authority of Heads of States, consisting of Heads of State and Government of Member States functions as the supreme decision-making organ. It is tasked with managing areas such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, security, humanitarian support, peacebuilding, cross-border crime control, the proliferation of small arms, and other issues outlined in the Mechanism. However, the Authority reserves the right to delegate decision-making authority to the Mediation and Security Council for an effective implementation of these responsibilities.

In 2005, the Authority firmly denounced the unconstitutional transfer of power in Togo, which led to Faure Gnassingbe stepping down and paving the way for a constitutionally mandated presidential election. In Guinea (2007), the Assembly's mediation efforts, led by General Ibrahim Babangida and Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, successfully resolved the crisis,

resulting in Lansana Kouyate's appointment as Prime Minister. It also convened extraordinary summits to tackle transitions in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso (N'Diaye, 2007).

### **2.2.3.2 The Mediation and Security Council**

The Mediation and Security Council plays a crucial role in maintaining peace and security in West Africa. It acts as the executive arm of the Authority on peace and security matters in the sub-region. Its primary responsibilities include making decisions on behalf of the Authority and implementing the provisions of the Protocol. Additionally, the Council oversees the approval and periodic review of mandates and terms of reference for various missions (ECOWAS Protocol on Non –Aggression, 1978).

In 2002, ECOWAS took decisive action by sending a high-level ministerial team to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, aiming to broker peace between the government of Laurent Gbagbo and rebel forces (N'Diaye, 2007).

### **2.2.3.3 The ECOWAS Commission**

As outlined in Article 15 of the Protocol, the President of the ECOWAS Commission has the mandate to initiate conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts in the subregion. This involves fact-finding, mediation, negotiation, facilitation, and reconciliation initiatives.

The Commission has made significant strides in implementing the Mechanism's agenda through various initiatives. Notably, they dispatched General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Nigerian Head of State, as a special mediator to Liberia to resolve electoral disputes and foster reconciliation among the country's political leaders. Furthermore, the Commission facilitated

the resolution of the Senegal-Gambia dispute through the mediation efforts of former President Olusegun Obasanjo (N'Diaye, 2007).

#### **2.2.3.4 Organs of the Mechanism**

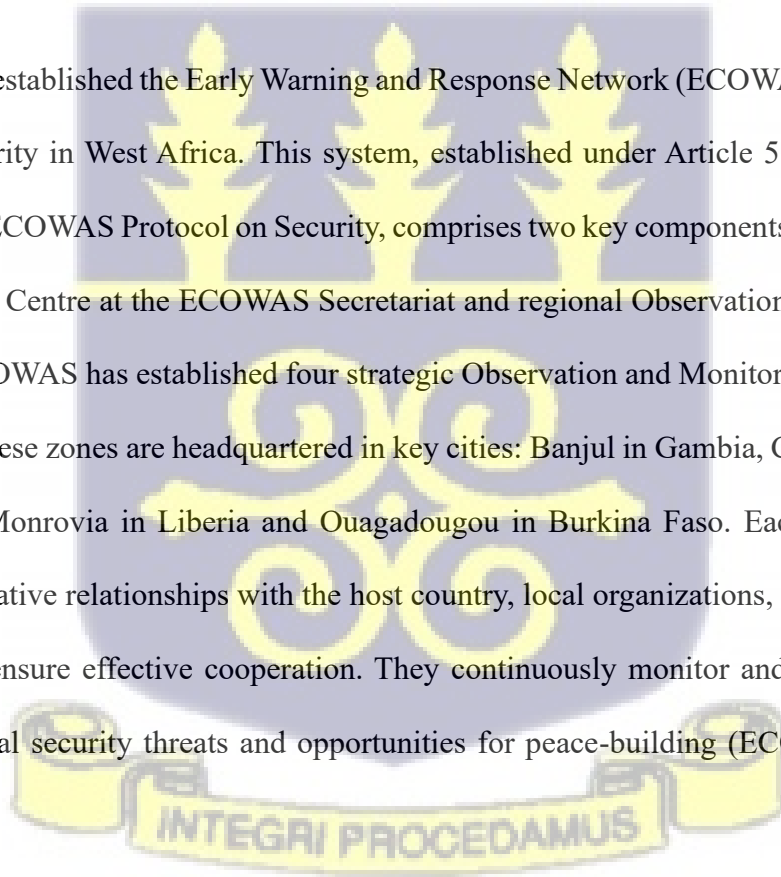
Per article 17 of the Protocol, three key organs were established to enhance the effectiveness of the Mediation and Security Council: the Defence and Security Commission, the Council of Elders, and the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

According to Article 18 of the Protocol, the Defence and Security Commission comprises representatives from Member States, including Chiefs of Defence Staff or their equivalents, Internal Affairs and Security Officers, and Foreign Affairs Ministry Experts. Its platform has provided a critical space for in-depth deliberations and advisory services on pressing security concerns, particularly in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the broader sub-regional security landscape. It also adopted the ECOWAS Standby Force's Operational Framework Document (Okere, 2017).

Another important organ is the Council of Elders. According to Article 20 of the Protocol, the President of the ECOWAS Commission is tasked with the responsibility of compiling an annual list of distinguished individuals who can leverage their experience and influence to facilitate mediation, conciliation, and conflict resolution on behalf of the organization. This diverse group comprises of esteemed women, political leaders, traditional authorities, and religious figures from various sectors of society. These esteemed personalities can be called upon by the Executive Secretary or the Mediation and Security Council to address specific conflict situations as needed. The Council of Elders have been involved in electoral processes across various countries, including Gambia, Sierra Leone, Togo, and even outside the sub-region in Zimbabwe (Odobu, 2017).

Prior to the establishment of the Mechanism, ECOMOG already existed, but its integration into the new framework was deemed essential due to its potential as a peacekeeping instrument in the region. Initially formed in 1990 as a response to Liberia's civil war, ECOMOG is primarily an ad-hoc military force comprising land, air, and sea components, sourced from the armed forces of ECOWAS member states (Ibid). However, its effectiveness has been hindered by challenges such as command and control challenges, logistical limitations, inadequate coordination and integration among the contributing nations, poor communication between ECOMOG field commanders and ECOWAS, and a lack of strong political commitment (Obi, 2009).

The ECOWAS established the Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) to enhance peace and security in West Africa. This system, established under Article 58 of the Revised Treaty and the ECOWAS Protocol on Security, comprises two key components: an Observation and Monitoring Centre at the ECOWAS Secretariat and regional Observation and Monitoring Zones. The ECOWAS has established four strategic Observation and Monitoring Zones across West Africa. These zones are headquartered in key cities: Banjul in Gambia, Cotonou in Benin Republic and Monrovia in Liberia and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Each zone's bureau fosters collaborative relationships with the host country, local organizations, and international institutions to ensure effective cooperation. They continuously monitor and analyze data to identify potential security threats and opportunities for peace-building (ECOWAS Protocol, 1999).



Subsequent protocols, key documents and action plans such as the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and Other Related Materials (2006), the ECOWAS Conflict Preventive Framework (2008), the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy

and Implementation Plan 2013 as well as the 2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism were adopted (Protocols & Legal Texts, 2024).

The ECOWAS has undergone a transformation through a process of spillover, expanding its original economic focus into an economic union that now encompasses conflict management, peacebuilding, and security stabilization across the West African sub-region. This evolution aligns with the neo-functional theory, as economic cooperation expanded in response to shifting regional dynamics, necessitating a broader mandate to manage stability. While its influence in conflict resolution is significant, questions remain about whether its institutional framework has been fully effective in maximizing impact. Indeed the sub-regional body's ability to effectively address West Africa's multifaceted challenges is compromised by inadequate human and material resources. The organization's capacity to collect and analyze information on potential conflict triggers is particularly constrained. The ECOWAS standby force, designed as a segment of the African standby force since 2004 and intended to reach full operational capacity by 2016, has encountered substantial challenges in its deployment, primarily due to limited resources and a lack of political drive (N'Diaye, 2007). To bridge this gap, the ECOWAS requires significant investments in staff development and resource enhancement at various levels (Odobbo et al., 2017).

### **2.3 The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance**

In 2001, the ECOWAS leaders signed the Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance to bolster the ECOWAS Mechanism, the cornerstone of regional security. This supplementary protocol builds upon the existing framework for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security. Article 1 of the ECOWAS Protocol establishes key constitutional principles for its Member States. These principles include the

separation of powers between the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches. The ECOWAS Protocol establishes a clear framework regarding the conduct of elections. It stipulates that substantial modifications cannot be made to electoral laws within six months of elections, unless a majority of political actors give their consent. Furthermore, the protocol emphasizes that every accession to power must be made through elections that are free, fair, and transparent. Additionally, the protocol adopts a zero-tolerance policy towards power obtained or maintained through unconstitutional means, promoting accountability and democratic transitions. Moreover, Article 19 of the protocol delineates the boundaries of military and security agencies' involvement in democratic governance. It mandates that these entities remain impartial and loyal to the nation, focusing exclusively on defending national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the democratic institutions that underpin the state (Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001).

In 2005, the ECOWAS reaffirmed its dedication to democratic values by promptly addressing Togo's unconstitutional power transition. Following Faure Gnassingbé's ascension, the ECOWAS imposed sanctions, suspended Togo's membership, and enforced travel bans and an arms embargo. This decisive response led to Gnassingbé's resignation as interim president and paved the way for presidential elections (Odobó, 2017).

The ECOWAS has, however, struggled to address a critical issue - member-state leaders altering national constitutions to extend their term limits. This practice has sparked intense debate within the organization. In 2015, a proposal aimed at banning third terms was put forward, but unfortunately, it was met with resistance from leaders who had previously benefited from term limit extensions and ultimately shelved (Mills, 2022). Despite establishing robust normative frameworks over the years, the region has become increasingly vulnerable to unconstitutional power transfers, posing significant security risks and potentially triggering further instability (Aning, 2024).

### 2.3.1 The ECOWAS' Evolving Role Challenged by a Resurgence of Coups

In recent years, West Africa has grappled with democratic fragility and entrenched insecurity (Ibid). The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance aimed to establish a robust foundation for democratic values among member states. However, since 2020, several countries have seen their democratic progress undermined by internal conflicts, extremist violence, constitutional manipulation, and military seizures of power.

The Sahel region faces an array of entrenched social, political, and economic challenges (Akinola & Makombe, 2024). West Africa has witnessed a surge in coup d'états since 2020, with successful takeovers in Mali, Guinea, Niger and Burkina Faso, and attempted but failed coups in Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. Parts of the Sahel, notably the tri-border region of Liptako-Gourma spanning Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, remain plagued by severe security challenges (Security Council Report, 2024).

In July 2023, a military coup disrupted Niger's capital, Niamey, with General Abdourahamane Tchiani, head of the Presidential Guard, proclaiming himself the leader of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland. The military regime justified its power grab by pointing to rising insecurity and economic stagnation under President Mohamed Bazoum, who has been held captive despite international pressure (Salihu et al., 2023).

Colonel Goïta's August 2020's military coup in Mali was sparked by public outrage over the manipulated parliamentary election and the government's inability to safeguard civilians from extremist attacks. President Keita's leadership was criticized for perpetuating corruption, instability, and ineffective governance, creating a power vacuum that the military ultimately filled (Akinola & Makombe, 2024).

Burkina Faso has been facing a dire security situation since 2015, with non-state armed forces, often linked to jihadist groups like al-Qaida and the Islamic State, carrying out relentless attacks. The January and September 2022 coups were largely seen as a response to the government's inability to tackle the violence perpetrated by these groups (Brailey, 2024).

Foreign intervention plays a substantial role in West Africa's coup dynamics, with global powers pursuing strategic interests and influence. These foreign powers often turn a blind eye to domestic political dynamics and authoritarianism, as long as their interests are protected. A prime example of this is the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization implicated in the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024). In contrast, for European states and the United States, their military aid to African governments has recently sparked resentment among military factions and segments of the population in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso (Akinola, & Makombe, 2024).

### **2.3.2 The ECOWAS' Responses to the Coups**

The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance constitutes a pivotal instrument within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), aimed at preventing coups d'état and consolidating democratic principles through institutionalization (Williams, 2024).

ECOWAS has responded to recent coups by suspending affected countries from its decision-making processes and imposing specific sanctions such as travel restrictions and asset freezes, alongside more extensive economic and trade restrictions (Pichon, 2024). The leaders of the three juntas claimed that sanctions, along with the threat of force to restore constitutional order, were unlawful, justifying their decision to break away from the ECOWAS. ECOWAS has however employed coercive measures on multiple occasions, notably in Sierra Leone in 1998 and The Gambia in 2017, to restore democratic order (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021).

ECOWAS' response to the recent surge in military coups in West Africa has been criticized for focusing on addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of the problem. The core issues driving these unconstitutional changes of power, such as the manipulation of constitutional term limits, have not been adequately addressed. ECOWAS' sanctions on member states that experience coups are often ineffective, as they're easily lifted after elections that may not be genuinely democratic, but rather orchestrated to favor the military junta and its supporters. Moreover, ECOWAS lacks a legal framework to hold individuals accountable for their role in coups, instead of just punishing the state (Olubiyo, & Ayodele, 2024).

ECOWAS' responses to democratic reversals in West Africa have been criticized as “killing itself softly” (Akinterinwa, 2023). Despite imposing a set of economic, political, and financial sanctions, coupled with threats of military intervention, the measures ultimately backfired, bolstering public support for the military regime instead of weakening it. Even though ECOWAS declared that it would intervene in Niger with its own troops, it lacked the necessary support and institutional capacity to carry out its threat of deploying the standby force (Aning, 2024). The bloc must reassess and refine its mechanisms for addressing military coups, drawing from its experiences in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger (Kanté, 2024).

#### **2.4 The Liptako-Gourma Charter: A Reactive Framework to Regional Dynamics**

In 2023, a military takeover in Niger brought General Abdourahamane Tchiani to power. In response, the ECOWAS issued a warning of potential military intervention to reinstate the country's semi-presidential system of governance. Amid these rising tensions, Mali and Burkina Faso pledged their support to Niger, vowing to assist in the event of an attack on any of the three nations (Kabel, 2023).

In a strategic move, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso formalized their collaboration by signing the Liptako-Gourma Charter on 16th September, 2023 creating the Alliance of Sahel States. The charter emphasizes the collective defense of the populations of the three states. It also encompasses provisions that transcend traditional alliance cooperation, outlining a vision for the integration of the three states within a confederal structure (Bassou, 2024). Notably, Article 6 of the Charter explicitly stipulates that any infringement on the sovereignty or territorial integrity of one or more signatory states shall be deemed an act of aggression against all parties, thereby triggering a collective obligation to provide assistance and relief (Digithèque MJP, 2023).

The three States converge geographically in the Liptako-Gourma region, an area that has faced significant instability due to the scourge of jihadism and militant Islamist movements in recent years nations (Kabel, 2023). The Charter serves as a direct response to the ECOWAS's inability to effectively address the underlying causes of political instability in the sub-region. By prioritizing their collective defense and cooperation, the Charter undermines the regional security mechanisms that the ECOWAS has worked to establish (Ndiaye, 2024)..

## **2.5 The ECOWAS and The Role of External Forces**

External actors have played a dual role in Africa's regional integration, with some contributing positively and others hindering progress. ECOWAS's foreign aid inflows are largely conditioned by the colonial history shared among its member states. A notable example is the monetary alliance between France and CFA Zone member states, forged in the 1960s. This legacy has spawned a centralized cooperation framework, with decision-making authority concentrated in Paris, primarily serving French interests (Ogele, 2021).

In recent years, the resurgence of anti-colonial and neo-colonial sentiment in the Sahel has led to increased skepticism towards European nations, particularly France, leading to the withdrawal of the French, EU, and UN missions from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (ISPI, (2024). Arikana Chihombori-Quao, the former permanent representative of the African Union to the United States, believes that the recent surge in military interventions on the continent is actually a response to the West's continued exploitation of the Africa's natural resources (Mhaka, T. (2023). However, the recent presence of Russian military advisors at Niger's Airbase 101 in Niamey has put the region's complex geopolitical landscape under the spotlight. This base, previously occupied by American, French, and other military forces, now serves as a symbol of the shifting dynamics in the Sahel region (Lebovich, 2024).

Interestingly, ECOWAS, initially formed to counter external interference, particularly from France, is now being perceived as a tool for French imperialism by the coup regimes in the region. The recent developments surrounding ECOWAS have brought into question the organization's fundamental principles. The answer lies in how the organization chooses to respond to these challenges and redefine its role in the international arena (ISPI, 2024).

## **2.6 The ECOWAS' Response to Member State Contestation**

Contestation refers to a “social practice that entails objection to specific issues that matter to people” (Wiener, 2017). In International Relations, it encompasses more than just an empirical observation of dissenting voices; it represents a nuanced analytical framework for exploring the multifaceted ways in which norms and institutions are challenged and redefined (Deitelhoff, N. (2020). Some manifestations of contestation include withholding financial support and withdrawal of membership of states (Hirschmann, 2021). The announcements made in January 2024 by the newly established military governments in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso,

indicating their plans to withdraw from the ECOWAS, may potentially increase the count of countries withdrawing from regional organizations. The withdrawal process of these Sahel states from the ECOWAS is quite unusual, as it defies the organization's governing treaty. According to Article 91, a member state must provide a one-year formal notice before exiting. The only similar instance was Mauritania's withdrawal in 2000, which occurred a year after the country submitted its formal notice in 1999 (Sulaimon, 2024).

International organizations may adopt two contrasting approaches when dealing with a challenging member state, either taking an assertive stance that may involve isolating the state or pursuing a conciliatory approach focused on fostering a more collaborative and harmonious relationship (Heinkelmann-Wild, & Jankauskas, 2020).

In the case of the ECOWAS's response to the announced withdrawals of the Sahel states, the organization leaned heavily on a conciliatory strategy, emphasizing dialogue, inclusion, and community-building to maintain regional cohesion. Following the announced withdrawals of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, the Authority, during its February 2024 Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, directed its Commission to continue diplomatic efforts toward the three Sahel states. This conciliatory approach involved not only maintaining diplomatic channels but also expanding outreach efforts to build goodwill and mutual understanding. The ECOWAS Commission was instructed to work collaboratively with key regional and international stakeholders—including the AU, UEMOA, the UN, and other bilateral partners—to encourage these states to remain within the Community. By seeking engagement from such a broad coalition, ECOWAS aimed to create a united front that could persuade these states to reconsider their decision through constructive dialogue and regional support (ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, 2024).

In addition, the Authority reiterated the critical need for the ECOWAS Commission to fast-track the operationalization of the Standby Force in a more active combat role against terrorism, incorporating the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Accra Initiative. This directive included convening finance and defense ministers to devise strategies for funding and equipping this counter-terrorism force (Ibid).

Similarly, as a conciliatory measure to restore relations with the three states, the ECOWAS Chairman appointed Senegalese President Bassirou Faye and Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé to serve as Special Envoys and mediators in discussions with these countries (Hansrod, 2024).

Furthermore, Regional International Organizations (RIOs) can respond to exit-related pressures by undertaking targeted institutional reforms - institutional strengthening or institutional weakening or even decide not to make introduce any changes. RIOs address exit-related challenges through institutional strengthening by enhancing organizational resilience, streamlining processes, and expanding policy capacity. This is achieved through reinforced authority, increased legalization, standardized community-oriented norms and rules, formalized cooperation-promoting norms and rules, and broadened policy scope and output. Conversely, institutional weakening involves eroding organizational foundations, loosening procedural norms, and contracting policy influence. This manifests as reduced authority, decreased legalization, relaxed norms and rules, narrowed policy scope, and diminished outputs (Panke et al., 2024).

The 2024 Country Resilience and Human Security Assessment (CRHSA) in Ghana, launched by ECOWAS on June 10, 2024, exemplifies the organization's resilience-building strategy in response to member state contestation and regional security threats. Conducted under the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO) Project with support from

the European Union, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and GIZ, this assessment reflects ECOWAS's commitment to addressing the complex human security challenges faced by its member states. The CRHSA's objective is to evaluate Ghana's institutional and social resilience against a variety of security risks, including violent extremism, forced migration, and farmer-herder conflict (ECOWAS, 2024).

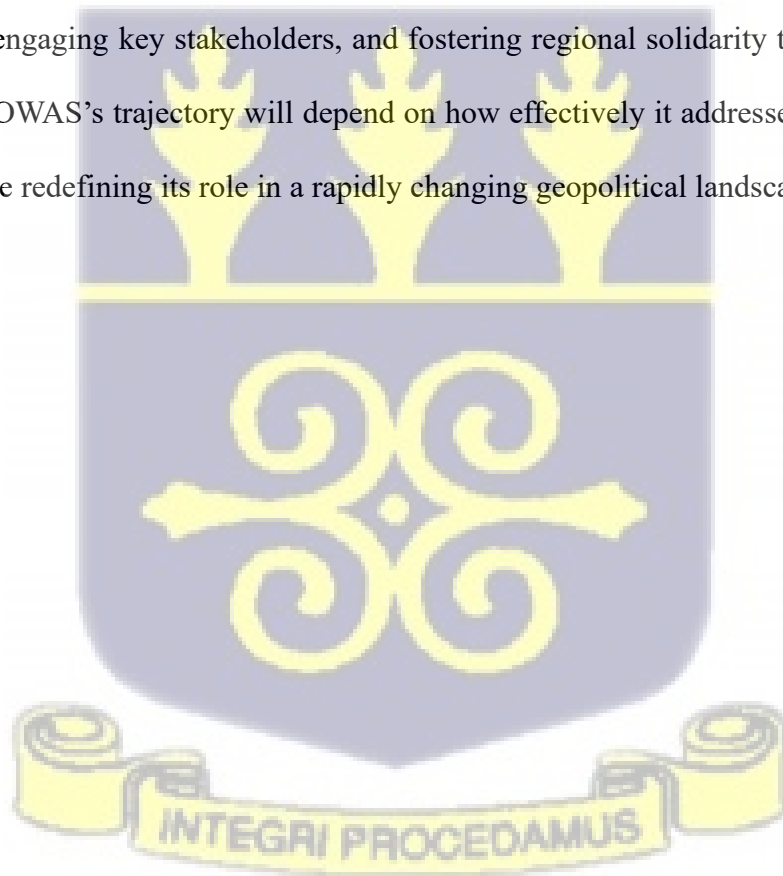
By incorporating digital technologies to enhance early warning systems and establishing a robust research database, ECOWAS seeks to strengthen its organizational foundation to anticipate and mitigate security issues effectively. This approach aligns with ECOWAS's resilience-building efforts to fortify its capacity to manage and contain regional. With prior CRHSA initiatives in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, ECOWAS is also adapting its assessment model to reflect region-specific threats, thus ensuring that responses are contextually appropriate (Ibid).

Similarly, in July 2024, in response to member state contestation and the recent trend of withdrawals within the ECOWAS, the organization adopted a resilience-building approach to reinforce its role as a stabilizing force in the region. The sub-regional body's proactive engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ghana, led by Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musah, Commissioner of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, underscores this approach (Selormey, 2024). During these discussions, the ECOWAS officials highlighted critical challenges facing the region, including attempts to manipulate electoral processes, recent coups in member states like Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali, and shifts in international alliances (Ibid).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The ECOWAS has transitioned from a solely economic integration organization into a multifaceted organization responsible for addressing regional security and governance issues.

Through key protocols, such as the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution and the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the ECOWAS has built a framework to respond to regional stability threats. However, despite these efforts, the organization encounters significant challenges due to resource limitations, insufficient political momentum, and the complexities of upholding democratic norms amid a resurgence of coups and constitutional manipulations within member states. The Liptako-Gourma Charter, signed by Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, has added a new dynamic to regional politics, with implications for ECOWAS' role and effectiveness. External forces, including France and Russia, have also played a significant role in shaping the region's politics. Rather than isolating the dissenting states, the organization has chosen a balanced, conciliatory approach, focusing on diplomacy, engaging key stakeholders, and fostering regional solidarity to maintain unity. Ultimately, ECOWAS's trajectory will depend on how effectively it addresses these evolving challenges while redefining its role in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.



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## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF NIGER, MALI AND BURKINA FASO FROM ECOWAS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SUB-REGIONAL BODY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter analyzes the findings based on the study's research questions and objective, focusing on the root causes of contestation among the ECOWAS member states, specifically Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, following the imposition of sanctions after coups took place in these countries. It further explores the potential regional implications for the ECOWAS' integration efforts. This chapter was developed from primary and secondary data gathered in this study. The research findings are organized in this chapter according to the key themes identified from data gathered through semi-structured interviews with participants who are experts in political, economic, and security matters related to regional integration, academics specializing in Political Science and International Relations, and Foreign Service Officers. The study employed codes to identify participants in relation to their interview responses, rather than using their actual names, to maintain anonymity.

#### 3.1 Root causes or factors influencing member state contestations within the ECOWAS and subsequent withdrawal from the sub-regional body

The first major theme of the study focuses on the root causes of member state contestations within the ECOWAS. The study sought to understand the root causes of member state contestation within the ECOWAS with the announced withdrawals of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as a case study. The study found out that the factors driving member states contestations within the ECOWAS are bad governance, frustration with the ECOWAS's inconsistent approach to governance, inconsistent application of its protocols, neo-colonial influence, and

a lack of pragmatism in addressing regional insecurity as a result of institutional challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of skilled personnel for complex operations, poor coordination, logistical inefficiencies among member states.

### 3.1.1 Security Crisis in The Sahel Region

The West African Sahel region is home to a rapidly expanding and increasingly lethal terrorist threat, with some of the world's most dangerous extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda operating in the area . The terrorist threat in the region has been exacerbated by external factors, stemming from both state and non-state actors in neighboring countries, particularly Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as from more distant influencers, including Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, whose involvement spans several decades. (Dirk 2022). Militant Islamist groups, initially concentrated in Mali, have expanded their presence westward and southward, wreaking havoc in the region. Their activities have led to devastating consequences, including the displacement of millions, shutdown of a large number of schools and food insecurity affecting 12.7 million individuals across Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. The Liptako-Gourma region, where the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire converge, is a critical hub for the subregion. This key trade route facilitates significant commerce, with approximately 25% of Mali's imports passing through the Abidjan-Bamako corridor and 30-35% of Burkina Faso's total imports entering via the Abidjan-Bobo Dioulasso route. Moreover, more than 50% of Burkina Faso's exports, including its vital cotton industry, are routed through Abidjan's port. Paradoxically, this strategic region has become a hotspot of violence and humanitarian crisis (Eizenga & Gnanguênon, 2024).

The ECOWAS has served as the premier regional cooperation framework, leveraging its members' political resolve, solid legal framework, and wealth of experience in maintaining peace and stability. The ECOWAS has undertaken numerous peacekeeping operations and established the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) within the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture. Building on the legacy of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the ESF has enhanced regional security capabilities since its inception in the 2000s. The rising tide of violent extremism has however highlighted substantial challenges in deploying ECOWAS forces effectively (Ibid).

### 3.1.2 Ineffectiveness of the ECOWAS' security response

Recounting some of the root causes of contestation within ECOWAS, Respondent 1, indicated that:

*The coups we're seeing right now are really tied to the rise of Islamic insurgency across West Africa. It's leading to serious insecurity in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, and it's even spreading towards countries like Benin and Nigeria. The military leaders basically felt that the ECOWAS wasn't doing enough to help deal with these security threats, so they took matters into their own hands. By staging the coups and pulling out of the ECOWAS, they wanted to send a clear message that they are sovereign nations, and would handle their own security issues if no one else steps up.*

This sentiment was echoed by Respondent 2, who stated that:

*Another cause is terrorism. Even though Nigeria is experiencing terrorism, there's a place known as the Liptako-Gourma area ... it's a tri border region that borders Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger right and it's one of the epicenters of terrorism in the world. Member states have received minimal assistance from ECOWAS. ECOWAS has a*

*robust security framework but the issue is the implementation. Funding is a problem.*

*West African leaders prioritize their internal security over honoring their financial obligations.”*

These grievances underscore a growing disconnect between the ECOWAS' mandate and its ability to respond to the evolving security dynamics of the Sahel region.

In an interview with Kestér Kenn KLOMEGÂH, Antoine SOMDAH, former ambassador of Burkina Faso to the Russian Federation and an expert in international law affirmed that the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) was established in response to the inadequate security measures, lack of solidarity, and abandonment by the ECOWAS in addressing the terrorist threat. He highlighted that the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) serves as a collective defense and mutual assistance bloc, designed to counter potential ECOWAS military interventions or other external threats, including terrorism, while also aspiring to foster sub-regional economic integration (Klomegâh, 2024).

As noted in the literature, the ECOWAS has adopted various measures to tackle security challenges in the Sahel, including the 2006 Protocol on Counter-Terrorism, Conflict Management, Peacekeeping, and Security, and the 2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism. These initiatives aim to combat terrorism and regional conflicts. The ECOWAS however faces significant challenges, including insufficient funding, lack of skilled personnel for complex operations, inadequate equipment and logistics, poor coordination among member states and other regional bodies. These issues hinder the effectiveness of the ECOWAS's security efforts in the region (Kwarkye, 2021; Akinyemi & Asiyambi, 2023).

Okom (2016) asserts that a robust financial foundation is crucial for the ECOWAS to achieve its regional integration goals; however, this objective is undermined by the inability of some member states to fulfill their financial commitments.

This highlights the systemic weaknesses within the ECOWAS' security architecture, particularly its reliance on the financial commitments of member states, which are often inconsistent or insufficient. The inability of some member states to meet these obligations compromises the organization's overall financial stability and, by extension, its capacity to respond effectively to security crises.

The rise of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) demonstrates dissatisfaction with ECOWAS's handling of regional security. The signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter, symbolic of the Liptako-Gourma region, has exposed gaps in ECOWAS' ability to provide adequate security assistance. The dissatisfaction among the Sahel states suggests that the security benefits of integration were not perceived as equally distributed. This perception of unequal benefits aligns with neo-functionalism's view that disintegration occurs when cooperation fails to deliver mutual benefits.

Research by von Borzyskowski et al. (2019) provides additional evidence, exploring how shifts in an organization's purpose or effectiveness can lead states to contemplate withdrawal. According to their findings, states may seek alternative avenues to pursue their interests globally if they perceive an organization as deviating from its initial objectives or failing to achieve its goals. The study underscores the significance of domestic politics and internal factors in driving a state's decision to exit international organizations. Notably, the authors observe that fewer than half of exit threats are motivated by demands for reform, instead attributing these threats to bilateral considerations.

From the interviews and the literature, there is a consistent perception that the ECOWAS has failed to provide adequate support in addressing the escalating security threats in the Sahel, particularly terrorism and insurgency in regions like Liptako-Gourma. Moreover, ECOWAS' financial and logistical weaknesses, underscore systemic issues that prevent the organization

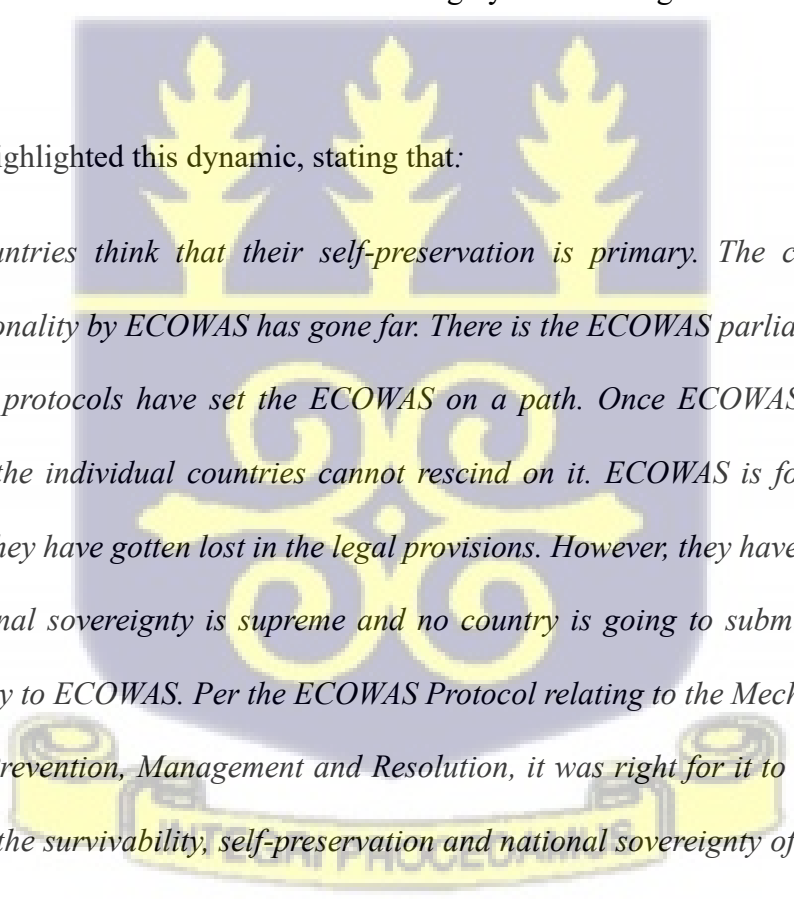
from acting effectively as a security actor. This aligns with neo-functionalism's view that disintegration is driven by the failure of regional cooperation to yield mutual benefits.

In this context, the Sahel states' withdrawals are not merely reactions to the ECOWAS' stance on coups but represent deeper dissatisfaction with its failure to adequately address the region's pressing security needs.

### 3.1.2 Tensions Between Sovereignty and Supranationality

A key emerging issue from the interviews underlying the recent withdrawals from ECOWAS is the enduring tension between national sovereignty and the organization's supranational authority.

Respondent 3 highlighted this dynamic, stating that:



*These countries think that their self-preservation is primary. The concept of supranationality by ECOWAS has gone far. There is the ECOWAS parliament. The ECOWAS protocols have set the ECOWAS on a path. Once ECOWAS makes a decision, the individual countries cannot rescind on it. ECOWAS is following a mirage. They have gotten lost in the legal provisions. However, they have forgotten that national sovereignty is supreme and no country is going to submit its total sovereignty to ECOWAS. Per the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, it was right for it to intervene. However, the survivability, self-preservation and national sovereignty of the Sahel States caused them to announce their withdrawal. States may give concessions to make decisions but they will not give away their sovereignty. The fact that it was legally right for ECOWAS to decide to intervene doesn't mean that it should intervene. Even EU could not do away with the sovereignty of Britain.*

With respect to sanctions meted out to these counties, Respondent 1 indicated that:

*These sanctions deeply angered the affected states. They were already grappling with the spread of insurgency and widespread insecurity within their borders and had hoped that ECOWAS, with its various protocols and action plans, would step in and provide effective support to address these critical challenges.*

From the interviews, legal provisions allowing ECOWAS to impose sanctions and intervene militarily are considered an overreach.

The Lagos Treaty's revision ushered in a new era for ECOWAS, shifting from non-interference to actively promoting democratic governance and human rights within member states. This change expanded the community's purview to include oversight of national institutions, government appointments, and the protection of human rights (Kufuor, 2021).

In West Africa, the resurgence of military coups has posed significant challenges to the region's democratic and security landscape (ISS Africa, 2022). It is worth noting that, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance constitutes a pivotal instrument within the ECOWAS, aimed at preventing coups d'état and consolidating democratic principles through institutionalization (Williams, 2024). The Protocol outlines punitive measures against member states that violate human rights or undermine democratic governance (Odubajo, & Ishola, 2024). Though, ECOWAS has responded to recent coups by suspending affected countries from its decision-making processes and imposing targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, as well as broader economic and trade restrictions (Pichon, 2024). According to Article 25 of the 1999 protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security, external interventions can occur

without state consent under specific circumstances, such as the overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government (Walther, 2024). The leaders of the three juntas claimed that sanctions, including the threat of force to restore constitutional order, were unlawful, justifying their decision to break away from the ECOWAS.

The timing of these sanctions, coinciding with a historic rise in terrorist threats – the primary catalyst for the coups – has further inflamed tensions. This controversy underscores the intricate balance between ECOWAS' supranational authority and the national interests of its member states.

Respondent 4, a former ambassador also shared the same view and stated that:

*After the coup d'état, ECOWAS acted in a way that undermined these countries' sovereignty. The threat to intervention militarily was a wrong move. The sanctions didn't help in any way. Preventive diplomacy should have been considered.*

Similarly, the literature also notes that despite imposing an unprecedented array of stringent sanctions, coupled with threats of military intervention, the measures ultimately backfired, bolstering public support for the military regime instead of weakening it. This move by ECOWAS has been described as “killing itself softly”. (Akinterinwa, 2023).

Speaking to Nwachukwu and Onje Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, concurred that the root cause stemmed from the imposition of stringent sanctions. He observed that the West African heads of state, led by His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the current ECOWAS Chair, made a firm stand against the coup attempt, demonstrating their determination to prevent its success. He added that while the principle behind their response was sound, the approach taken may have left some room for improvement. He stated that: *“Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger's actions were a knee-jerk reaction to past sanctions. They used this as an excuse to withdraw from the*

community”. He acknowledged that both sides, however, had their flaws in handling the situation (Nwachukwu & Onje, 2024).

Respondent 2, an academic also highlighted that:

*They also cited the sanctions. I think the protocol should be revised so that the sanctions target the coup leaders only. They should be the only target so that the citizens can live their normal lives.*

Similarly, Respondent 5 also emphasized that:

*They're really angry at ECOWAS because of its inconsistency in applying sanctions. It is evident that these countries felt that ECOWAS' preferences over the issues has changed and therefore do not align with their domestic and foreign policy interests. This led to the contestation we are currently witnessing, which is largely caused by domestic issues which the previous governments were not able to resolve. The Sahel states expected ECOWAS to support them in tackling the widespread insurgency within the Sahel region, but you see.... ECOWAS has its own challenges, especially with funding.*

ECOWAS's transformation from a regional economic community to a more politically and militarily assertive body is highlighted by its legal framework, particularly the 1993 Revised Treaty and subsequent protocols, which empowered ECOWAS to intervene in matters related to governance and security. The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), in particular, became a cornerstone of ECOWAS's efforts to ensure democratic stability within the region. It set the stage for ECOWAS to impose punitive measures against member states that violate human rights or undermine democratic order, including economic sanctions, travel bans, and suspension from decision-making bodies.

The recent imposition of sanctions on Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, following their military coups, exemplifies the challenge ECOWAS faces in balancing its supranational role with the national sovereignty of its members. These sanctions were seen by the affected states as an infringement on their sovereignty. From the participants' responses, the crux of the issue lies in the perception of ECOWAS's interventionist policies as an overreach. The decision of these countries to withdraw from ECOWAS can be seen as a response to what they perceived as an inappropriate and coercive approach to their internal security crises. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), underscores the growing divide between the supranational aspirations of ECOWAS and the sovereignty of its member states, particularly in the face of complex security dynamics that the current ECOWAS framework appears ill-equipped to handle effectively. To remain relevant and effective, ECOWAS must reconsider its approach, balancing its supranational mandate with a greater sensitivity to the sovereignty of member states and the evolving challenges they face.

### 3.1.3 Neo-Colonial Influence

From the interviews and the literature, one recurring factor driving member state contestation within ECOWAS is the neo-colonial influence. According to Respondent 6:

*The second paragraph of the preamble of the ASS's constitution speaks of the promotion of total freedom through political independence, human dignity and emancipation. In a less formal way, the aim of the ASS is to free themselves completely from the shackles of modern colonialism imposed on them by the former colonizers, which is the European countries, including France. This struggle is born of a need to free themselves from the endless exploitation of the wealth of these countries and their peoples, because plainly, the French-speaking countries of*

*Africa are not “independent”, they're really not. Being described as poor countries by the whole world... this is a real disgrace, because when you look at the exploitable wealth, only the colonies have a right to the wealth of these countries, to the detriment of the population. To put it bluntly, modern exploitation by the former colonialists, the European countries, especially France is the main reason why the ASS is leaving ECOWAS. ECOWAS is an organization that is secretly under the yoke of Europe through laws and agreements that don't benefit them.*

As explained by the respondent, this perception of ECOWAS as a proxy for Western interests has led to mistrust and the announced withdrawal of these states from the organization.

This is affirmed by Respondent 7, an International Relations Expert who also reiterated that:

*They also see France's influence in the sub-regional body. France has played a decisive role in their underdevelopment and they don't want anything to do with them. As a result of this perceived influence, they decided to avoid the sub-regional body altogether.*

Similarly, Respondent 2 stated that:

*Some factors are exogenous to West Africa.... that is ECOWAS' relationship with the developed countries, especially France. They were former colonies of France. France had a decisive role in the affairs of the Sahel States. They often tend to compare themselves to English-speaking countries and see some disparities in terms of development that's why there is some kind of internal backlash... resentment against the French. So they feel that France is influencing ECOWAS.*

The sub-regional body is perceived by the Sahel States as being overly influenced by Western powers, particularly France. This perception stems from the belief that the policies and actions

of ECOWAS, such as military interventions or sanctions, reflect the priorities of former colonial powers rather than the needs and interests of West African nations.

Building on the insights shared by the earlier respondents, the Respondent 8 offers a nuanced perspective on the complexities surrounding ECOWAS's decision to send troops to Niger:

*ECOWAS' decision to send troops to Niger was a mistake. Mali got the solidarity with Burkina Faso through Niger. Together, they perceived that ECOWAS was a puppet of the West who wanted to destroy their country. To them, ECOWAS was getting support from the French, so the best decision was just to withdraw from the ECOWAS. There is mistrust among member states. ECOWAS has a zero tolerance for regime change and has been successful with interventions but these countries have been intransigent in adhering to ECOWAS' timelines and policies. The sanctions were quite harsh as well. The electricity cuts didn't help the citizens, so they felt that Nigeria was dictating the agenda of the West.*

According to the literature, the second wave of colonization, which resulted in post-colonial African states remaining under the political and economic control of their former colonizers, has intensified the challenges faced by regional organizations like ECOWAS. Following the independence of its former colonies, France worked to safeguard its strategic foreign, military, and economic interests by fostering strong ties with the local Francophone elites. Additionally, France played a pivotal role in establishing the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and maintaining the CFA franc (Arinze et al., 2021)

The region has long been linked to Europe through a series of aid and cooperation agreements, initially with the European Community and later with the European Union. Notable agreements include the Yaoundé Agreement, the Lomé Conventions, and the Cotonou Agreement. In addition, numerous EU member states have consistently provided significant financial

assistance, including humanitarian and food aid, in response to the persistent challenges of poverty and governance in the region. This aid has often been motivated not only by humanitarian concerns but also by the pursuit of economic interests.(Ibid).

Respondent 9 also contrasted France's role with that of Russia, emphasizing that partnerships with the latter are framed as less coercive and more aligned with national sovereignty:

*The ineffectiveness of interventions like Operation Barkhane and the MINUSMA eventually led to partnerships being formed with Russia. We didn't leave ECOWAS because of the Russians; they've never colonized us or killed any African leaders. It's simply a partnership with them, and the Russians will never dictate to us, unlike the French. They will always do what we want them to do. For us, it's all about freedom, and our nation is firmly behind the soldiers in this pursuit. The French asked them to impose sanctions on us while they took our resources to develop themselves and distribute electricity to other countries. This isn't fair.*

Russia is capitalizing on a comparable convergence of opportunities in the Sahel, forging close ties with the military governments in Mali and Burkina Faso. These alliances have included security assistance, diplomatic support, and information campaigns. Following Mali's second military coup, Russian military advisers arrived in the country toward the end of 2021. Through the Wagner Group, Russia has deployed approximately 400 mercenaries to assist in countering jihadist groups. Additionally, arms shipments were delivered to Mali by mid-2022. Despite these efforts, the security situation in Mali has continued to worsen, with insurgent activity spreading further across the region (Stronski, 2024).

The perception that ECOWAS is excessively influenced by Western powers, particularly France, is central to this contestation. This perception is rooted in a belief that the organization's policies, including military interventions and sanctions, are shaped by the interests of former

colonial powers rather than the needs of West African nations. The interviewees suggest that the withdrawal of countries like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS is not solely about specific policies but reflects a broader rejection of what they perceive as ECOWAS' complicity in neo-colonial dynamics. The relationship between ECOWAS and European powers has historically been framed by agreements like the Yaoundé Agreement, the Lomé Conventions, and the Cotonou Agreement, which have linked the region to Europe through aid and cooperation. While these agreements were initially meant to address economic and development issues in West Africa, they also served European economic interests. Through military support and security assistance, including the deployment of mercenaries via the Wagner Group, Russia is gaining influence in the region, particularly in the Sahel, where it is seen as a counterbalance to Western influence. This complex web of historical and contemporary interactions between ECOWAS, its member states, and external powers illustrates the deep-seated concerns about neo-colonialism that underlie the growing contestation within the regional body.

#### **3.1.4 Frustration with ECOWAS's Inconsistent Approach to Governance**

In relation to the root causes of contestation within ECOWAS, Respondent 8 revealed that:

*We've had leaders in the ECOWAS Commission and they have not been doing the right thing. When the current President of Ghana was also ECOWAS Chair, he didn't take pragmatic measures to address the root causes. Now the coups have increased. ECOWAS is not a perfect institution but the institution is made up of people who are not truthful. You need to align the member states with the vision of the body. I'm not saying past glory is bad; but we need to think about the future.*

Supporting this view, Respondent 6 added that:

*Look at Article 2 of the Protocol on Democracy...I think it's really disappointing that ECOWAS didn't step up to stop Gnassingbé, Ouattara, and Condé from manipulating their constitutions to stay in office. They found ways to extend term limits. ECOWAS is always quick to condemn coups. It has double standards.*

Similarly, Respondent 2, a Political Scientist also emphasized that:

*Your protocol...supplementary protocol says that it will not take over power or maintain power by unconstitutional means isn't it? So even if you are a civilian and you want to maintain power through unconstitutional means, by changing even your constitution, right, you should not do it. But ECOWAS will sit down for civilian government to alter their constitutions or for president or government or whatever it is to alter their constitutions and they will not talk. They will even go and then participate in their inauguration.*

This assertion is further corroborated by Onyejekwe's argument that the leaders of ECOWAS, particularly President Bola Tinubu, who had a questionable democratic track record and were elected through a highly contested and flawed process, undermined the organization's credibility as a fair arbiter (Onyejekwe,2024).

Building on this perspective, Martin Ronceray has pointed out a growing disconnect between ECOWAS' agenda and the priorities of the populations it seeks to represent. This discrepancy has led to the belief that ECOWAS functions more as a "club" of self-serving heads of state and governments, primarily interested in maintaining their grip on power rather than addressing the broader governance challenges facing the region. This sentiment is compounded by the fact that leaders championing ECOWAS' tough stance on unconstitutional changes of government often face questions about their legitimacy at home. These leaders appear to

prioritize constitutional continuity primarily as a tool for consolidating their authority, an approach that increasingly alienates the public and shifts the balance of power in favor of military regimes (Ronceray, 2023).

The data reveals that the ECOWAS' failure to consistently enforce its own protocols, particularly on governance and constitutional integrity, has undermined public trust and contributed to the dissatisfaction of its member states, leading to the withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from the regional bloc. This perception of double standards and self-serving leadership has fueled frustrations with Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, where public sentiment often aligns more closely with the military regimes now in power than with the ECOWAS leadership. For these states, ECOWAS' rigid focus on constitutional manipulations, coupled with its failure to address the underlying causes of instability in West Africa, appears disconnected from their national priorities and sovereignty. The resulting disillusionment with ECOWAS as a fair and effective regional body has played a significant role in their decision to withdraw, signalling a broader rejection of its governance approach and leadership practices.

### **3.1.5 Conclusion**

The study findings revealed that the root causes of member state contestation within ECOWAS are multifaceted, with factors such as perceived double standards in leadership, ECOWAS's failure to address regional security issues, the influence of neo-colonial powers, and a misapplication of sanctions. These member states felt that ECOWAS stance was not meant to solve their internal problems but rather worsen their plights of insecurity caused by the terrorists. Therefore, ECOWAS stance on matters arising within the sub-region, has led to mistrust amongst its member states as they expected that ECOWAS would intervene in resolving their domestic issues. The decision to consider military intervention in Niger served

as a catalyst for their withdrawal. As a result, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) was formed to assert their sovereignty and signal to ECOWAS that they intend to collectively tackle their domestic concerns. These factors have collectively contributed to the withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, signalling a broader dissatisfaction with the organization's approach to governance and regional stability.

### **3.2.0 Broader Regional implications of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger's withdrawal on ECOWAS regional integration efforts**

The second major theme on broader regional implications of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger withdrawal from ECOWAS sought to examine the potential implications of their withdrawal on going ECOWAS regional integration efforts. The implication of their withdrawal is likely to affect regional integration efforts in trade, economy, governance, democracy, security, welfare and overall regional economic development and growth.

#### **3.2.1 Security Concerns and Spillover Effects**

According to Respondent 4:

*If they leave, ECOWAS will lose the little control it has over the situation in the Sahel. If the conflict issues in the north aren't managed effectively, the instability could spill over to the coastal states. The Alliance of Sahel States might not have the capacity to fight terrorism on its own, and if they choose not to cooperate with ECOWAS, the chances of spillover effects become even greater. This is a serious concern for the entire region.*

Respondent 2 echoed these concerns, emphasizing the humanitarian implications of security failures:

*In case there's a spillover of conflicts, the citizens' rights will be infringed upon, in terms of security. So, it seems that where ECOWAS came from, several years ago, they are likely to go back there. There can be spillover of conflicts if ECOWAS is no longer in control of these states. We'll see more refugees coming down which will be terrible for the coastal states."*

Similarly, Respondent 3 also noted that:

*Efforts like the Accra Initiative and the Joint Multinational Force depend heavily on the participation of these countries. If they leave, it'll be a critical blow to the region's unified fight against terrorism. These countries have played important roles in combating insurgencies, and without their involvement, I fear there'll be serious gaps in vital information sharing.*

The surge in insecurity in West Africa's junta-led countries is alarming. Recent developments, including the collapse of the G5 Sahel alliance and the withdrawal of international forces, have emboldened violent extremist groups. The departure of the ASS from the ECOWAS exacerbates regional security concerns, undermining efforts to combat terrorism and organized crime. Already struggling with inadequate resources and staffing shortages, ECOWAS countries face increased threats from armed groups. This security vacuum may even lead to more military coups in the sub-region (Pichon, 2024).

The spillover effect mentioned by Respondents 4 and 2 underscore the interconnectedness of the region. Similarly, Respondent 3 expressed concern over the operational and collaborative implications of these withdrawals. The participants feared that the inability of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to manage the region's security independently would result in further instability, potentially spreading across borders.

It must be noted that the withdrawal of these member states is to show their displeasure at the ECOWAS stance taken against the illegitimate removal of democratically elected leaders in the sub-region. Though the ECOWAS continues to struggle with restoring democracy and stability in three countries where military takeovers occurred within a span of just a year and a half, these coups not only disrupt the political structure of the affected countries and the sub-region, but also undermine the substance of democracy, leaving it superficial. (Aduamoah, 2023).

### 3.2.2 Economic Integration Challenges

On the economic front, Respondent 3 emphasized that:

*Individual ECOWAS countries are likely to prioritize their own self-preservation by forging direct alliances with the Sahel States, bypassing the ECOWAS platform entirely. For instance, Ghana recently sent a delegation led by its Minister of National Security to engage directly with the governments of Burkina Faso and Mali, aiming to foster collaborative efforts to address terrorism and insecurity.*

Respondent 6 also reiterated that:

*In reality, the implications of these withdrawals on individual countries will likely be minimal, largely because of the pre-existing relationships between the Sahel states and their neighboring ECOWAS member states. It will depend heavily on the specific bilateral ties between each ECOWAS country and the withdrawing Sahel states. These relationships will play a crucial role in determining how much these changes disrupt cooperation on security, trade, and other regional matters.*

The statements from the respondents indicate a potential shift in how ECOWAS member states approach cooperation, moving from regionalism toward more individualized, nationalistic strategies in response to the political dynamics within the region.

In an interview with Onyinye Nwachukwu and Ojochenemi Onje in Abuja, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security of the ECOWAS stated that:

*If these countries leave, it will be more difficult diplomatically and diminish ECOWAS' reach. Intra-West African trade is small, with only 11% of the region's trade with the rest of the world. ECOWAS has been promoting industrialization through the common external tariff, adding value to primary products and promoting diversity in production (Nwachukwu & Onje, 2024).*

This highlights the fragile nature of ECOWAS's economic integration efforts and the risks posed by fragmentation within the regional body.

Furthermore, Respondent 2, a Political Scientist also indicated that:

*It affects the unity. I mean, the whole decision is about cooperation, economic cooperation. So, if they are no longer members of ECOWAS, it means that ECOWAS protocols that we have will not affect them. We talk about free movement of goods and services, and therefore it's likely that will be affected. So, in Ghana, we don't produce onion on a large scale... I mean those that are imported from Niger, Mali into Ghana all right, look at tomatoes...so it means that it's going to affect trade. It means maybe Ghana would have to establish a bilateral relationship with them one by one.*

Supporting this perspective, Respondent 1 highlighted the broader regional implications, emphasizing the risk of further destabilization:

*The current security crisis really calls for immediate attention because they pose common threats to all ECOWAS member states. There's a real concern that other countries could follow Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali if they face similar crises. This would seriously affect our regional integration efforts, which are aimed at growing our economies and boosting trade between member states. For any country to benefit from regional integration, we need stability — both in security and in the free movement of goods and services. But it's just not possible when there's crisis and turmoil. So, the withdrawal of these three countries is a major threat to our integration projects. We need to address this issue.*

These views imply that the loss of a cohesive regional trade framework could create barriers to economic cooperation and increase the complexity of securing trade agreements, undermining the broader objectives of economic integration within ECOWAS.

### **3.2.3 Threat to Regional Integration and Collective Influence**

Highlighting the implications on regional integration efforts, Respondent 5 stated that:

*With Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger pulling out of ECOWAS, it's only going to make the already shaky security situation in West Africa worse. These terrorist groups are feeding off our inability to come together and tackle the crises in the Sahel. Their withdrawal is bound to take a toll on regional integration, especially when it comes to things like trade, customs, and tariffs, and it's likely to deepen the political instability we're already struggling with.*

Similarly, the Respondent 7, the International Relations Expert also noted that:

*The withdrawal of these countries is undeniably a setback for regional integration. It directly undermines the progress we've made over the years toward deeper*

*cooperation and unity within West Africa. This move dampens the regional integration agenda we have worked so hard to develop. If the Alliance of Sahel States continues to thrive and expand, it will only raise serious questions about the relevance and effectiveness of ECOWAS.*

Respondent 5 stresses how the withdrawal will disrupt trade, customs, and tariffs, while Respondent 7 highlights the broader undermining of cooperation and unity within West Africa. Both emphasize that these withdrawals represent a significant setback for ECOWAS's integration agenda.

Furthermore, Respondent 8, also stated that:

*The withdrawal of these member states will undoubtedly lead to an organizational shake-up within ECOWAS. It's not just about the political implications; it's also about the practical, structural disruptions this will cause. For instance, Burkina Faso has hosted the West African Health Organization headquarters since 1987. With their exit, ECOWAS will have to find another country willing and able to host the organization. This isn't a simple task—it involves identifying a new location, setting up facilities, and recruiting and training new personnel to ensure operations continue smoothly. Such a transition will inevitably incur substantial costs and take considerable time.*

Furthermore, Respondent 3, also explained that:

*The coup regimes in West Africa are really putting the stability of these countries at risk because they just haven't been able to return to democratic rule. What this means is that as long as the military is in charge, it could become the norm that*

*whenever a country sees that its government can't handle security issues, the military just steps in. And that's really damaging – it'll erode confidence in our young democracies, which we need to protect and nurture if we want the sub-region to thrive. The current situation is really a dilemma for most stakeholders, especially when it comes to political stability, which, you know, would have helped drive ECOWAS' economic integration efforts. So, this is definitely going to affect regional integration—basically, it could send us back to the old days of military rule.*

Finally, Respondent 8 also added that:

*Well, I believe there's a positive side to every situation, and this one is no exception. ECOWAS has long been regarded as one of the most effective regional organizations globally, earning recognition for its efforts in fostering economic integration and regional security. However, like any institution, it is not without its challenges. No organization is perfect, and ECOWAS is no exception. This moment, as difficult as it may seem, presents an opportunity for introspection and growth. It offers ECOWAS the chance to reassess its structure, make necessary adjustments, and redefine its objectives to align more closely with the current realities of the region. Times of crisis often force organizations to innovate, adapt, and emerge stronger.*

Addressing the implications of the recent withdrawals, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, in an interview with Kingsley Igbohoh highlighted that, in today's global diplomacy, strength and influence stem from unity and collective numbers. Retaining all 15 member states enhances ECOWAS's standing and

influence on the international stage. A reduction in membership, he warned, would weaken the organization's capacity to act effectively. Ambassador Musah also underscored ECOWAS's foundational principle of solidarity, which plays a vital role in international engagements. He pointed out that when pursuing positions within global bodies like the United Nations, ECOWAS operates as a unified bloc, rallying behind candidates from within its ranks (Igbohoh, 2024).

From the interviews, Respondent 8 offered a more practical view, highlighting the structural and logistical disruptions the withdrawals will cause within ECOWAS and also offered a more optimistic perspective. Respondent 3 further emphasized that the absence of ECOWAS's control in these countries could exacerbate military coups and further erode political stability, undermining the efforts to restore democratic rule in the region. This sentiment aligns with Pichon's broader concerns about the rise of violent extremist groups in the Sahel.

Unlike the other views, Respondent 8 offers a positive and reflective outlook, framing the crisis as an opportunity for ECOWAS to reassess its structure and adapt to the region's evolving needs. This viewpoint stands out for its focus on innovation and institutional growth amid challenges. Finally, the Commissioner's remarks highlighted the broader implications of the withdrawals, emphasizing the potential weakening of ECOWAS's collective influence and solidarity on the international stage.

Ajala et al. (2024) further emphasizes the need to reform the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, pointing out that the current protocol, in place since 2001, lacks measures to address contemporary issues, such as enforcing term limits.

The withdrawal of these three countries from regional organizations is expected to have a substantial implication on regional integration efforts. While immediate effects on security cooperation may be limited, there are significant concerns about long-term repercussions,

particularly regarding weakened security initiatives following their exit from groups like the G5 Sahel, which could heighten security risks for both the withdrawing nations and neighboring, more stable states. Moreover, new initiatives, such as the Alliance of Sahel States, may encounter challenges without the support of regional bodies like ECOWAS.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter presented an analysis of findings in alignment with the study research questions and objectives. It sought to ascertain the decisions that led to member states' withdrawal from the ECOWAS. This chapter also examined the potential implications of their withdrawal on going ECOWAS regional integration efforts. The next chapter presents a summary of the findings, drawing conclusions and offers some recommendations.



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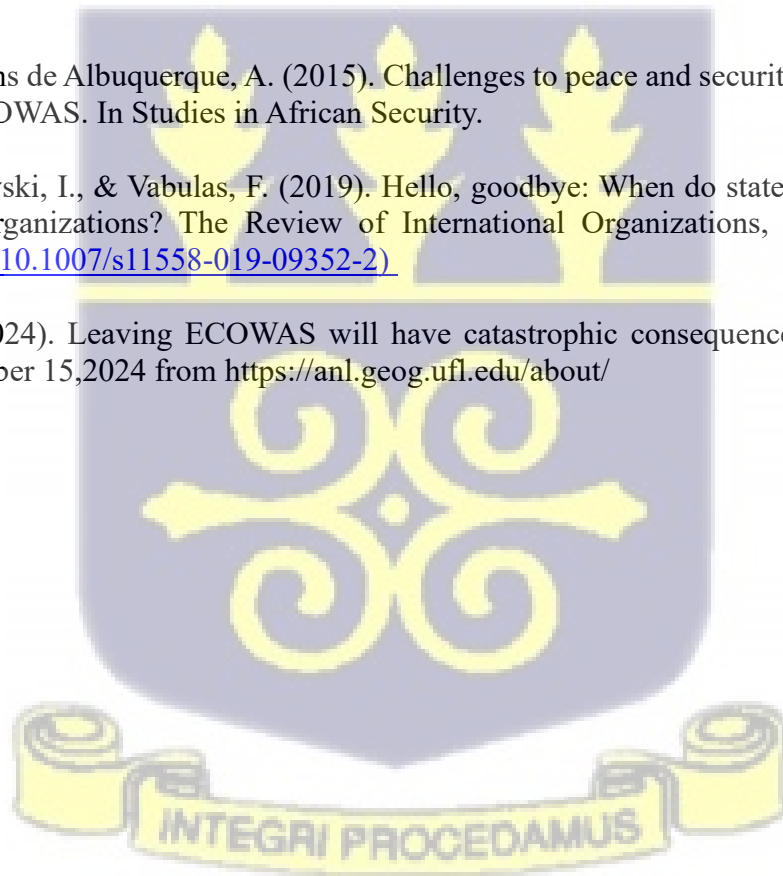
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## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents the summary of findings gathered from the field interviews and conclusions reached at the end of the study. The study also makes some useful recommendations for various stakeholders in policy making, governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and regional sub-groupings particularly ECOWAS in addressing key emerging issues of member state contestation and its implications on ECOWAS regional integration efforts within West Africa. The findings were analyzed in accordance with the major themes and sub-themes generated during the literature review and analysis of findings.

This study was conducted within the theoretical framework of neo-functionalism and its revised version. It posits that integration is driven by the spillover effects from one area of cooperation to others, where initial steps in integration set off a chain reaction, eventually leading to deeper political and economic unification. In the context of the ECOWAS, neofunctionalism provides valuable insights into the regional integration process and the contestation observed among member states. The ECOWAS was established to foster economic cooperation and regional stability, but its mandate has since expanded to include political and security cooperation. According to neofunctionalism, this expansion of the ECOWAS' mandate can result from functional spillover, where economic integration necessitated further cooperation in other areas like governance and security. The role of the ECOWAS' supranational institutions is critical in understanding these contestations. Neofunctionalism predicts that as regional organizations take on more responsibility, their success depends on the ability of these institutions to manage conflicts and advance integration.

In the case of the ECOWAS, the recent withdrawals by key founding members highlight weaknesses in these supranational structures.

The revised version of neofunctionalism emphasizes how prior decisions and events shape the course of regional integration. The evolution of ECOWAS, shaped by early commitments to economic cooperation, and the decision to integrate security and democratic governance into its mandate at critical junctures, through the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the 1999 Protocol Relating to Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution has set a path that now shapes the organization's responses to political crises, such as unconstitutional changes of government. The institutionalization of sanctions and interventions, while aimed at enforcing compliance, has led to tensions between ECOWAS and Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, where the latter have perceived its actions as not being responsive to their needs.

One of the core elements of neo-functionalism is that divergent preferences between member states and regional institutions can lead to disintegration. The frustration of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso with the ECOWAS' approach to governance, particularly its leadership's focus on prolonging constitutional terms over broader security concerns, demonstrates this dynamic. The revised neo-functionalism posits that regional interdependence is anticipated to yield net benefits, including greater security. If these benefits are unevenly distributed among the member states, however, the likelihood of disintegration becomes greater. The recent withdrawals align with their proposition that if benefits are not shared or perceived to be disproportionately favoring certain states, the likelihood of disintegration increases.

#### **4.1 Summary of Major Research Findings**

The study identified core findings according to the objectives set in Chapter One.

**Objective One: Examination of the evolution of the ECOWAS' mandate in response to regional dynamics and member state contestation**

The study revealed that ECOWAS was originally founded with the primary objective of promoting regional economic integration among West African states. The mandate of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has evolved significantly since its inception, adapting to the shifting dynamics within the region, including political, economic, and security challenges, as well as contestation from its member states. The organization was also shaped by security concerns, particularly in the context of military coups and political instability in the region. Leopold Sedar Senghor, the former President of Senegal, insightfully remarked that sustainable development thrives only within a stable and secure environment. In light of this, the ECOWAS implemented the Protocol on Non-Aggression in 1978 and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence in 1981. The inadequacies of these protocols however, necessitated the development of an all-encompassing conflict management mechanism.

The study found that the 1999 Protocol Relating to Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution marked a shift towards security regionalism, emphasizing the ECOWAS's role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, with the deployment of peacekeeping forces like the ECOMOG mission in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The increasing number of coups and political crises in West Africa led the ECOWAS to reassess its role in regional governance. The organization's mandate expanded from purely economic integration to include stronger emphasis on political stability, human rights, and conflict prevention. The study found that the ECOWAS also had to evolve in response to political instability and the increasing number of unconstitutional changes in government, which led to the development of protocols like the

Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and the establishment of mechanisms for imposing sanctions against member states violating democratic norms. This move underscored the ECOWAS's evolving response to the need for political stability, particularly after the string of coups in the region. In response to political crises, the ECOWAS became more assertive in taking interventionist actions, and peacekeeping operations in countries like Côte d'Ivoire (2002) and Guinea-Bissau (2000).

The study discovered that global, political and economic dynamics have also influenced the ECOWAS' mandate, such as shifts in international aid conditioned by the colonial history shared among its member states, the global fight against terrorism, and the African Union's broader agenda. These external pressures have often prompted the ECOWAS to reconsider its strategies and adjust its policies.

The findings reveal that, the ECOWAS has adopted a conciliatory approach after the announced exit of the Sahel States, focused on promoting regional cohesion and encouraging these states to reconsider their decision to exit the bloc. ECOWAS chose not to isolate the dissenting states but to focus on dialogue and collaboration. At its February 2024 Extraordinary Summit, the ECOWAS committed to diplomatic efforts, urging Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger to reconsider their exits through the facilitation of dialogue and the engagement of key regional and international stakeholders such as the African Union, UEMOA, and the United Nations. This approach emphasized mutual understanding and the fostering of goodwill.

The study found that in response to these contestations, the ECOWAS has appointed special envoys from Senegal and Togo to mediate discussions with the Sahel states. ECOWAS is focusing on institutional strengthening as part of its resilience-building strategy. The 2024

Country Resilience and Human Security Assessment (CRHSA) in Ghana highlights these efforts, addressing security threats such as violent extremism and forced migration while enhancing early warning systems and institutional frameworks. Additionally, the ECOWAS has engaged proactively with civil society organizations in Ghana and deployed election observer missions to ensure democratic integrity and regional unity amid political instability in member states.

**Objective Two: Investigation of the root causes of member state contestation within the ECOWAS**

The study sought to understand the root causes of member state contestation within ECOWAS with the announced withdrawals of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as a case study. The study found out that member state contestation within the ECOWAS has been fueled by factors such as bad governance, poor leadership, insecurity, terrorism, military meddling in politics, self-interest of actors, the excesses of the ECOWAS in relation to the imposition of sanctions, inconsistent application of the rules, protocols and conventions, neo-colonial influence, lack of pragmatism on the part of ECOWAS in tackling regional insecurity, specific positions of ECOWAS on key matters.

The study found that the Sahel region of West Africa is grappling with increasing security issues. The ECOWAS, as a regional body, has attempted to address these security challenges through frameworks like the 2006 Protocol on Counter-Terrorism and the 2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism. Despite these efforts, the organization's security response has faced considerable obstacles. Key challenges include insufficient funding, lack of skilled personnel, inadequate equipment, poor coordination among member states, and logistical

inefficiencies. These limitations have hindered ECOWAS's capacity to respond effectively to the evolving security threats in the Sahel.

Participants in the study indicated that Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, have been dealing with severe insecurity and terrorism for years. The ECOWAS has failed to adequately address these internal security issues, often leaving the member states feeling unsupported. This dissatisfaction led to the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS), a collective security bloc aimed at addressing regional security without relying on ECOWAS. This aligns with the neo-functionalism theory, which posits that disintegration occurs when cooperation fails to yield shared benefits, and when regional security efforts are seen as ineffective or unequal.

The findings of the study revealed that the ECOWAS's transformation from a regional economic community to a politically and militarily assertive organization is highlighted by its legal framework, particularly the 1993 Revised Treaty and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). These frameworks empowered the ECOWAS to intervene in matters of governance and security, allowing it to impose sanctions such as travel bans, economic restrictions, and suspensions for violations of human rights and democratic order. The recent sanctions imposed on Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso following their military coups exemplify the challenge the ECOWAS faces in balancing its supranational role with the sovereignty of its member states. While the legal provisions gave the ECOWAS a stronger role, they also led to perceptions of overreach, with the affected countries viewing the sanctions as excessive. In response, the military juntas, feeling unsupported by the ECOWAS in addressing security threats like terrorism and insurgency, withdrew from the organization and formed the ASS, asserting their intent to independently manage their security concerns.

The study found that the ECOWAS is perceived by the Sahel states as being overly influenced by former colonial powers, particularly France. This perception stems from the belief that the ECOWAS policies, such as military interventions and sanctions, are shaped more by Western interests than by the needs of West African nations. The countries feel that the ECOWAS is serving the interests of Western powers, rather than prioritizing their own sovereignty and development. This has fueled a sense of mistrust and contributed to their decision to withdraw.

The findings also indicate that frustration with the ECOWAS's inconsistent approach to governance is a significant factor contributing to member state contestation. Participants highlighted perceptions of double standards within the ECOWAS, particularly its failure to address constitutional manipulations by civilian governments. Data from the literature further corroborates these concerns, highlighting a growing disconnect between the ECOWAS's governance agenda and the priorities of the populations it seeks to represent. Reports suggest that the organization is perceived as prioritizing the interests of heads of state over broader regional governance issues. This sentiment has been compounded by the perception that leaders championing the ECOWAS's tough stance on unconstitutional changes of government often face legitimacy challenges within their own countries. Such inconsistencies have weakened public trust in the ECOWAS, alienated populations, and shifted the balance of power in favor of military regimes.

**Objective Three: Assessment of the implications of member state contestations on the organization's effectiveness as a unifying body in West Africa**

The study found that the withdrawal of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso from the ECOWAS has far-reaching implications for regional security, economic integration, and the broader goal of

fostering unity and cooperation in West Africa. These withdrawals will disrupt the organization's ability to achieve its objectives and expose systemic challenges that the ECOWAS must address to maintain its relevance and effectiveness.

The study revealed that one of the most critical implications of the withdrawals is the erosion of regional security cooperation. The ECOWAS's already strained capacity to manage terrorism and insurgency in the Sahel will be further weakened. Already, the resurgence of violent extremist groups has been fueled by the dissolution of security initiatives like the G5 Sahel alliance and the withdrawal of international forces. Thus, the withdrawal of these member states increases a risk of conflict spillovers into neighboring coastal countries, threatening regional stability. Furthermore, the absence of collective security mechanisms raises the possibility of a surge in military coups, further destabilizing governance structures across the region.

On the economic front, the study's findings reveal that the withdrawals challenge the ECOWAS's efforts to promote regional trade and economic integration. With these countries opting out of the ECOWAS protocols, key trade arrangements such as the free movement of goods, services, and people are likely to be disrupted. Nations that rely on agricultural imports from these states may face supply chain challenges, compelling them to negotiate bilateral agreements outside the ECOWAS framework. This shift undermines the regional economic integration agenda, which relies on collective action to boost trade and industrialization within the sub-region.

In terms of governance, the findings show that the withdrawals represent a broader challenge to the ECOWAS's authority and legitimacy. The discontent expressed by the withdrawing

states over the ECOWAS's stance on military coups highlights the need for the organization to reassess its governance frameworks. The lack of enforceable measures to address issues such as unconstitutional changes in government and term limits has made the ECOWAS vulnerable to criticism and member state contestation. This institutional weakness, if unaddressed, could lead to further fragmentation.

The study also revealed that the departures have logistical and structural implications for the ECOWAS. For example, the need to relocate regional institutions, such as the West African Health Organization headquartered in Burkina Faso, underscores the practical disruptions that these withdrawals will cause. These transitions will require significant resources, time, and planning, placing additional strain on the organization.

The study also found that the withdrawals will pose a significant threat to the ECOWAS's unity, diminishing its collective influence in global diplomacy and weakening its ability to act effectively. In addition, it could also lead to political instability and lead to more coups in the sub-region.

The findings underscore the potential for long-term regional implications. The study revealed that the departures could inspire other member states to question their continued participation in the ECOWAS, especially if the organization fails to address their grievances. This would not only affect the ECOWAS's relevance but also diminish its influence in global and regional affairs.

Despite these challenges, the study's findings highlight a potential constructive opportunity for the ECOWAS. The withdrawals will provide the ECOWAS with an opportunity to introspect

and initiate reforms to address its structural and procedural weaknesses. The current crisis could serve as a critical juncture for the organization to redefine its objectives, enhance its protocols, and innovate strategies to adapt to the changing dynamics of the region. This moment of adversity, if managed effectively, could lead to a stronger and more resilient the ECOWAS.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex interplay between regional integration and disintegration within the ECOWAS, particularly in relation to member state contestation and institutional challenges. The recent withdrawals of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso reflect a deeper tension between the supranational ambitions of the ECOWAS and the sovereignty concerns of its member states, compounded by internal governance issues. The ECOWAS's evolution from an economic community to a politically and militarily assertive body, underpinned by evolving legal frameworks, has exposed the limits of its influence and the inconsistencies in its enforcement of protocols. The crisis resulting from these withdrawals presents a critical juncture for the ECOWAS as it turns 50th in 2025. It offers a unique opportunity for the organization to reevaluate and restructure its frameworks to better align with the realities of its member states.

### 4.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings outlined above the study recommends the following:

- **Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation as a First Resort:** The ECOWAS should invest more in preventive diplomacy, including continued dialogue with countries experiencing political turmoil. Engaging experienced mediators, such as former presidents like Olusegun Obasanjo and other skilled diplomats, could help resolve

crises before they escalate. By maintaining communication and offering mediation, ECOWAS can work to bring back states that have announced their withdrawal from the organization and address the root causes of their discontent.

- **Strengthen Institutional Capacity:** The ECOWAS should prioritize strengthening its institutions to better serve the needs of its member states. The organization should adopt a more consistent and transparent enforcement of its protocols. The ECOWAS should hold its leaders accountable for actions that undermine democratic norms, ensuring that its commitment to constitutional democracy is not selectively applied. The ECOWAS should revise its framework for sanctions to target leaders responsible for unconstitutional changes in government, rather than penalizing citizens who are not responsible for the actions of their leaders.
- **Diversify Funding Sources:** The ECOWAS should seek to diversify its sources of funding beyond member state contributions to address security and developmental needs of its members. This could include partnerships with international organizations like the UN, AU, development banks, and private sector investments in infrastructure and regional projects.
- **Strengthen National Institutions:** Governments in the ECOWAS member states should prioritize strengthening democratic governance, rule of law, and accountability within their countries. This would help address the internal political challenges that lead to unconstitutional changes of government. Governments must ensure the integrity of electoral processes and avoid constitutional manipulations.
- **Promote Grassroot Mobilization and Public Awareness:** CSOs can support public diplomacy efforts by raising awareness among the citizens of the ECOWAS member states about the benefits of regional integration. Public awareness campaigns can help

create a sense of ownership and responsibility among the people for the success of the ECOWAS integration process.

- **Encourage Constructive Dialogue:** Member states should prioritize fostering open and constructive dialogues with the ECOWAS, particularly concerning policies related to governance and security, prior to making decisions regarding withdrawal.
- **Conduct Ongoing Research on Regional Integration:** Academics and think tanks should continue conducting research on regional integration, identifying both successful models and the challenges facing the ECOWAS. Such research can inform policy development.



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### Interviews

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Respondent 2-Political Scientist, University of Ghana, Legon

Respondent 3-Security Analyst and Legal Academic, University of Professional Studies, Ghana

Respondent 4- Foreign Service Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, Ghana

Respondent 5- Academic, University of Ghana, Legon

Respondent 6-Political Analyst and Legal Expert, L'Université Aube Nouvelle de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Respondent 7 - International Relations Expert, University of Ghana, Legon

Respondent 8-ECOWAS and AU Expert, Afcfita

Respondent 9-Diplomat, Embassy of Niger in Ghana

