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The Evolving Role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Solving Conflict in the Sub-Saharan Region from 2011 to 2021: The cases of Mali, Burkina-Faso, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau

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Resumo

A região Oeste Africana é conhecida por sua instabilidade política e de segurança, tornando a busca pela estabilidade uma tarefa desafiadora para a comunidade internacional. Nos últimos anos (2011 a 2021), a Comunidade Econômica dos Estados da África Ocidental (CEDEAO) emergiu como um ator importante na região, desempenhando um papel ativo na resolução de conflitos, especialmente durante golpes de Estado em Mali (2012, 2020, 2021), Guiné-Bissau (2012), Burkina Faso (2015) e República da Guiné (2021).

No entanto, as ações da CEDEAO receberam críticas, especialmente em relação à coerência de suas intervenções. Durante a crise em Burkina Faso em 2014 e 2015, a sociedade civil exigiu ação consistente e não discriminatória da CEDEAO, recusando o plano de mediação proposto pela organização. Eles afirmaram que a situação foi resolvida mais devido a esforços internos do que às ações da CEDEAO.

Esta dissertação analisa os princípios orientadores das ações da CEDEAO, com foco nas ferramentas legais utilizadas durante as crises após os golpes de Estado. A diplomacia coercitiva, mediação e operações de manutenção de paz foram os principais métodos utilizados. A pesquisa baseia-se em uma revisão documental da literatura, explorando fontes primárias, como instrumentos legais da organização, e secundárias, incluindo deliberações oficiais, trabalhos acadêmicos e jornais.

Em resumo, a CEDEAO desempenhou um papel significativo durante as crises pós-golpes de Estado na região, embora nem sempre tenha se baseado exclusivamente em seus mecanismos legais para resolver essas crises. Suas ações foram sujeitas a críticas, destacando desafios na busca pela estabilidade na região.

Palavras-Chave: CEDEAO, golpe, conflito, Mali, Guiné-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, Guiné.

Abstract

The West African region is known for its political and security instability, making the quest for stability a daunting task for the international community. In recent years (2011-2021), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has emerged as a significant player in the region, actively involved in conflict resolution, especially during coups in Mali (2012, 2020, 2021), Guinea-Bissau (2012), Burkina Faso (2015), and the Republic of Guinea (2021).

However, ECOWAS' actions have faced criticism, particularly regarding the coherence of their interventions. During the crisis in Burkina Faso in 2014 and 2015, civil society demanded consistent and non-discriminatory action from ECOWAS, rejecting the mediation plan proposed by the organization. They argued that the situation was resolved more due to internal efforts than ECOWAS' actions.

This dissertation analyzes the guiding principles of ECOWAS' actions, with a focus on the legal tools used during the crises following the coups. Coercive diplomacy, mediation, and peacekeeping operations were the primary methods employed. The research is based on a documentary literature review, exploring primary sources such as the organization's legal instruments, as well as secondary sources, including official deliberations, academic work, and newspapers.

In Summary, ECOWAS played a significant role during post-coup crises in the region, although they did not always rely exclusively on their legal mechanisms to resolve these crises. Their actions have faced criticism, highlighting challenges in the pursuit of stability in the region.

Keywords: ECOWAS, coup, conflict, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, Guinea.

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Glossary of Acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission in Mali
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU PSC	African Union Peace and Security Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
CPLP	Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries
CNRDE	National Committee for Recovering Democracy and Restoring the State
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOMIB	ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group
EU	European Union
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad.
MUJWA	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest
MICEMA	ECOWAS Standby Force Mission in Mali
MISSING	Angolan Technical and Military Assistance Mission in Guinea Bissau
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PSC	Peace and Security Council
PSO	Peace Operation Support
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde
Recs	Regional Economic Communities
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	United Nations
UN SC	United Nations Security Council

Introduction

The ongoing events in the political landscape of West Africa, particularly the recent series of military coups that have occurred in last year in the region Burkina Faso in 2022 and the most recent crisis in Niger in 2023¹, are now recognized as a recurring phenomenon. Consequently, security challenges have become a primary concern for most West African nations due to the significant potential for these conflicts to spread contagiously throughout the region. Hence, the ineffective measures employed by ECOWAS to resolve these issues reignite the debate concerning the organization's efficiency and coherence.

The current global socio-political landscape has been characterized by a progressive decline in democracy, which result is that “fewer people live in democracies in the world” (Kingsbury, 2023, p. 1). A notable factor contributing to this trend is the lack of trust in democratic institutions, as witnessed in various countries in. Africa, and more specifically in the West African region (Lenard, 2015; Winsor, 2023). At this purpose, this work will focus on the cases of military coups happening in Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, and Guinea, between 2011 and 2021.

The causes of the crises in these countries vary from each other. While some crises are rooted in domestic political rivalries or internal security issues, as in the case of Guinea-Bissau in 2012 (Mabel, 2019); others arise from the emergence of terrorism or jihadist movements within the territory, as witnessed in Mali, in 2012,2020 and 2021, as well as in Burkina-Faso between 2014 and 2015 (Clime, 2013; Shaw, 2013; Phelan, 2016). Consequently, another cause of repetitive crises in the region consisted of various precarious socio-economic conditions, as witnessed in Republic of Guinea in 2021 (Yabi, 2010; Bah, 2015; Joschka, 2021).

These factors have, in turn, led the affected countries to experience a range of unconstitutional changes in their governments that assumed the form of military coups d'état. Considered as the major manifestation of political instability in different countries, a coup d'état² involves the sudden and often violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group of army officials (de Boer, 2014a). This sudden and forceful replacement of leading

¹ For further readings on these recent military coups see: Okeke & Ahmed, (2023); Sohaib & Taifour, (2023); Eze, (2023).

² Coup d'état comes from the French notion meaning “*stroke of the state*”. The word *coup* means a blow or a strike and *état* stands for denoting a sovereign political entity (de Boer, 2014a).

government personnel is classified as unconstitutional by the regional and international organizations of which these countries are members. Indeed, both the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) blame the coups in accordance with their main documents (ECOWAS,1993; AU, 2000).

The creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), in 1963 in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, which later became the African Union (AU) in 2002, was considered a symbol of unity among African peoples and a defender of the rights and principles of democracy. This was followed by the creation of various Regional Economic Communities (recs), including ECOWAS, which was established to promote collective self-reliance in the West African region (Bach, 1983).

From 1975 to the present day, the regional organization has undertaken various institutional reforms, particularly in the Treaty. In the initial edition of the ECOWAS Treaty of 1975, the organization's objectives were primarily based on economic development. However, in the Revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993, the organization shifted from a singular focus on economic development to encompass political and security matters. This shift recognized the significance of the political stability and security spectrum in the achievement of the common economic development goal for all its Member States (Bach, 1983).

Following the established principles outlined in Article 58(1) (2) of the Revised Treaty (1993), ECOWAS Member States commit to preserve and reinforce relationships that foster peace, stability, and security within the region. To achieve these goals, all Member States should cooperate with the Community to establish and enhance effective mechanisms for the prompt prevention and resolution of both intra-state and inter-state conflicts (ECOWAS, 1993).

Hence, this research will encompass ECOWAS' involvement in addressing coup d'état-induced crises within its region, spanning from 2011 to 2021. It will focus specifically on incidents in Mali (2012, 2020, and 2021), Guinea-Bissau (2012), Burkina Faso (2015), and Guinea (2021).

Since 2012, a few young democracies in West Africa, experienced sudden interruptions in their democratization processes by military forces. Started in Mali in March 2012, the government of one of the most celebrated symbols of Africa's democratic potential was overthrown in a military-executed coup. Simultaneously, a four-decade-long rebellion by the

Imuhar³ seeking autonomy and independence reached new heights. This escalation was fueled by weapons from Muammar Gadhafi's declined regime (Cline, 2013).

This aspect weakened the regional security structure, boosting the domestic political rivalry and security concerns in Guinea-Bissau, Burkina- Faso and Guinea, leading them to fall into a coup d'état contagious situation. These circumstances created a security vacuum in the region and result in displacement, acute hunger, and violence along the sub-region (Stewart, 2013).

During these recurrent crises or political turmoil in the region, especially of those mentioned above, the African-led regional organizations, like ECOWAS, assumed critical roles. The significance of ECOWAS intervention in regional conflicts based on the various legal tools, has been underscored by many researchers, who concur that the organization has employed a variety of mechanisms and methods to resolve regional conflicts (Yabi, 2010; Maiangwa, 2017; Mabel, 2019; and Suzuki, 2020). These approaches include coercive diplomacy, mediation, and peacekeeping operations, each applied following different motivations, and legal frameworks.

While the relevance of ECOWAS has been emphasized by the aforementioned authors, it is important to note that there has also been a considerable amount of criticism, as pointed out by Hairsine (2021, p. 3). Hairsine argues that ECOWAS "resembles a toothless bulldog" in the sense that it lacks significant leverage aside from limited sanctioning power.

The significance of these four countries holds an importance beyond their geographical proximity. They share deep-rooted commonalities in values and histories that transcend political boundaries. A pertinent common thread binding them together is their collective transition from post-independence military rule to the embracement of democratic governance, a transformation that largely occurred in unison around 1991.

Another pertinent commonality uniting these countries is their full ECOWAS membership with equal rights and obligations within it. Consequently, the treatment they receive from this organization should have been in accordance with the principles outlined in the official documents, as stipulated in Article 32(a) of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993),

³ The Imuhar (Tuareg in the colonial taxonomy), are a non-state Muslim society of more than 1.5 million people. They live in an area that stretches across 2 million square kilometers in the African Sahara and the Sahel, predominantly in Southern Algeria, Northern Niger, Northern Mali, Southern Libya, and Northern Burkina Faso (Fischer, 2009).

that claims a foundation of "equality and interdependence that should exist among Member States."

Therefore, this research will have a distinct focus on exploring and comprehending the strategies employed by the regional organization to resolve the complex political and military crises mentioned above, especially coup d'états, within the framework and instruments provided by ECOWAS. The research therefore questions what kind of legal mechanisms ECOWAS has effectively used to address military-induced instability (coup d'états) in Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, in the period between 2011 and 2021.

This research will be structured into five parts. In the first part, the discussion will analyze the background of the coups d'état in West Africa, which emerged in the aftermath of the independence period. These challenges were influenced by two primary factors: first, the global geopolitical shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world and the economic reforms imposed with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) during the 1980s. These developments had far-reaching implications, reshaping the political, social, and economic landscapes of African countries. Additionally, it is essential to consider the regional security dilemma that emerged following the Arab Spring, particularly with the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011.

Next, the study will delve into theoretically introducing the Theory of Regional Security Complex (RSCT). The RSCT underscores the significance of regional mechanisms, as in the case of ECOWAS, and their role in conflict resolution. Furthermore, the third part of this study will focus on the legal framework for intervention established by the ECOWAS to deal with regional instabilities and insecurities. The variety of mechanisms and methods delineated in the ECOWAS main documents for this purpose will be presented aimed at offering a comprehensive ground upon which the analysis of the case studies will develop. Indeed, the next part of this research is addressing the cases, starting with the Mali coups, and then covering the cases of Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. Within these cases, the study will explore the role of ECOWAS, the methods and mechanisms used to solve the crisis, such as diplomatic missions, mediation processes, and even military interventions.

The fifth part of the study, before the conclusion, will present a research summary of the intervention methods employed by ECOWAS, aiming to explain the intervention process through the findings and results of the intervention mechanisms in the above-mentioned crises (in Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Guinea). This will explain the main driven path of

ECOWAS and will finally provide an understanding of how effective the organization's resolution mechanisms used in various crises during different moments were.

Methodology

In order to provide a comprehensive and well-founded response to the research question presented above, the primary objective is to explore the role played by ECOWAS in addressing military instabilities (coup d'états) within its Member States. This inquiry will specifically focus on the legal and officially approved mechanisms employed by ECOWAS to intervene in such situations. Furthermore, the research aims to not only explore the utilization of the legal framework during these critical moments but also to understand the complex dynamics shaped by ECOWAS within diverse contexts.

To answer the research question and to achieve the objectives of this research, the study will apply a desk research strategy (Garba 2020, p.5), where the employment and use of meaningful existing data from reliable internet sources would be useful. The research approach for this study will be literature-based. A wide range of available literature was consulted, including books and journal articles related to the topic, as well as current media coverage about the case studies.

The analysis of primary sources during the process of data collection will be germane and central to the study's goals, therefore, this research focuses on legal documents, such as the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993) and the Peace and Security Framework Protocol (1999). Furthermore, the study will conduct a comparison and a deep analysis of the legal instruments, both the first and the revised versions. Additionally, the research will try to analyse the implementation processes of active legal frameworks signed by all Member States, such as the Protocol of Mutual Assistance of 1981, the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Protocol of 1990, the Declaration of Political Principles of 1991, the Mechanism Prevention of 1999, the Protocol on Good Governance of 2001, the Conflict Prevention Framework of 2008, and the ECOWAS vision for 2020, as well as the one for 2050.

Finally, the interpretation of the ECOWAS legal instruments to solve crises among its Member States will be observed and analysed within the comparative study of the above cited cases. A comparative case study is for gathering and analysing the data of two or more entities

(might they be countries, cities, communities, or any other samplings used) (Pickvance, 2001, p.11). The comparative strategy aims to elucidate the distinctions or similarities observed in the intervention of ECOWAS in resolving analogous conflict scenarios (such as coup d'états) across these countries. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify common underlying motives if they exhibit similarities or to explore the factors that prompt ECOWAS to adopt diverse strategies when dealing with similar conflicts. This analysis will consider the shared legal framework that mandates each country's compliance and implementation of the regional conflict resolution and peace and security framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The background of the West African security challenge

Unfolding the Cold War period, the West African region and the broader African continent experienced profound changes that attracted the attention of researchers from diverse disciplines. This period was marked by a complex interplay of international dynamics and policy interventions that significantly impacted many countries, especially those that had established robust support and political alliances with the Soviet Union during their early years of independence (Okoth, 2002).

The region also experienced a variety of political systems of governance ranging from multi-party democratic politics to single-party civilian authoritarian governments, and military dictatorship, inevitably heading towards an "impending Armageddon" (Kaplan, 1994 apud. Maingwa, 2017 p. 106). This prediction was based on the prevalence of crime, oppressive regimes, and the significant number of unemployed and undereducated youth in the region. Furthermore, Jenkins and Kposowa, (1992) consider that military coups are likely to occur anywhere in the region due to their fundamental and lasting characteristics of political life.

The effects of two influential factors, namely the global geopolitical shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world and the economic reforms imposed with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) during the 80s, had far-reaching implications, reshaping the political, social, and economic landscapes of African countries. As a result, the African continent became a fertile ground for extensive research and analysis to understand the multifaceted consequences of these transformative forces (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

Following the period of reforms and economic adjustments, the Sub-Saharan region challenges, which were not only related to the economy, but also to social and cultural crises, led to conflicts in several countries, as well as to secession, drug trafficking, terrorism, poverty, weak security structures, military coups, corruption, drought, and climate change (Maingwa, 2017).

This research will use the Northern African revolutions of 2011 also known as “the Arab Spring” as a landmark to draw and track the current Sub-Saharan-based insecurity spectrum, which has not only shaped the regional security landscape but also, prompted several terrorist activities and inter and intrastate conflicts in the sub-Saharan region (Danjibo, 2020). The post-

Ghaddafi era in Libya, started in 2011, heightened the tensions in the region, with Mali emerging as one of the frontline countries that later affected the others through a spillover of security threats, as it is described in the “escalation and diffusion/contagion theory” (Shaw, 2013, p.1994)⁴.

The regional insecurity worsened following the fall of Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi. Indeed, in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, several militia groups, jihadis, and regional affiliate terrorist groups linked to Al-Qaida emerged, posing a threat to the peace and stability of multiple countries in the region (Shaw, 2013).

Maiangwa (2017) asserts that, according to the US Country Report on Terrorism (2011), Africa witnessed 978 terrorist attacks in 2011 because of the escalating violent activities of Boko Haram. These attacks, along with the associated casualties and regional spillover into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, as well as alleged abuses by Nigerian security forces, constitute an immediate threat to both human security and the stability of Nigeria and the broader West African region (ISS Dakar et al., 2013).

Security challenges emerged as a primary concern for most West African countries, as the potential for their contagious spread within the region became significant. However, these crises cannot be fully understood solely through a political, economic, and military lens; they also have strong ties to ethnic relationships and cultural factors. This is the case of the Imuhar ethnic group, which constitutes a significant portion of the population in countries such as Mali, Niger, and Chad, as well as the Maghreb region and the Middle East (Mirkin, 2013)⁵.

According to Bala and Tar (2021), the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA)⁶ led by the Imuhar insurgents in northern Mali, as well as Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria, and the renationalization of threats to Niger, Cameroun, and Burkina-Faso, are the prevailing security challenges in West Africa. The authors further state that

⁴The theory is recognized as the phenomenon where a crisis originating in one country spreads to its neighboring nations, described as a regional spillover /contagion effect, as example of the situations in Niger and Chad, as well as the historical instances of crises spilling over from Liberia to Sierra Leone (Shaw, 2013).

⁵ The Imuhars played a vital role during the Northern African revolutions. They fought for political recognition in countries such as Libya, by supporting the Ghaddafi regime to the end. With the fall of the regime, they returned to their home countries, Niger, and Mali, and joined other movement groups, for example, the Northern Mali movement founded by Imuhars “National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad” (MNLA) (Ronen, 2013).

⁶ The MNLA was formed in October 2011 as a merger of a variety of secessionist movements of Imuhar. Among them there were well-trained and well-equipped fighters who had fought in Muammar al-Gaddafi’s armies before the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 (Döring & Herpolsheimer, 2018).

terrorism and insurgency in West Africa have emerged as significant security concerns for both individual countries and the regional body of ECOWAS (Bala and Tar, 2021).

Following the events in Mali and Guinea-Bissau in 2012, where in this latter case the military seized power halting the democratization process before the completion of a scheduled second round of Presidential elections (Mabel, 2019), West Africa faced another significant turning point with the 2014 civilian uprising in Burkina Faso.

It was further coupled with an attempted coup d'état orchestrated in September 2015 by the presidential guard, known as the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP) (Saidou, 2018). Furthermore, the region continued to grapple with challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic crisis and ongoing security issues. In fact, just within 18 months into the post-pandemic era, the region experienced four (4) coups d'état. These included two crises in Mali, the first occurred on 18th August 2020, followed by the second on 24th May 2021. Additionally, there were two more coups, one on 5th September 2021, in Guinea, and another on 24th January 2022, in Burkina Faso (Engels, 2022).

To conclude, the West African region is among the most conflicting sub-regions in Africa due to its political and military instabilities. Since the end of the Cold War, it has turned out to be one of the world's key trouble spots (Iwilade & Agbo, 2012,). Indeed, the region handled various challenges, driving the fragile region into a dire situation. The hostilities led to various uprisings and unconstitutional changes of "coup d'état", therefore, security became one of the main objectives of both the states and the international community.

Coup d'état dilemma in Africa and The Regional Security Complex Theory

The concept of coup d'état is described as a governmental overthrow, or unconstitutional change of power, by both the AU and the ECOWAS. The study of this phenomenon has been present throughout modern and contemporary history, as several episodes of rising and falling governments in the world can be recorded (ECOWAS 1993; AU 1999).

As a consequence, although various definitions of coup d'états have been offered by different scholars all of them were grounded on a common understanding of coup d'état as a seizure of the machinery of state or the government, by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the head of state using unconstitutional means, consider to be illegal

according to the international law (Chin & Kirkpatrick, 2023; De Boer, 2014; Powell & Thyne 2011).

After the initial years of attaining independence, the Sub-Saharan states experienced a period of newfound freedom and tremendous optimism for the future of their nations. However, this wave of enthusiasm was soon overshadowed by the rising influence of the military elite in politics, primarily driven by resource constraints and the relative novelty of these nations (AGOLA, 1980; Thies, 2009).

The phenomenon of coups d'état or military seizures of power has been a persistent presence on the African continent since the early years of independence. According to data from Duzor & Williamson, (2022) found on the Voice of America (VOA), out of 492 attempted or successful coups that have occurred worldwide since 1950. Africa has experienced 220 coups, representing the highest number among all regions, with 109 of these cases being categorized as successful coups. Furthermore, out of 54 countries on the African continent, 45 have had at least one coup attempt since 1950 (Powell & Thyne, 2011, p.255).

In addition, almost 90% of independent African nations had experienced a coup or attempt, so leading to 210 governmental changes in the continent, of which 52 have been successful seizures, 56 attempts, and 102 plots. Furthermore, by the end of the 1980s, 25 Sub-Saharan African states were controlled by military regimes (Jenkins & Kposowa, 1992, p.272). Given this scenario, the lack of regional security cooperation has been a significant factor in the gradual destabilization of the West African region over the past decades (Mabel, 2019).

According to the author, the spectrum of insecurity in the region stems from various motivations. The rise of terrorist activities in the Sahel region compounds the jihadist threat in West Africa, alongside challenges like drug trafficking and attempts to amend constitutions for extended presidential terms (ibid.). These threats had direct consequences on several countries in the region, including Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, and Guinea.

The regional insecurity dilemma in Sub-Sahara presents a clear sign and an urgent need for a collective plan and strategy for all nations to encounter the insecurity dilemma in the region. In Francis's analysis (2010), the concept of sub-regional economic cooperation entities and security regionalism is closely linked to the emergence of regional peacekeeping and conflict management capabilities in the region.

Furthermore, Maiangwa (2017) highlights situations in which regional entities are collectively impacted by shared security challenges, enabling them to coordinate a unified response to these threats. At this purpose, scholars like Buzan and Waiver (2003) and Ogwu (2008) developed and used, respectively, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to elucidate the mechanisms behind the conversion of national security threats into regional issues.

According to Buzan and Waiver (2003), a regional security complex comprises a group of states whose fundamental national security concerns are so tightly intertwined that they cannot be disentangled or independently addressed. The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) assumes a central role in this study, allowing us to understand the intricate complexities and endeavours undertaken by regional organizations like ECOWAS in their conflict resolution, and in the pursuit of restoring peace and security within the region. Following the post-decolonization process, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a notable surge in local insecurity.

The region's leaders found themselves unable to establish the necessary cooperation mechanisms to effectively address the internal disputes. These latter consequently led to armed conflicts, instances of government change and coup d'états, which became the prevailing norm in the region (Cruden, 2011).

Throughout the early stages of the state-building process in the region, the security challenges and their intricate nature brought attention to the fact that instability in one state could not be confined solely within its borders, as claimed "no Member State can expect to isolate itself from the political crisis in another state" (Bah, 2005, p.77).

The region has witnessed several instances of a "domino effect"⁷ scenario, as seen in the Liberian civil war (1990), which had repercussions on neighbouring countries such as Sierra Leone (1997) Guinea-Bissau (1999) and Ivory Coast (2003). This pattern repeated during the 2011 crisis in Mali, spreading to Guinea-Bissau (2012), followed by the Burkina-Faso crisis in 2015.

The "domino effect" was later observed in the aftermath of the global pandemic crisis, with the re-emergence of coup d'état in the region, initiated in Mali in 2020 and followed by the Republic of Guinea and Mali in 2021.

⁷ For further readings on the "domino effect" see Baldwin, (1993) and Slater (1993).

The present African political landscape stands as a paramount concern for two organizations, the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS. Their shared challenge is to formulate effective strategies that can counteract the resurgence of coups within the region and quell the unsettling tide of frequent coup attempts in various countries.

Echoing this sentiment, the 2021 Chair of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, emphasized this pressing matter. He unequivocally stated that “whenever a coup d'état transpires within a Member State of ECOWAS, it serves as a blatant violation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance” (Vanguard, 2021, p.1). He fervently called upon military leaders to swiftly reinstate constitutional order in their respective countries. These assertions are a crucial step toward elevating the overall stability and security levels within the region.

The RSCT offers invaluable insights into understanding the West African regional security landscape and the dynamic evolution of its security architecture. The reforms spearheaded by ECOWAS have served as transformative instruments, over decades, to reshape and dismantle the post-colonial legacy of insecurity (Cruden, 2011).

To achieve the final goal of collective peace and security, various initiatives led to the creation of a regional organization that onboards all nations with equal rights and commitment to avoid further consequences of this muddled and constantly insecure atmosphere in the region. As affirmed by Alcázar (2019), the current States (countries) are no longer expected to be the only ones responsible for providing security within their borders. The regional organizations are expected to provide the well-being of individuals to promote and protect all people.

African Regional Organizations

The African independence period notably shifted the continental political and economic spectrum, fueling the emergence of multinational entities, functioning as coalitions of independent nations aimed to combat the remaining forms of colonialism and imperialism, and to embody the essence of Pan-Africanism and continental unity (Williams, 2007).

This period was characterized also by a surge of regionalism and the forging of a path for shared development strategies, which re-signified the roles and priorities assigned to the primary pre-existing intergovernmental bodies and establish a platform for the regional emancipation (Bach, 2003).

A crucial point in this transition is the precedence of supranationalism over the relinquishment of sovereignty, with each African nation now participating in a minimum of two regional organizations (Bappah, 2015). Nonetheless, the author assumes that the proliferation of such regional bodies represents a challenge to achieve deep integration across legal, political, and security spheres.

After the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which later (in 2000) became the African Union (AU), various recs started to dot the continent, like the case of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁸. The organization was inaugurated by the Lagos Treaty in 1975, initially centered on economic collaboration, with a core mission to cultivate cooperation and progress within the economic sphere, driven by the aspiration to improve the well-being of the region's inhabitants.

This pursuit encompassed not just safeguarding economic stability, but also, actively contributing to the broader development of the African continent (Alcázar, 2019). However, the onset of regional instabilities and the civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the '90s

⁸ ECOWAS stands out as a pivotal and dynamic entity within the African landscape, wielding substantial political and economic influence. Globally recognized data underscores its significance, as its 15 Member States collectively span an expansive territory covering 5.12 million square kilometers, accommodating approximately 424.34 million individuals. This cumulative populace constitutes a notable 5.3 percent of the global population. The organization's economic prowess is equally compelling, boasting an impressive annual economic output reaching 760.56 billion US dollars, accompanied by a combined GDP that amasses a formidable \$734.8 billion.

ECOWAS official website.

underscored the indispensability of peace and political stability to successful economic integration, forcing a shift from economic to political priorities.



Map highlighting Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Source. <https://www.thehabarinetwork.com>

There is a clear and open relationship between the AU and the various subregional actors on the African continent, notably the recs and regional mechanisms (rms), as one of the key components of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Suzuki, 2020). Furthermore, Suzuki (2020) highlighted three (3) main steps and methods used by these two organizations to solve conflicts in West Africa, being respectively: diplomacy⁹, mediation¹⁰, and peace support operations¹¹.

Despite these three mentioned steps, other forms of intervention are used by the two organizations, especially by the ECOWAS in West Africa, which consist of coercive and preventive diplomacy (Ateku,2020). These two methods have brought results as in the case of

⁹ Diplomacy involves various political actions, including summits, communiqués, monitoring missions, UN support, contact groups, Membership suspension, and sanctions (Suzuki, 2020).

¹⁰ Mediation is characterized by appointing a mediator who consults with parties involved in the conflict and drafts a peace agreement. However, ECOWAS's mediation efforts often clash due to the use of influential individuals as mediators, who bring their own political interests and agendas into the process (Suzuki, 2020).

¹¹ Peace support operations are often related to military intervention, including preparatory meetings, meetings for resource mobilization, or authorizing a peace support operation to stabilize a situation (Suzuki, 2020).

the recent intervention of ECOWAS through coercive diplomacy¹², described as one of the international practices to employ a range of diplomatic means to persuade another international actor to act in a manner that they may not have voluntarily chosen (Feaver & Lorber, 2010).

This approach typically avoids direct military intervention or the use of physical force, instead relying on the application of significant pressure, including the threat of force and the imposition of economic sanctions (Feaver & Lorber, 2010). Coercive diplomacy was employed during several crises and recently to solve the post-election dispute in The Gambia in 2017.

With the deployment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group contingent from Senegal to The Gambia, under ECOWAS mandate, the former president Yaya Jammeh was forced to flee and allowed the newly elected president Adama Barrow to take over. Ateku (2020) considers coercive diplomacy as the latest manifestation of the evolving character of ECOWAS' resort to threats and/or use of force and diplomacy to ensure peace and security in West Africa.

Throughout the various crises that unfolded in the region, the countries experienced a significant presence of various actors attempting to resolve conflicts and restore constitutional order. However, while the AU, United Nations (UN), and Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) were involved in the region's conflict resolutions, a notably influential effort came from the ECOWAS, which emerged as one of the most active players in the region, operating through diplomatic missions, mediation processes, or military deployment of stabilization missions, like the case of ECOMIB¹³ in Guinea-Bissau and AFISMA¹⁴ in Mali, both in 2012 (AU, 2013).

Yabi (2019) affirms that the intervention of ECOWAS in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB)¹⁵, helped to calm down the tension between the parties and gave a possibility to solve the conflict.

After every successful execution coup d'état in the region, in many cases, one of the initial reactions undertaken by ECOWAS was the imposition of sanctions on the respective country,

¹² For further readings see . Schettino (2009) and Feaver & Lorber (2010).

¹³ ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau, which as operative from April 26th, 2012 to September 2020 (Africa News, 2022).

¹⁴ The African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) was authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This decision was taking during the 6898th meeting of the UNSC on December 20th, 2012, marking a significant step in international efforts to address the crisis in Mali (UNSC, 2012e).

¹⁵ ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau, which as operative from April 26th, 2012 to September 2020 (Africa News, 2022).

which entails exclusion from participating in various regional gatherings, including legal representation in the organization's regular meetings.

According to Engels (2022), ECOWAS imposed sanctions on the Malian Junta after the coup, such as trade embargoes and border closures, to exert pressure on the military government and prevent any delays in the electoral timetable.

Similarly, in the case of the military crisis in Burkina-Faso in 2015, the African Union (AU), through its Peace and Security Council (PSC), swiftly condemned the coup and demanded the restoration of the transitional government. The PSC promptly decided to suspend, with immediate effect, Burkina Faso's participation in all AU activities, while also threatening to impose sanctions against those responsible. Moreover, the AU took the further step of classifying the architects of the coup as 'terrorist elements' (Saidou, 2018).

Contrary to this, in the case of Burkina Faso's coup (in 2015), the ECOWAS chose a much more conciliatory approach and instead opted for mediation. Indeed, the ECOWAS offered the coup leaders a way out to keep peace and prevent a further escalation of the crisis (Saidou, 2018).

This ECOWAS decision echoed some resentment among other entities and actors, questioning the coherence and the rule of law within the organisation. Thus, the Burkinabe civil society activists questioned the ECOWAS consistency and seriousness in applying its norms and asked why ECOWAS did not immediately plan to use sanctions, as it did in 2012 in Mali and Guinea-Bissau (Saidou, 2018).

Different to the non-sanction decision from ECOWAS regarding the Burkinabe crisis, during the last coup d'état in Republic of Guinea in 2021, led by Captain Mamady Dumbaia, the ECOWAS leaders agreed in an emergency summit to impose gradual sanctions on Guinea's junta over its inflexibility on setting a date for the return to civilian rule (VOA, 2022).

Therefore, given this evidence, the research will explore the legal mechanism used by ECOWAS to face with regional coups d'état. Even though the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993) determines that all countries should be treated as equal, and no discrimination should be viewed in favour of the political elite for their geopolitical benefit (Saidou, 2018), like the case in Burkina Faso (2015). Whereby, the civil society accused the ECOWAS mediation group of favoring the former president Campaore.

ECOWAS Legal Framework of Intervention

The Lagos Treaty of 1975 notably omitted provisions concerning peace, security, stability, and governance (Alcázar, 2019). However, these crucial domains were subsequently integrated as foundational principles in the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS, in 1993, together with the expansion of the economic scope of the organization, which was envisioning the formation of an Economic Union for West Africa.

The Revised Treaty amplifies ECOWAS ambit to encompass not only a comprehensive cooperative framework but also a heightened focus on political and security integration. This entails the alignment of national policies across domains such as agriculture, natural resources, industry, communications, energy, education, science, technology, health, tourism, and legal affairs (Alcázar, 2019).

Yabi (2019) asserts that the 1990s stand out as a pivotal decade in ECOWAS' transformation into a strong organization qualified for both diplomatic and military interventions, to address severe threats to the Member State's security and regional stability. The authority of ECOWAS was envisioned in the Revised Treaty and fortified by a legal framework, including the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework and other pertinent legal instruments, which were unanimously endorsed by Member States (Mabel, 2019).

Within the security normative framework, ECOWAS possesses numerous protocols, among which: the Protocol of Mutual Assistance (1981), the ECOMOG protocol (1990), the Declaration of Political Principles (1991), the Mechanism Prevention (1999), the Protocol on Good Governance (2001), the Conflict Prevention Framework (2008), and the ECOWAS Vision for 2020, and the more recent ECOWAS Vision for 2050.

All these legal frameworks serve as a guiding principle for the organization and operate as legal support to justify the organization's act in various situations, such as during political and military crises.

The Protocol of Mutual Assistance in Defence (MAD) signed in 1981, underlines a critical principle that sustainable economic progress hinges on assuring essential security measures in all Member States of the Community. The protocol encompasses scenarios requiring collective sub-regional involvement in cases of external aggression, and inter-state

and intra-state conflicts. Articles 2 and 3 establish the principle that any threat against a Member State will be regarded as a threat to the entire community, triggering a commitment to mutual aid and support, by stating that:

“Member States declare and accept that any armed threat or aggression directed against any Member State shall constitute a threat or aggression against the entire Community
“(ECOWAS, 1981 art. 2).

“Member States resolve to give mutual aid and assistance for defence against any
armed threat or aggression” (ECOWAS, 1981 art. 3).

Furthermore, ECOWAS' engagement occurs under some specific circumstances, stipulated in article 4 of the Protocol of Mutual Assistance (1981), which declared that Member States shall take appropriate measure, such as specified in article 17 (a) In case of armed conflict between two or several Member States if the settlement procedure by peaceful means, as indicated in article 5 of the Non-Aggression Protocol mentioned in the Preamble, proves ineffective.

(b) In case of internal armed conflict within any Member State engineered and supported actively from outside likely to endanger the security and peace in the entire Community. In this case, ECOWAS shall appreciate and decide on this situation in full collaboration with the Authority of the Member State or States concerned.

Additionally, the Protocol of Mutual Assistance (1981) declares that the organization should be ready to act whenever a Member State experiences an internally instigated armed conflict, especially one externally fuelled and materially supported from outside the community, and so posing a credible threat to regional peace and security. However, if the conflict remains solely within the state's borders without external involvement, ECOWAS abstains from intervention (ECOWAS, 1981).

During the last decade of the 20th century, the region faced several security threats. Therefore, to counter the potential escalation of the crisis in other countries, the organization created a common standby military force to protect democratic values and prevent a regional spillover. This decision resulted in the creation of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Protocol in 1990.

The force played a vital role in various conflicts that engulfed different countries in the 90's. Notably, it was involved in the Liberian civil war in 1990, Sierra Leone in 1997, and Guinea-Bissau in 1999. After that, ECOMOG continued to be employed to prevent bloodshed and the loss of human lives. The most recent intervention of the force took place in The Gambia in 2017 (Aljazeera, 2013).

In addition, soon after the creation of ECOMOG, the organization decided to sign the Declaration of Political Principles, in 1991, which reaffirmed the regional commitment to promoting peace and security in the region, as evident in the third principle of the declaration:

“We reaffirm also our determination to settle all disputes among ourselves by peaceful means in such a manner as not to endanger the peace, security and stability of our sub-region”
(ECOWAS, 1991 p.3).

In December 1999, the organization ratified the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (ECOWAS, 1999), which recognized the need to enhance the organization's capacity for conflict resolution. This protocol superseded preceding agreements and laid out a comprehensive framework for regional involvement in political crises among Member States.

Integral to this effort was the reinforcement of the Security and Mediation Council's (SMC) roles, alongside the establishment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as the designated regional intervention force (Alcázar, 2019).

The protocol revitalized and expanded the criteria under which the mechanism could be triggered. It will come into force in situations of: a) Aggression or the emergence of conflict within any Member State, or the imminent threat of such aggression or conflict; b) Disputes between two or more Member States; c) Internal conflicts that had the potential to ignite a humanitarian catastrophe or pose a significant risk to peace and security within the subregion; d) Grave and widespread violations of human rights and the rule of law; e) Instances where a democratically elected government had been overthrown (coup d'état) or an attempt to do so had taken place; f) Any other circumstance determined by the Mediation and Security Council's deliberations (ECOWAS, 1999).

In addition to that, the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security was adopted in 1999. Article 3a of this protocol outlines its objective, which is to prevent, manage, and resolve internal and interstate

conflicts following the conditions specified in paragraph 46 of the protocol This framework was ratified under Decision A/DEC.11/10/98 on October 31, 1998. Furthermore, the organization declared in Article 4(e) that it solemnly affirms and declares its adherence to the following principles.

Afterwards, the Supplementary Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance was adopted in 2001. Article 19 (3) of this Supplementary Protocol stipulates that the armed forces, the police, and other security agencies should participate in ECOMOG missions as provided in Article 28 of the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999 (ECOWAS, 2001) Furthermore, the Supplementary Protocol also outlines in the same article 19(4) that, upon a decision by constitutionally constituted authorities, the ECOMOG may also participate in peacekeeping missions (ECOWAS, 2001).

Another relevant legal instrument is the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) signed in 2008, which reflects the organization's unwavering commitment to a zero-tolerance policy for unconstitutional changes of government (Akenroye, 2012).

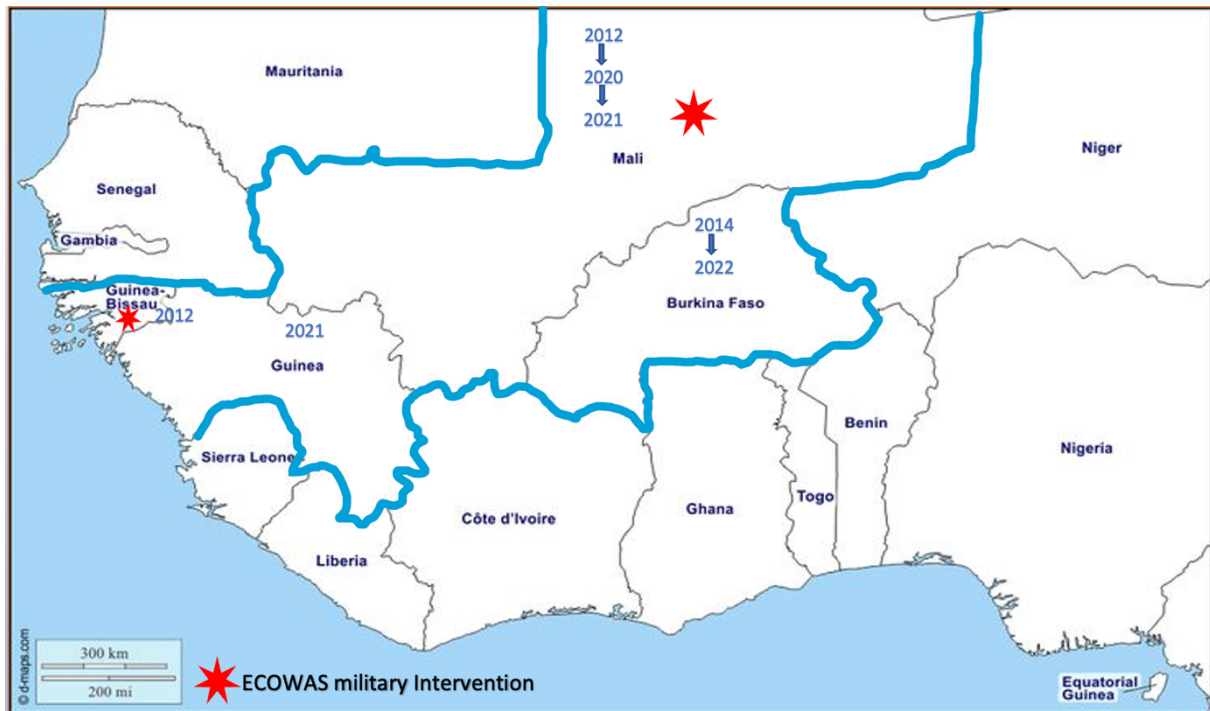
Akenroye (2012) further emphasizes that the ECPF received additional reinforcement from various international agreements and declarations, including the Organization of African Unity (the precursor to the African Union) Declaration on a Framework for Responding to Unconstitutional Changes of Government, commonly known as the Lomé Declaration, adopted in 2000.

Additionally, the above-mentioned declaration was bolstered by the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (1999), the AU revised Constitutive Act of 1993, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Good Governance, adopted in January 2007. All these instruments unequivocally denounce unconstitutional changes of government and wholeheartedly endorse the imposition of sanctions on any Member State deemed to be involved in such actions (Akenroye, 2012).

Hence, the necessity to adopt a collective approach to ensure both regional security and the preservation of democratic principles became indisputable. This imperative remains steadfast even in the face of the region's susceptibility, as observed by Iwilade and Agbo (2012) who characterizes the region's security landscape as "volatile". Furthermore, being a prominent

global hotspot after the Cold War era, ECOWAS has effectively stepped into the role of regional security regulator (Iwilade and Agbo, 2012).

In the next stages of this analysis, this study will examine ECOWAS's response and resolution of those regional crises involving "coups d'état." This assessment will be conducted through the lens of the above-mentioned legal mechanisms which have been operate within the selected case studies: Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Republic of Guinea, respectively.



Picture: Map of the case studies countries and the dates of the coup d'état analyzed. Source. Google images.

MALI

The country has faced persistent challenges to its territorial integrity since its independence. The northern region, predominantly inhabited by the Imuhar population, has been a recurring source of concern for the Malian government, by causing over the years, a series of uprisings (Cline, 2013).

Despite cease-fire agreements that temporarily halted any rebellion, the Malian government has struggled to establish lasting peace agreements (Cline, 2013). Mali has

witnessed three instances of rebellion in the past, the latest of which occurred in 2009 (Shaw, 2013).

The author further states that many of the Imuhar who were employed in Gaddafi's military campaign were rebels who sought refuge after the 2009 rebellion was quelled. The root causes of these recurring challenges appear to be feelings of marginalization of northerners by the southern administration in Bamako.

The situation escalated significantly in January 2012, as Imuhar rebels in northern Mali initiated an insurgency against the security forces operating in the region (Shaw, 2013). At the same time, there were additional armed groups who pushed the Malian Armed force to a swift defeat, notably the Ansar Dine group ('defenders of the faith'), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) (Döring & Herpolsheimer, 2018).

This situation led a group of young soldiers, headed by Captain Amadou Sanogo, to stage a coup d'état on March 21, 2012, against Amadou Toumani Touré, who was accused of being incapable of solving the insurgence in the North. It was amid this confusion within the political and military leadership that Ansar Dine, AQIM, and MUJAO gained ground and the MNLA proclaimed the independence of Azawad on April 6. This proclamation was strongly condemned by the international community, especially by the ECOWAS (Döring & Herpolsheimer, 2018).

The overthrow of a democratically elected government during the spring of 2012 in Mali, is symptomatic of the re-emerging pattern of coups d'état which have hit Africa in recent years. On March 21, 2012, after enjoying twenty years of constitutional democracy, Mali briefly fell under the control of a group of middle-ranking soldiers.

The country at the time was tragically divided between the Azawad independence movement taking control of the North, and the joint military junta-new civilian government, struggling to unify the country (Barka & Ncube, 2012).

According to the news on Aljazeera (2012), shortly after the mutiny, the military junta made a bold announcement via national television, asserting their control over the country and the suspension of the constitution. This audacious and solid decision by the junta triggered a global reaction to the coup within the nation's borders.

Multiple countries and the UN Security Council swiftly condemned the coup, urging the prompt release of the ousted President Touré. Echoing this sentiment, Victoria Nuland, a spokesperson, and special envoy from the US State Department, emphasized: “We stand with the legitimately elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré. Mali has been a leading democracy in West Africa, and those institutions must be respected.” (Aljazeera, 2012).

ECOWAS response

The ripples of international condemnation were not confined solely to foreign shores; they reverberated within the continent as well. This disapproval was prominently voiced by regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the key sub-regional body, ECOWAS. Highlighting the gravity of the circumstances, Mr. Jean Ping, the Chair of the African Union, announced the swift suspension of Mali from the organization. Moreover, steps were initiated to dispatch a mission to the West African nation to conduct an in-depth assessment of the unfolding power dynamics (Reuters, 2012).

The ECOWAS' response to the situation was articulated after an emergency Summit of Heads of State and Governments, convened on 27th March 2012, in Abidjan. Leading up to this pivotal summit, ECOWAS had proactively dispatched a high-level delegation to Mali, with a primary twofold objective to apprise the junta of the forthcoming summit's decisions and to deliberate on the strategies for swiftly reinstating constitutional order in Mali.

This delegation encompassed six Heads of State and the Foreign Affairs Minister of Nigeria. However, the mission encountered an unexpected hurdle, as security concerns forced the delegation to fail in the attempt to land at Bamako airport. The tumultuous scene, provoked by demonstrators, rendered the airport environment unsafe, preventing the delegation from carrying out their intended engagement (ECOWAS, 2012a).

Concluding their meeting, the Heads of State reaffirmed the core resolutions adopted during the Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government held in Abidjan on 27th March 2012, on several deliberations such as, denying legitimacy to the Comité National de Redressement pour la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'État (National Committee for Democracy and State Restoration) demanding the immediate restoration of constitutional order in Mali and the release of the political detainees by the Junta (ECOWAS, 2012).

Furthermore, the deliberation announced the suspension of Mali from all decision-making bodies of ECOWAS with immediate effect, under Articles 1(e) and 45(2) of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and the provisions of the Africa Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2012), until the restoration of the constitutional order.

The head of state henceforth instructs the ECOWAS Commission to put the ECOWAS Standby Force on high alert for all eventualities (ECOWAS, 2012a).

The adoption of sanctions measures was meant to be a decidedly robust stance on both a diplomatic and economic level. Diplomatically, the country's borders were effectively sealed, barring entry except in cases of dire humanitarian need. Economically, the organization opted to freeze the assets of Comité National de Redressement pour la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'Etat (CNRDRE) (National Committee for Democracy and State Restoration) leaders and their affiliates within the ECOWAS Member States. Furthermore, Mali was prohibited from using the seaports of the ECOWAS Member States, which represented a particularly impactful measure given the landlocked nature of the country and its absence of direct sea access (ECOWAS, 2012a).

Moreover, the Heads of State announced that if the CNRDRE failed to adhere to the Authority's directives, the sanctions would come into force within 72 hours following their endorsement, and no later than on Monday, April 2, 2012.

Concluded this proclamation, the Authority extended an invitation to the African Union to bolster their existing sanctions against the CNRDRE and its affiliates, while also urging the African Union to apprise the Secretary-General of the United Nations about the ECOWAS sanctions (ECOWAS, 2012a). Thus, this decision was later endorsed during the UN Security Council 6798th meeting, on 5 July 2012, pursuant to resolution 2056 (UNSC, 2012a).

It is important to note that, under ECOWAS's Revised Treaty of 1993, article 9 stipulates that the authority vested in the Heads of State and government, which constitutes the highest decision-making body, becomes operative within 90 days from the signing date. This means that a formal ratification process is not required; instead, the leaders directly commit to their respective countries, bypassing internal decision-making mechanisms (Bach, 2003; ECOWAS, 1993).

Considering both these restrictive measures taken by the regional body and the following circumstances between the Junta and the ECOWAS, the two parties agreed to solve the military crisis in the best way possible for the benefit of the citizens. Hereafter, the two parties agreed on the following terms: on the one hand ECOWAS decided to revoke all previously imposed sanctions and embargoes against the country and the military junta; while, on the other hand, the military junta pledged to restore the constitutional order within the nation and took responsibility for establishing a defined timeline for holding elections within a short period, to establish another civilian government in the country.

As reported by France 24, in 2012, against the backdrop of the rigorous measures enacted by the regional body and taking into consideration the existing circumstances between the Junta and ECOWAS, both parties have harmonized their positions to address the military crisis in a manner that safeguards the welfare of the population (France 24, 2012).

Furthermore, the committee of ECOWAS chiefs of defence staff, had adopted preparatory measures for the rapid deployment of ECOWAS troops to counter any eventuality, and to counter the growing concern at the situation in northern Mali (VOA, 2012).

Despite the military junta's endeavors to engage in negotiations and establish agreements with the international community to reinstate the country's constitutional order, the internal security situation persisted. This was largely attributed to the escalating hostilities in the northern region of the country, primarily involving clashes between the local Imuhar Islamist extremist group Ansar Dine and the MNLA (Ronen, 2013).

In response to this escalating conflict, the African Union (AU) took active measures to facilitate a ceasefire between the MNLA and Ansar Dine. However, the rebel factions retained control over northern Mali, indicating that despite the AU's mediation efforts, the situation remained complex and unresolved (Ronen, 2013). As the year 2012 ended, Ansar Dine breached the African Peace ceasefire agreement, leading to significant military advancements towards the southern regions. Notably, in January 2013, they captured Kona, a town situated just 680 kilometers away from Bamako (the capital of Mali) (World Peace Foundation, 2017).

The WPF (2017) considers that, given the precarious state of security and the socio-economic conditions in both the northern region and the whole Malian country, the transitional authority found it imperative to seek defense assistance from the international community.

This request aimed to effectively address the pressing challenges at hand. However, due to financial constraints and the lack of proper coordination mechanisms, the AU Standby Force (AFS), originally intended for rapid responses, encountered difficulties in deploying their personnel in a timely manner to the northern region of Mali (World Peace Foundation, 2017).

The AFISMA Mission

In response to these limitations, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) convened during its 6898th meeting, in December 2012, and adopted Resolution 2085. This resolution played a pivotal role by authorizing the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)¹⁶ for an initial duration of one year. AFISMA was entrusted with the responsibility of taking all necessary measures in alignment with international humanitarian law and human rights law. These actions were to be carried out while fully upholding Mali's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity (UNSC, 2012b).

Indeed, as outlined in the resolution, a primary objective of the AFISMA mission was to provide support to the Malian authorities in regaining control over the northern areas of their territory, that had been seized by terrorist extremists and armed groups.

The mission's focus also encompassed mitigating the threat posed by various terrorist organizations such as AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and other affiliated extremist groups. This mandate was to be executed while ensuring that appropriate measures were taken to minimize the impact of military actions on the civilian population (UNSC, 2012b).

According to the documents released by the World Peace Foundation in 2017 the mission's composition and budget were detailed as follows (W.P.F, 2017): the AFISMA mission was comprised of a total of 3,300 personnel, which included: 2,990 troops, 30 individual police officers and 2 formed police units, collectively totaling 280 personnel. Unfortunately, the mission experienced a significant loss, with a total of 65 troops killed in the line of duty.

¹⁶ The African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) was initially slated to commence in September 2013. However, due to unforeseen developments including a rapid advance by rebel forces in early January 2013 and the subsequent intervention by French forces, ECOWAS opted to expedite the deployment of AFISMA forces. As a response, Nigeria took the lead by initiating the deployment of both air and ground forces to Mali on January 17th.

By March 2013, other countries made a significant contribution to the mission with a huge number of military and police personnel, divided into the following countries: Chad (2015), Nigeria (1186), Togo (723), Niger (657), Senegal (501), Burkina Faso (495), Benin (300), Guinea (144) and Ghana with 125 personnel. The mission had a total cost of \$455.53 million, and only 25% of the budget was covered by the African countries, while the rest came from international donors including the US, Japan, EU (European Union), Germany, and France (W.P.F, 2017). Despite the formidable challenges encountered by the African-led mission during their intervention to protect Mali's territorial integrity, particularly in the northern region, the collective efforts, which involved substantial contributions from the French army, the Malian authorities, and the transformation of AFISMA into MINUSMA, succeeded in ousting rebel groups from most northern cities. The collaborative actions of these key actors played a pivotal role in stabilizing the country, enabling it to successfully conduct the first round of national elections in August 2013 (W.P.F, 2017).

In addressing this crisis, ECOWAS effectively devised and implemented practical solutions, successfully restoring the country to constitutional order within the stipulated timeframe, all under the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security (1999), and the Revised Treaty (1993).

Hence, ECOWAS employed crucial structural methods that ultimately led to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and safeguarded the nation's territorial integrity. Through acts of condemnation of the coup d'état in an official statement, the ECOWAS took the initial step to exert pressure on the military forces responsible for the coup (ECOWAS, 1999).

Furthermore, ECOWAS undertook another step stated in the legal documents, and consisting of the imposition of stringent measures, including sanctions and border closures. These measures are employed to coerce the military junta into relinquishing power and facilitating the return to civilian rule: a goal that was successfully achieved following subsequent elections (ECOWAS, 1999).

Yet, another relevant step that agrees with the official charter is the Military Intervention by Request: based on which ECOWAS will be ready to militarily intervene within the country, but only at the request of national officials. This demonstrated ECOWAS's commitment to a peaceful resolution, as it was willing to engage militarily only as a last resort, and so emphasizing the preference for diplomatic solutions.

Thus, it's vital to underscore that ECOWAS' military intervention in Mali was prompted solely by a request from the transition authorities, not by any ECOWAS unilateral imposition aimed at restoring constitutional order.

Despite ECOWAS' extensive authority to intervene in member countries as outlined in article 25 of Revised ECOWAS Treaty (1993), the document specifies that intervention is warranted in cases of civil conflict with the potential to trigger a humanitarian crisis or pose a significant threat to regional peace and security (ECOWAS, 1993).

Therefore, by implementing these strategic measures, ECOWAS played a pivotal role in resolving the conflict and preserving the nation's territorial integrity, showcasing its dedication to maintaining regional stability and democracy.

The resolution of the crisis in Mali highlights three crucial methods employed by ECOWAS to address military crises within its Member States: coercive diplomacy, mediation, and military intervention (Ateku, 2020). In the case of the 2012 Mali conflict, these methods were effectively employed in various cases facilitating the organization and its partners in resolving the crisis and reinstating a democratically elected government through the electoral process.

The post-pandemic period posed a severe threat to the world across various aspects of life and notably, democracy faced significant challenges in numerous countries, particularly in the Sahel¹⁷ region. This region witnessed a series of four successful military coup d'états within a span of just 18 months from August 2020 to October 2021, all occurring in former French colonies. Two of these four coups took place in Mali.

On 18th August 2020, a faction of military officers orchestrated a coup, unseating the democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK), who had governed since 2013. They adopted the moniker "National Committee for the Salvation of the People" (NCSP) (Fornof & Cole, 2020). Notably, this coup occurred amid a severe economic crisis, further exacerbated by the ongoing global pandemic.

The military takeover followed a prolonged period of nationwide public demonstrations led by the "June 5 Movement–Rally of Patriotic Force" (M5-RFP). These protests were fueled

¹⁷ The Sahel region spans some 5 400 km (3400 miles) from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east, in a belt that varies from several hundred to a thousand kilometers (620 miles) in width, covering an area of 3 053 200 km² (1 178 800 sq mi). The post-colonial Sahel states comprise Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan (Danjibo, 2020).

by accusations against the IBK government, which was criticized for its perceived inability to address the escalating threat posed by jihadist movements and security issues within the country, as well as its alleged involvement in high-level corruption (Associated Press, 2020).

In the aftermath of the coup d'état, a united front of condemnation emerged from key international actors, including ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, and officials from the United States and France, all vocally condemning the uprising and demanding the release of Keïta (France 24, 2020).

In response to the widespread denunciation of the coup, the international community reacted with forceful measures. The African Union took a decisive step by suspending Mali's membership and its participation in the organization's activities until a normal constitutional order was reinstated in the country. This action followed a robust condemnation by the AU, which categorically rejected coups d'état and unconstitutional changes of government on the continent, aligning with the principles outlined in Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act¹⁸ (Chin & Kirkpatrick, 2023).

In the wake of the AU suspension, ECOWAS took parallel actions by suspending Mali from its internal decision-making bodies and implementing additional sanctions, such as the closure of Mali's borders again (Aljazeera, 2020). On August 22, a pivotal meeting between Mali's coup leaders and ECOWAS mediators, aimed at facilitating a transition back to civilian rule, ended without a viable solution for the ongoing crisis (France 24, 2020).

The mediation process in Mali bears a striking resemblance to past intervention formats, particularly those witnessed in 2012. However, this time, the mediation grapples with a notable internal challenge that goes beyond the resistance of the Malian junta to the proposed transition period and encompasses civil society and opposition leaders who do not agree with the mediation methods advanced by ECOWAS (Bappah, 2018).

As highlighted in a Reuters article by Diallo and Lewis (2020), opposition leader Cheick Oumar Sissoko asserted, "If they want to come, they can come, but we are not going to move." Furthermore, he firmly stated, "We are prepared to cross ECOWAS's red line" (Reuters, 2020).

¹⁸ The art. 4(m) of the AU (2000) addressed the "Respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance, while art. 4 (p) of the same document stated the condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments.

After receiving these strong and unequivocal statements from Mali's government, it became evident how ECOWAS's response to conflicts. This affirmation is supported by the remarks made by former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, after the ECOWAS delegation met with the parties involved in the crisis, and who stated:

"We have reached a consensus on several issues, but there are still some matters on which we have not reached an agreement. Therefore, regarding these issues, we conveyed ECOWAS's stance to the military officers and requested them to reconsider their decision"
(Aljazeera, 2020a).

The concluding statement from the ECOWAS summit held in Niamey, Niger, on September 7th, 2020, stipulates that a civilian transitional president and prime minister "must be appointed no later than September 15th". This directive seems to align with the provisions outlined in the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (1999) and is consistent with Section VII, Article 38 of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF, 1999).

Conversely, the military junta made a decisive move on September 13th 2020, by advancing a political charter that laid the foundation for an 18-month transitional government. This government would have involved the appointment of either a soldier or a civilian as an interim president before elections were conducted (Associated Press, 2020). Hence, the ECOWAS deadline of September 15th passed without the regional mediators successfully persuading the coup makers to relinquish power to a civilian-led government.

Subsequently, on September 21st 2020, according to the Aljazeera outlet (2020), the Malian military junta announced the nomination of former Defence Minister Bah Ndaw as the president of the new transitional government, and appointed Assimi Goita as the vice president. Later, the junta proposed the former Malian Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane as Prime Minister, and following these developments, Goita requested the lifting of ECOWAS's economic sanctions on September 22nd, by citing the appointment of an interim president. ECOWAS promptly accepted the request, and on October 6th, they decided to lift all the sanctions.

This action was aimed at showing ECOWAS support for the transition to civilian rule in Mali (Okon, 2021). Overall, with ECOWAS support, Mali was progressing towards a successful transition to civilian rule until a coup d'état led by Colonel Assimi Goita¹⁹ on May 24th 2021 occurred, just after 18 months after the previous coup of 2020 and removing the

¹⁹ Goita served as the Vice President and leader of the junta during the Coup of August 18th 2020 (Okon, 2021).

transitional government. ECOWAS response to this coup was of strong condemnation, as it had done previously, while also advanced by imposing traditional sanctions, like those implemented in the coups of 2012 and August 2020 (Okon, 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to assess the inadequacies of ECOWAS mediation in Mali, which account for the recurrent pattern of instability in the country, despite sustained diplomatic efforts to restore constitutional order. At this purpose, Okon (2021) identified three primary gaps that contribute to ECOWAS's failure:

- (a) Inadequate Monitoring and Oversight of Successive Governments: ECOWAS leadership tends to swiftly invoke its stance on zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government when leaders are removed, even in situations where the leadership was corrupt or ineffective. However, there is often a lack of consistent efforts to monitor and restrain the actions of those in power, which can lead to unchecked excesses.
- (b) ECOWAS' Tolerance of Poor Governance from Its Member States Diminishes Its Integrity and Legitimacy: ECOWAS's willingness to tolerate bad governance within its Member States erodes its credibility and legitimacy among various actors and entities in the sub-region. Consequently, when ECOWAS leadership attempts to mediate certain regional crises, these efforts are often met with resistance and viewed as thinly veiled attempts to support leaders who may be perpetuating bad governance. This perception is reinforced by the belief that such interventions are aimed at safeguarding the personal and regime security of these leaders, not the interest of the country.

(c) French Interests in Former Colonies Create Another Gap in ECOWAS' Response to the Mali Conflict (2012-2021): A significant factor contributing to the gap in ECOWAS' response to the Mali conflict from 2012 to 2021 is the vested interest of France in its former colonies. For example, French influence played a pivotal role in the transition of ECOWAS' Peace Support Operation (PSO) from MICEMA to AFISMA, effectively shaping the preferred first responder to the conflict. Consequently, ECOWAS exercises caution when making decisions and acting in response to the Mali conflict, given France capability to veto such decisions and actions at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Despite ECOWAS's diligent efforts to uphold the rule of law in Mali and resolve coups, under the organization's legal framework, and despite the utilization of various mechanisms

(such as coercive diplomacy, mediation, and military intervention), the inefficiency of these approaches in effectively resolving conflicts and restoring constitutional order is evident.

The ineffectiveness persists despite the existence of regional legal mechanisms, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in 2001, as well as the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999, and various other legal frameworks.

GUINEA-BISSAU

The year 2012 represented a significant and challenging period for the region, drawing substantial attention from the international community, with a particular focus on ECOWAS as the primary regional organization. While efforts to counter the coup d'état in Mali were already underway, an additional coup d'état unfolded in Guinea-Bissau, on April 12.

This simultaneous development introduced further complexity into the international community's efforts to find solutions for both countries. It's worth noting that, unlike Mali, the coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau did not stem from a territorial rebellion seeking separation from the central government.

For decades, Guinea-Bissau has been marked not only by economic deficiencies and social imbalances but also, by persistent political-military instability, closely linked to challenges within the security sector (France 24, 2020). Since gaining independence from Portugal in 1973, Guinea-Bissau has endured constant political volatility (Mabel, 2019).

After the death of President Malam Bacai Sanha on 9 January 2012, Guinea-Bissau faced a series of political-military struggles. To address this challenging national security situation, the international community, particularly ECOWAS, provided significant support by dispatching \$63 million for the security sector reform, aimed to enable the country to successfully hold presidential elections within the same year and restore democracy (Suzuki, 2020).

Despite all, on 12th April 2012, the coup d'état interrupted the presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau after the successful first round won by former prime minister Carlos Gomes Junior, but the voting round was inconclusive due to the coup d'état (Ramet, 2012). A self-proclaimed "military command", composed of a group of generals and senior army officers ousted Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior, and the interim president Raimundo Pereira,

plunging the country into another volatile military-political situation (Döring & Herpolsheimer, 2018).

ECOWAS response

The international community's response to the coup d'état was unsurprising, especially regarding condemnation, with the regional body taking immediate action. ECOWAS swiftly released a statement from its headquarters in Abuja, (Nigeria), the day after the coup, signed by H.E. Désiré Kadré Ouedraogo, President of the ECOWAS Commission.

Furthermore, on April 13 the REC decided to deploy a military contingent to Guinea-Bissau, replacing the departing Angolan forces (MISSANG)²⁰ (Suzuki, 2020). Suzuki (2020) further states that the ECOWAS mission's mandate was twofold: to ensure the correct implementation of the regional road map for the country's defense and security sector reform program, as well as to oversee the completion of the scheduled presidential runoff election.

In the above statement, ECOWAS expressed significant disappointment regarding the timing of the coup attempt, which occurred a few days after a joint meeting between ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN with the military hierarchy of Guinea-Bissau (AU, 2013).

During this meeting, strong warnings were issued, cautioning against any tendency to disrupt the ongoing electoral process. Furthermore, this incident occurred at a critical time when ECOWAS was deeply involved in collaborative efforts with Guinea-Bissau to pursue comprehensive reforms aimed at fostering economic development and national reconstruction, as outlined in ECOWAS (2012b).

Additionally, the ECOWAS Commission strongly condemned the military incursion and called for the immediate restoration of constitutional order to facilitate the completion of the ongoing electoral process (ECOWAS, 2012b). The regional body formally designated that act as a clear violation of the Community's fundamental principle of Zero Tolerance for the acquisition of power through unconstitutional means, as enshrined in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2005 (Diallo, 2005).

²⁰ The Angolan Military Mission in Guinea Bissau, (Missão Militar Angolana na Guiné-Bissau) from 2010-2012 was comprised of 270 military personnel. The MISSANG aimed to provide technical and Military Assistance, and help in the security reform (Lusa, 2012).

The international condemnation continued, extending to the continental level with the African Union's response to the situation. On April 17th, during the 318th AU's Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC), the AU followed the ECOWAS position of condemning the coup and decided to immediately suspend Guinea-Bissau from all activities until constitutional order was restored (Reuters & Dabo, 2012; Suzuki, 2020).

This decision was made during a meeting chaired by H.E. Ramtane Lamamra, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, in Addis Ababa, and was in tune with standard procedure of the AU when dealing with coups d'état in the continent: "Suspension is the African Union's customary response to any disruption of constitutional rule within one of its Member States" (Reuters & Dabo, 2012).

Moreover, during the urgent UNSC 6774th meeting, convened in New York on 18th May 2012, the Council unanimously adopted the Resolution 2048 (2012), under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations of 1945. This action was taken to uphold international peace and security as mandated by the United Nations Charter (UNSC, 2012c). Hence, the resolution imposed targeted sanctions on five leaders of the military juntas collectively referred to as "the military Command", including travel bans, with exceptions granted for humanitarian, judicial, or reconciliatory purposes.

Additionally, the Council demanded the Military Command to immediately restore and uphold constitutional order, which included reinstating of the legitimate authorities and ensuring the return of all soldiers to their barracks, and so facilitating the resumption of the disrupted electoral process (Security Council, 2012).

The Council further emphasized the importance of a firm commitment of all national stakeholders, as well as Guinea-Bissau's international partners, to restore the constitutional order. Moreover, it encouraged the ongoing mediation efforts led by ECOWAS, in close coordination with the UN, AU, the EU, and the CPLP (AU, 2013).

After international condemnation of the coup d'état, both the country and the junta began to face substantial pressure from ECOWAS and other strategic partners, leading to tangible consequences. One of the first steps taken by the military junta in the aftermath of the coup was the creation of a National Transitional Council, achieved through negotiations involving numerous political parties, and including several opposition groups.

These dialogues with the opposition ultimately led to the signing of a protocol on 18th April 2012, to establish a national government with a two-year term. Interestingly, several parties chosen not to endorse this protocol (Ramet, 2012).

After the junta's unilateral action, which was carried out in collaboration with certain political elites, the international response to this move were not satisfactory. Both ECOWAS and the African Union rejected the National Transitional Council, viewing it as an effort to legitimize the coup d'état (Ramet, 2012).

Ramet (2012) further emphasizes that, despite the international backlash against this action, diplomatic channels remained open for addressing the situation in the country.

A regional meeting took place in Banjul on April 29, involving the region's Foreign Ministers, collectively referred to as the "Contact Group," and Guinea Bissau's political stakeholders (the junta, political parties, and the civil society).

After more than 12 hours of discussions in Banjul, chaired by President Yahya Jammeh, the Contact Group ultimately concluded that "it was futile to continue as it had become evident that the head of the military junta was unwilling to negotiate and preferred to face the consequences" (ECOWAS, 2012d, p.2).

After a series of consultations, a deal was ultimately brokered between ECOWAS and the Military Command. ECOWAS, by employing coercive diplomatic tactics which included sanctions, successfully secured the release of the detainees and the preservation of the Parliament until new elections could be held. On May 23, the announcement of the establishment of a transitional civilian government was made, and the junta was subsequently dissolved (Mabel, 2019).

Under the agreement, the transitional civilian government committed to organize presidential and parliamentary elections within one year. ECOWAS decided to deploy a force of 600 soldiers to oversee the political transition until elections were organized. The deployment of the ECOWAS troops allowed the Angolan Military Mission (MISSANG) to be withdrawn without incident (Ramet, 2012).

This decision followed from the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, which convened in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on April 26, 2012, during which the Heads of State and Government thoroughly assessed the situations in Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

As a result, they agreed to take significant measures in response to the constitutional changes underway in both nations.

Concerning Guinea-Bissau, the Heads of State and Government conveyed several important points in their final communique, outlining their approach to address the unfolding situation, being here reported the e most relevant ones (ECOWAS, 2012c):

The Authorities reaffirm the fundamental principle of “Zero Tolerance” for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means, as well as the role of the military in a Democracy, as enshrined in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

The Authorities reiterate the ECOWAS denunciation of the 18 April 2012 Agreement establishing the so-called National Transitional Council and reaffirms that ECOWAS will never recognize any unconstitutional transitional arrangement.

The Authority urges all the stakeholders to submit to the mediation efforts of ECOWAS to agree with the modalities for a consensual transition through the holding of elections within twelve months, taking note of the written commitment of 16 April 2012 by the Military Command to accept the restoration of constitutional order, based on modalities to be worked out with the help of ECOWAS.

The Authorities instruct the Commission to deploy a contingent of the ECOWAS Standby Force in Guinea Bissau with immediate effect to, among other duties, facilitate the withdrawal of the MISSANG, assist in securing the transitional process, and undertake preparatory work for the immediate implementation of the roadmap for the Defense and Security Sector Reform Program (DSSRP). To this end, the Authority has approved the Mandate of the ECOWAS Stand by Force (ESF) in Guinea-Bissau.

These points underscore ECOWAS' solid commitment to resolving the situation and restoring civilian governance in Guinea-Bissau. This aligns with the regional stance against unconstitutional regime changes through coup d'états, which is reinforced by the protocols and regional legal frameworks approved by all Member States.

Between 16 and 21 December 2012, the ECOWAS, AU, the CPLP, the European Union (EU), and the UN collaborated on a joint mission to Guinea Bissau, which initiated in response to a request made under the auspices of the AU, on September 28, in New York, by representatives of both the current Bissau-Guinean authorities and the regime overthrown by

the coup d'état (Tadele & AU, 2013). This initiative was supported by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), expressed in its 340th meeting on November 2nd 2012.

Later, the extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja on November 11th 2012, urged for the swift deployment of the mission (Tadele & AU, 2013). This mission was not the first of its kind in the country. In 1998, ECOWAS deployed a Peace Stabilization Mission during Guinea Bissau's civil war, known as ECOMOG²¹. However, unlike the previous mission, the current one is not led by ECOWAS, as indicated by the mission's Terms of Reference (tor), but all parties involved agreed that the AU would take the lead in coordinating the preparation and execution of the mission (Tadele & AU, 2013).

However, it is important to highlight that ECOWAS played a crucial and active role in achieving the mission's objectives. The primary goal of the mission was to assess the political and security situation on the ground, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the local dynamics and explore potential solutions to the multifaceted challenges. In this endeavor, ECOWAS made significant contributions and collaborated closely with the AU to accomplish these objectives (Global Security, 2017).

Therefore, the UNSC resolution, S/RES/2203(2015) adopted on 18 February 2015, recognized the crucial role played by ECOMIB in stabilizing Guinea-Bissau and urged the international community to provide support. Some countries contributed to ECOMIB's troop, including Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, with additional support from a police contingent from Nigeria.

These nations collectively played a vital role in the mission's operations and contributed to maintaining stability in Guinea-Bissau (Yabi, 2012). Notwithstanding, ECOMIB remained solely funded by ECOWAS. The Commission and its Member States persevered in their efforts to bring the mission in Guinea-Bissau to a successful conclusion, despite the extremely challenging circumstances.

Therefore, the ECOWAS mission in Guinea-Bissau in 2012 crisis yielded significant positive outcomes, playing a pivotal role in easing tensions among the warring factions. Additionally, it actively supported the country in its transition towards a peaceful and

²¹ ECOWAS Monitoring Group was Established in November 1998 for the mission in Guinea-Bissau May 1999,

democratic state. The presence of ECOMIB helped to stabilize the country, ensuring protection for key government personnel and critical installations (Accord, 2019).

Notwithstanding the country's successful return to democracy following a peaceful general election in 2013, with both the parliamentary and presidential victories secured by the African Party for Independence for Guinea and Cap-Vert (PAIGC), the ECOMIB contingent remained committed to support Guinea-Bissau. The mission extended beyond the election to help the country in its ongoing efforts to restore peace and security, which had been disrupted during the 2012 crisis.

After almost a decade, discussions about the effectiveness and necessity of the mission began to gain traction among various stakeholders, including politicians, academics, and social activists.

This general dissatisfaction intensified with the announcement of the presidential candidates for the 2019 election, Umaro Sissoco Embalo, who vowed to announce the withdrawal of the mission in the country in case of victory, and that became a fulfilled promise after he secured victory in the second round of elections. According to DW and Lusa (2020), Embalo stated, "Let them return, that's what we want. Let them go and allow us, the Guineans, to work on solving our problems." (DW & Lusa, 2020).

Therefore, just three months after taking office, Embalo decided to withdraw from the ECOMIB contingent (as reported by DW & Lusa, 2020). On March 12th, after a Council of Ministers meeting, a communiqué was released, commending the national defense forces for their commitment to upholding political authority (as stated by UNSC, 2012d).

To formalize the conclusive decision regarding the ECOMIB mission in Guinea-Bissau, during the 57th session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government convened in Niamey, Niger on 7th September 2020, the Heads of State expressed their contentment with the notable progress achieved in the functionality of key institutions, notably the National Assembly and the Government.

Consequently, the Authority resolved to withdraw the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau and extended its heartfelt appreciation to the nations providing troops and police for their invaluable contributions to stabilizing Guinea-Bissau (ECOWAS, 2020).

This decision was later endorsed also by the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC), marking the official conclusion of the ECOWAS stabilization military- mission in Guinea-Bissau (AU, 2013).

BURKINA FASO

In the aftermath of the Northern African revolutions, Burkina Faso faced ongoing security and social challenges that reverberated throughout the Sahel region. After 27 years in power, President Blaise Compaoré sought to amend the constitution to extend his tenure. In 2014, trade unions and civil society organizations responded vehemently, condemning his decision, and initiating widespread strikes across the country. Their unified efforts aimed to compel the president to backtrack on his decision and demand his immediate resignation from office (Phelan, 2016).

The Civil society in Burkina Faso has consistently proven to be a formidable force, playing a crucial role in the country's governance and historical trajectory throughout the nation's history. Saidou (2018), affirms that the Burkinabe civil society has remained resilient and dynamic, effectively bringing change in governments and leadership. It has served as a significant counterforce during periods of authoritarian rule, whether civilian or military, that Burkina-Faso has experienced since gaining independence from France, in 1960.

Due to the pressure exerted by civil society, the President was forced to resign from power in October 2014, leaving Burkina-Faso to be governed by a transitional government (Coopera Salud, 2020). However, in September 2015, the transitional government was overthrown by the Regiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP)²², the presidential guard.

ECOWAS response

As expected, the ECOWAS reaction to the Coup d'état occurred in the same patterns as in previous cases, by urgently condemning the act. Further, the organization proposed a mediation process to restore the transition government before the election. But surprisingly, the

²² The most powerful section of the Burkinabe army which acted during Compaoré's reign as a political militia.

mediation process proposed by ECOWAS was fiercely rejected by Burkinabe civil society and ultimately failed to mediate the conflict (Saidou, 2018).

In contrast to the approaches taken in previous cases, ECOWAS adopted a distinct strategy when addressing the situation in Burkina Faso. Instead of resorting to the "Coercive Diplomacy" method, which involved imposing harsh sanctions on the country's economy and its junta leaders, the regional body opted for a mediation-based solution.

This shift in approach became evident in the outcome of an urgent meeting held on 6th November 2014, in Accra, Ghana, during which ECOWAS decided to form a mediation and "contact group" led by President Macky Sal, of Senegal. President Sal was granted full authority to negotiate on behalf of the organization, as detailed in Document 204/2014 (ECOWAS, 2014). This marked a departure from their previous stance and reflected a commitment to resolving the Burkina-Faso situation through diplomatic channels.

In alignment with the ECOWAS approach to address the crisis, the AU-PSC, during its 465th meeting on 3rd November 2014, endorsed the statement put forth by ECOWAS and vehemently condemned the act of constitutional change, recognizing it as a clear violation of democratic principles and the core values upheld by the AU.

As a result, the AU-PSC resolved to collaborate not only with ECOWAS, but also with the United Nations Commission, in the pursuit of a peaceful and diplomatic resolution to the crisis. This concerted effort demonstrated a unified commitment to resolve the situation per international norms and principles (PSC/PR/COMM.(CDLXV), 2014).

Consistently, mirroring the approach adopted by international organizations in prior instances, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demonstrated its commitment to address the situation in Burkina-Faso, by acknowledging and taking note of two significant declarations emanated in relation to the Burkina Faso crisis: first, the Declaration made by the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 2nd November 2014; and second, the Declaration issued by the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission on 4th November 2014.

This recognition by the UNSC indicated its active engagement with the issue and its commitment to collaborating with regional and continental bodies in addressing the crisis (SC/11651-AFR/3020, 2014). In contrast to the above-mentioned cases, wherein the ECOWAS imposed its resolution on the countries under a coup leader and engaged in conversations only

with the directly involved personnel, in the case of Burkina-Faso, due to the heavy importance of civil society, it was relevant to include this actor to find a solution to the crisis that befalls the country.

The AU, ECOWAS and UN joined the mission led by Togolese former Prime Minister Edem Kodjo, aimed to create a coordinated mediation process that included not only the military junta but also the civil society, as one of the main actors (Saidou, 2018). Furthermore, Bappah (2018) affirms that, during the Burkina-Faso crisis, ECOWAS committed itself at closely working with civil society following that, several regional initiatives emerged in the region to contribute to conflict management. With an inclusive commission or a joint mediation committee to solve the situation.

Finally, on 16th November 2014, a transitional charter was signed, in which the Burkinabe civil society played a key role, together with other national stakeholders composed of political parties, civil society, the military and security institutions, as well as religious and traditional leaders (Saidou, 2018).

Two months before the general election, scheduled for 16th September 2015, according to the transitional charter, the presidential guard (RSP)²³ intervened during a political meeting, holding hostage the transitional elite, including the president of transition, the prime minister, and other ministers (Saidou, 2018).

Several influential internal actors tried to dissuade the junta from proceeding with the coup d'état, but their efforts failed, and on the following day, the junta announced the establishment of a military council led by General Diendéré (Phelan, 2016). The coup was seen as an attempt to halt the transitional process and restore the Compaoré regime (Saidou, 2018).

As usual, the international response to the crisis was quick to condemn the coup d'état. This time, the ECOWAS condemnation joined a collective press release issued by the international support group and the transition support group in Burkina Faso, co-chaired by the ECOWAS, AU, and UN. On September 17th, they announced their collective condemnation of the coup and called on the junta to release the detained prisoners and return the country to the transition process (GISAT-BF, 2015).

²³ Presidential Security Regiment.

However, Saidou (2018) stated that, despite being a member of GISAT-BF²⁴, ECOWAS adopted a more conciliatory stance, by opting for mediation and extending an offer to the coup leaders in the name of preserving peace and preventing a further escalation of the crisis. The mediation process initiated by ECOWAS led to a dispute over mandates between the AU and ECOWAS.

Consequently, to continue with the mediation process, ECOWAS dispatched two heads of state, Macky Sall and Thomas Yayi Boni, to visit the country and seek a peaceful solution to the crisis (Aljazeera, 2015).

This delegation faced vehement rejection from civil society and other internal actors, who demanded a fairer and more impartial delegation. They believed that the parties involved were advocating in favor of the former president, Blaise Compaoré (Saidou, 2018). This suspicion was furthermore accentuated when the mediators, after consultations with all national actors, released a draft political agreement of 13 points, which was later submitted to the ECOWAS Extraordinary Summit-in Abuja on 22nd September 2015.

During the summit the Heads of state decided to reiterate their position on condemning the coup d'état, by reaffirming its commitment to the principles contained in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS, 2015).

Considering these political announcements, which often face criticism from civil society, who consistently question the impartiality and efficacy of the ECOWAS mediation process in the country, there is a growing concern regarding the coherence and seriousness with which ECOWAS applies its norms.

Additionally, issues have raised questioning why ECOWAS did not immediately consider the use of sanctions in Burkina-Faso, as it did in other situations, such as Mali in 2012 or Niger in 2009 (Saidou, 2018).

The ECOWAS attempt to solve the 2015 crisis in Burkina-Faso was considered unsuccessful because the mediation process faced a strong internal opposition and the civil society leaders considered the ECOWAS mediation as a “failure”, reflecting the mediation complexity in times of popular uprisings (Saidou, 2018).

²⁴ Support Group for the Transition in Burkina Faso. <https://www.peaceau.org>

Following the official dissolution of the RSP on 25th September 2015, the transitional government was reinstated to continue the transition process and hold a general election, which happened on 29th November 2015, with the support and under close surveillance of the international community (Penar, 2015).

According to the UN-SC report (S/2015/1012), the return to democracy occurred with the general elections won by Roch Marc Christian Kaboré with 53% of the votes. The newly elected president had to face a blatant and dire security challenge in the country due to the growing threats and activities coming from terrorist groups. Kaboré announced that the fundamental priority and focus of his government would have been security to stabilize the country and enable its citizens to move freely with no threats from terrorist militants (Moderan & Koné, 2022).

Despite the commitments made by the new head of state, the socio-political situation in the country did not improve as promised during the elections. Consequently, trust and satisfaction with the government started to decline, as it failed to meet the expectations of the Burkinabè people for good governance.

Indeed, various civil society elements and political elites have criticized and accused the Kaboré regime of corruption, laxity, and nepotism (Moderan & Koné, 2022). However, despite the presence of an internal opposition regarding the democratically elected government, Kaboré was able to complete the first term and to re-elected himself for a second term, on 22nd November 2020, with 57.87% of vol (France 24, 2020).

In November 2021, 53 police officers were killed in a terrorist attack at the Inata military post while waiting for logistical support and supplies, including food rations (Moderan & Koné, 2022). This incident eroded trust in the government's ability to address the country's security challenges. And less than two years after President Kaboré's re-election, he was overthrown by the Burkina Faso's army, under the leadership of Damiba, on 24th January 2022.

The junta leader Damiba affirmed that the Kabore administration failed to unite the country and to manage the deteriorating security situation, so justifying in these terms the ousting of the civilian government (Aljazeera, 2020).

However, after only a few months in power, the Damiba leadership faced criticism (Daniel Eizenga²⁵. Under these circumstances, the country plunged into another crisis when Captain Ibrahim Traoré seized power in a coup on 30th September 2022, aiming to put an end to the Damiba military regime and install a new one (Aljazeera, 2022). Despite all international efforts, including those of ECOWAS, Burkina Faso remains under a military regime with no signs of a return to a democratic system in the foreseeable future.

REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

Like the previous instances, instability continues to plague the region for multifaceted reasons, and the political history of the Republic of Guinea is no “less turbulent than that of its neighbors, though it is different in many respects” (Yabi, 2010, p.7).

In the case of the Republic of Guinea, the nation bears a history steeped in prolonged military rule, since its independence from France, as the military elite has ruled the country for over half of a century (Bah, 2015). Following the passing of President Conte in 2008 and the subsequent coup d'état in 2009, the country endured a critical and contentious era of governance and political stability (Zamfir, 2021).

The pivotal 2010 election ignited optimism and liberated the nation from military hegemony, leading Alpha Conde to become the first democratically elected president since independence, in 1958. However, the end of President Conde's second term saw a contentious alteration of the constitution's term limits, contrary to the case of Burkina Faso, where the president was unsuccessful in extending its term limit, by forging a constitutional amendment which would have allowed him to run for a third consecutive term (Joschka, 2021).

In Guinea, although the same manoeuvre was strongly condemned by various internal stakeholders, including the opposition party “Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée” (UFDG), led by Cellou Dalein Diallo, the amendment went through, and the third term was granted to President Conde. Incumbent Alpha Conde secured Guinea's disputed presidential election with 59.5 per cent of the votes, allowing him to claim a controversial third term (Aljazeera, 2020b). According to Joschka (2021), the election's outcome was fiercely contested by the opposition party (the UFDG) and received strong criticism from international observers.

²⁵ Analyst at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington.

Throughout the (2020), clashes between security forces and anti-government protesters took place across the country, leading to numerous fatalities, hundreds of injuries, and numerous arrests (Joschka,2021).

These actions represented a tumultuous upheaval, questioning the legitimacy of the regime. Amid this politically charged and turbulent climate, on 5th September 2021 the Guinean special forces, led by the 41 years old Col. Mamady Doumbouya, opted to stage a coup d'état against the regime of the 84-years old President in power (Chin & Kirkpatrick, 2023).

In the aftermath of the coup, Colonel Doumbouya decided to dissolve the government, suspend the Constitution, and command his forces to arrest President Condé. He subsequently established the National Rally and Development Committee (CNRD), which would serve as the country's interim executive (Zulueta-Fülscher & Noël, 2021).

Although the coup d'état represented an unconstitutional change of power, it was received by the population with great joy and celebrations over the streets of Conakry and across the country, indicating how g how “the Guineans were frustrated with Condé’s presidency” (Fioratta, 2021). However, although the celebration of the coup was occurring, the population still feared another military rule, mainly based on their historical experiences of previous military regimes.

ECOWAS Response

Almost two weeks after the coup, and more precisely on 16th September 2021, the ECOWAS held an extraordinary summit in Accra. Stating that “military coups are not tolerated in West Africa” (Mushoriwa, 2021, p.2).

During the summit, the organization relied on its decision according to the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (1999) to: a) suspend the country from all its governing bodies until the restoration of constitutional order; b) order the junta to conduct presidential and legislative elections within six (6) months to restore constitutional rule in the Republic of Guinea; c) impose sanctions, following extant ECOWAS Protocols, of travel bans on the members of the CNRD and their family members and freeze their financial assets; and d) ensure that no members of the CNRD would be allowed to contest the presidential election (ECOWAS, 2021b).

Despite the strong message conveyed by the regional organization, Guinea followed the example of Mali, which established its own National Transitional Council (CNT) following the 2020 coup. Colonel Doumbouya and other soldiers and politician denied their commitment to the transition timetable and proposed a 39-month transition period for the return of constitutional civilian rule, exceeding the time demanded by ECOWAS (Zulueta-Fülscher & Noël, 2021). Additionally, Alpha Condé was released from prison in November 2021 and placed under house arrest until April 2022.

In September 2022, responding to the junta's refusal to set a shorter date for elections, ECOWAS agreed to gradually impose more sanctions on junta members (France 24, 2022).

The entire situation neighboring the coup d'état in Guinea highlights the significant challenges faced by ECOWAS in upholding its fundamental principles of the rule of law, democracy, and good governance.

Despite all the efforts made by the organization, it failed to restore constitutional order within the expected timeframe. As a result, the country remains under the leadership of Doumbouya, whose promises of restoring civilian rule remain uncertain of being fulfilled.

The conclusive argument on the case studies

The cases of Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, and Guinea discussed above highlight the diverse dynamics and intervention methods used by ECOWAS in response to military-driven crises, specifically coup d'états. These case studies demonstrate that ECOWAS has used a range of mechanisms to intervene, including coercive diplomacy, mediation, preventive diplomacy, and military intervention (Ateku, 2020).

Mabel (2019) affirms that ECOWAS's role during political crises in the subregion underscored the importance of the organization as a diplomatic actor with substantial influence. It effectively employed coercive diplomacy through sanctions to discourage the military elite from continuing their actions and persuade them to adhere to the democratic principles agreed upon by their national legal framework, as Member States of the regional organization.

As a regional organization, ECOWAS is dedicated to upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, and it recognizes that coups d'état poses a serious threat to the region's progress and development.

The organization's intervention aims to restore constitutional order, protect human rights, and prevent further escalation of violence and insecurity (Bah, 2005). The interventions are driven by a commitment to promote peace, security, and stability in West Africa, which constitute the major priority of the organization to attain economic and social development.

The article 58(e) of the Revised Treaty (1993) highlights the community's commitment to strengthen its mechanisms for the timely prevention and resolution of intra-state and inter-state conflicts, and the need to employ good office missions, conciliation, mediation, and other methods of peaceful settlement of disputes (ECOWAS, 1993).

Therefore, since the creation of the organization in 1975, ECOWAS has been involved in preventive diplomacy and mediation in the West African region, as stated in the ECOWAS mediation guidelines (EMG) approved in 2018 (Bah, 2005).

Differently from previous approaches that had normalized authoritarian regimes, the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993) placed a significant emphasis on democracy and the rule of law, as the new framework for pursuing economic integration and development objectives. In 1999, the adoption of the ECOWAS Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, which now constitutes the principal of the ECOWAS peace and security architecture, aimed to strengthen the Treaty, and formalize this shift in security thinking.

In 2001, the adoption of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which supplements the 1999 Mechanism, heightened the focus on addressing root causes and advancing peacebuilding efforts. This was regarded as a crucial element in preventing further violent conflict and fostering stability in West Africa. Additionally, in January 2008, the organization introduced the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF).

This framework not only consolidated existing structures for conflict prevention and management but also outlined a comprehensive approach to address the underlying structural causes of conflict (Iwilade & Agbo, 2012).

Iwilade and Agbo (2012) further mentioned that the Mechanism established various instruments to enhance regional cooperation in critical areas such as conflict prevention, early warning, peacekeeping operations, control of cross-border crime, international terrorism, and the proliferation of small arms and antipersonnel mines, as detailed in Article 3 of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention (1999).

These instruments encompass the Mediation and Security Council (MSC), the Executive Secretariat, the ECOWAS Rapid Response Force, an Early Warning System (ECOWARN), and the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF).

This research aimed to understand what legal mechanisms ECOWAS has employed to effectively address military-induced instability, including coup d'états in the region. Bah (2005) affirmed that the legal framework that guides ECOWAS interventions in cases of coups d'état is primarily based on its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which was adopted in 2001.

This protocol outlines the principles and mechanisms that ECOWAS member states must adhere to regarding democracy, governance, and the rule of law. Furthermore, the author alludes that the conflict resolution mechanism (1999), goes a step further by addressing conflicts within Member States such as the unconstitutional changes of government (coup d'état), and it commits Member States to respect and uphold democratic processes (Bah, 2005).

The ECOWAS 2001 Protocol expresses zero tolerance towards any form of unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa and enumerates certain principles of good governance within ECOWAS Member States (Diallo, 2005). Article 45 (1) of the 2001 Protocol asserts that “if democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means or widespread human rights violations in a Member State, ECOWAS may impose sanctions on the state” (ECOWAS, 2001).

According to the ECOWAS Vision Agenda for 2020, the organization aimed to achieve, by 2020, a secure and socially cohesive West Africa, free from conflicts. In this vision, the leaders and inhabitants of the region were expected to highly value peace and collective regional security. The agenda also envisioned the effective operation of an ECOWAS regional governance, defense, and security system capable of efficiently combating illegal arms and drug trafficking (ECOWAS, 2010).

Therefore, to realize this vision, ECOWAS assumes to implement legal mechanisms designed to achieve the goals outlined in the 2020 agenda. The crises that unfolded in the four countries (Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, and Guinea) posed challenges to ECOWAS.

One of the major challenges consisted in deciding what mechanisms or strategies to adopt when addressing the coup d'état crises. The region contained a diverse political landscape, and these crises had a range of underlying causes, including internal political disputes, constitutional amendments, and internal security challenges.

The following table aims to offer a comparative analysis of the ECOWAS interventions implemented in the case studies. When comparing the causes of coups d'état in Burkina-Faso (2014) and Guinea (2021), though they occurred in different years, a common factor emerges: both crises were primarily fueled by attempts to amend the constitution to enable the incumbent presidents to run for a third term in office. This action violated the principle of term limits outlined in the ECOWAS Protocol of Democracy and Good Governance, leading to instability and discontent in both nations.

Following the coup in Burkina-Faso, the condemnation rhetoric was slighter, and the official press release did not include threats of sanctions against the junta or the suspension of the country from the organization due to the unconstitutional change. Instead, ECOWAS invited the parties to engage in a mediation process aimed at restoring the constitutional order.

In contrast, immediately after the coup in Guinea, in 2021, the military junta faced severe sanctions, and the country was suspended from the organization. This contrasting response highlights the ECOWAS inconsistent “double standard” in approaching similar situations.

Similarly, the crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, both taking place in the same year (2012), had different underlying causes. However, the reaction to the crises was more prompt in Guinea-Bissau, despite Mali's crisis having started months earlier. In the case of Mali, ECOWAS had to wait to join the international coalition before it could intervene militarily in the country.

Moreover, the internal political elite in Mali rejected the mediation process proposed by ECOWAS to restore the constitution within a specific timeframe. In contrast, in Guinea-Bissau, the country was given little or no chance to dispute the election timeframe. ECOWAS demanded that elections would be held within 12 months following the coup d'état. This

discrepancy in response highlights once again the differing approaches taken by ECOWAS in these cases.

These differentiations confirm the observations made by many experts (Saidou ,2018; Yabi, 2010) who viewed ECOWAS as a body that doesn't consistently adhere to the law or the prescribed legal tools but, rather, appears to be influenced by the will of the heads of states, particularly those from the most influential countries, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Ivory Coast.

Therefore, it's evident through the findings that ECOWAS did not lack the legal mechanisms or guidelines to handle crises derived from coup d'état. The most significant gap identified during this research, which leads parties to reject the resolution methods based on the protocols and legal principles signed and ratified by all Member States, is the lack of impartiality, coherence, and treatments during different crises.

This lack of impartiality acts as an obstacle for the organization to successfully implement its plans, as seen in the case of Burkina Faso, in 2014, where the civil society rejected the mediation method proposed by ECOWAS and demanded a reformulation of the mediation agenda, and Guinea, in 2021 whereby the junta rejected the transition period proposed by the organization.

Table 1. Comparative summary of ECOWAS interventions model in the case studies.

Country	Response	The type of resolution adopted
Mali	ECOWAS- reacted on 27 th March 2012, during the emergency summit in Abuja. ²⁶	An unsuccessful coercive diplomatic mission comprised six heads of state and ministers.
	AU- Peace and Security Council endorsed the ECOWAS decision, on 2 nd April 2012.	Adoption of measures on political and economic sanctions.
	The UNSC condemned the country by following the AU report, during the 6798 th meeting under resolution 2056, on 5 th July 2012.	The deployment of a military mission was initiated at the request of Mali (AFISMA-MINUSMA).

²⁶ (ECOWAS, 2012a) (ECOWAS COMMISSION, 2022)

		A transitional government was established with the primary objective of conducting a general election within a 12-month timeframe.
Guinea-Bissau	ECOWAS- reacted on 13th April 2012, through an official statement, condemning the act and urging to constitutional return.²⁷ Through an official statement, Condemning the act and urging to constitutional return. The country was suspended following the urgent summit in Abidjan, on April 27, 2012, and a decision was made to deploy a standby military mission. AU-The Peace and Security Council decided to suspend the country during the 318th meeting on 17 April 2012. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemned the country during its 6774th meeting under Resolution 2048 and endorsed the decisions made by both the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS.	Deployment of a military mission was initiated in response to an internal request (ESF-ECOMIB). An attempt was made to pursue a diplomatic solution through the involvement of the 'Contact Group'. A diplomatic mission Was been dispatched to Bissau to engage in negotiations. A transitional government Was been established with the primary objective of conducting a general election within a 12-month timeframe.
Burkina Faso	ECOWAS- reacted on 6th November 2014. After an urgent meeting held in Accra, an official statement, Condemning the act and urging to constitutional return was. The AU-The Peace and Security Council decided on 3rd November 2014, to endorse the statement put forth by ECOWAS. It vehemently condemned the act of constitutional change, recognizing it as a clear	Joining international mission on condemning the coup by creating a contact diplomatic group. Unsuccessful coercive diplomatic mission comprised of two heads of state. Adoption of more conciliatory mediation, not by sanctioning the junta or the country.

²⁷ (ECOWAS, 2021a)

	violation of democratic principles and the core values upheld by the AU.	
Republic Of Guinea	ECOWAS- reacted on 16th September 2020. After the extraordinary summit held in Accra. The country was suspended from all its governing bodies until the restoration of constitutional order and ordered the junta to conduct the presidential and legislative elections within six (6) months to restore constitutional rule in the Republic of Guinea.	Adoption of Coercive Diplomacy by sanctioning the junta, their families, and the country. A transitional government was established by the junta for 38 months.

Conclusion

This work has acknowledged a significant aspect concerning the role of ECOWAS in addressing coup d'états in its Member States. The organization is regarded as an essential player in the region, even though it still faces numerous challenges.

ECOWAS has paved the way for economic development through the establishment of free trade areas, customs unions, and common markets. On a political level, the organization has adopted various legal mechanisms, by including in its Revised Treaty (1993) the imperative to intervene not only in the economic affairs of its Member States but also in politics, by promoting democratic values and respect for the rule of law.

Hence, many protocols leading to the achievement of these objectives have been signed and ratified by all the Member States, amongst them the Protocol of Mutual Assistance (1981), the ECOMOG protocol (1990), the Declaration of Political Principles (1991), the Mechanism Prevention (1999), the Protocol on Good Governance (2001), the Conflict Prevention Framework (2008), and the ECOWAS vision for 2020, and the ECOWAS Vision for 2050, which have served as guiding principles over the last few decades.

Used as the legal foundation for arguments in producing directives to address crises, they enabled ECOWAS to make significant progress in containing violent conflicts through preventive diplomacy initiatives, including fact-finding missions, quiet diplomacy, and mediation in the sub-region. In some cases (Guinea-Bissau, 2012, and Guinea, 2021), they also applied the instrument of coercive diplomacy. However, despite these achievements, some serious setbacks to the preventive diplomacy initiatives outlined in the Revised Treaty and various legal Mechanisms remain to be achieved.

ECOWAS has been heavily criticized by the Burkinabe civil Society for lacking coherence in addressing the crises that have engulfed the region between 2011 and 2021, as in the cases of Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. One of the criticisms pointed that, even though many of these crises (coups d'état) have shared similar causalities (Burkina Faso, 2015 and Guinea-2021), the ECOWAS' responses have varied.

This study has highlighted the diversity of intervention methods used by the organization in the cases analyzed, although the reason motivating the intervention was always the same: a successfully executed coup d'état. This divergence is evident in the condemnation

rhetoric employed and the deliberations that follow the urgent summits convened to analyze each case.

The reaction to these crises demonstrates, indeed, a clear disparity in how the regional body acts in the region. If by legal principles, all Member States should be treated equally and deserve the same treatment, the actions undertaken by ECOWAS in the cases here presented, have diverged significantly.

The growing lack of trust in ECOWAS as a fair and strong player with the power and authority to resolve crises in the region is evident in recent events that unfolded in Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. All these countries refused to comply with the ECOWAS directives to resolve their respective crises.

During the development of this research, the most challenging aspect regarded the need to analyze the legal instruments of ECOWAS. Many of these legal instruments are not available on the organization's official website. Additionally, a further complexity regarded the lack of clarity of the legal instrument reported in the official declarations of the organization, to justify ECOWAS actions to solve a political or military crisis.

Despite all, we expect this research to serve as inspiration for future studies on both the causes of coups d'état in the region, which continue to be a recurrent phenomenon, as well as on the role of ECOWAS and the mechanisms implemented by the regional body to guarantee peace and stability among its Member States.

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