

**THE SAHEL SECURITY PACT AND THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
OF WEST AFRICAN STATES' (ECOWAS) MANDATE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN WEST
AFRICA**

***¹Ojo Joseph IseOlorunkanmi, ²Abalaka Elisha Ugbeyo, ³Opeyemi John Olofin,
⁴Olugbenga Sampson Balogun, ⁵Timothy Onimisi, ⁶Henry Nweke-Love**

^{1,6}Department of Political Science & International Relations

Landmark University & SDG 16 Cluster, Landmark University Omuaran, Nigeria.

^{2,3,4,5}Department of Political Science & International Relations

Landmark University, Omuaran, Nigeria.

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***Corresponding Author: Ojo Joseph IseOlorunkanmi**

Department of Political Science & International Relations, Landmark University & SDG 16 Cluster, Landmark
University Omuaran, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The formation of the Sahel Security Pact by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger poses a significant challenge to West Africa's existing regional security and governance structures. This study examines how the pact restructures security architecture, undermines the authority of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and impedes democratic consolidation. Relying on qualitative data from in-depth interviews and other secondary data, the research explores the pact's political motivations, operational advantages, and broader normative consequences. The findings of the study reveal that the stakeholders perceive the security pact as both a response to ECOWAS's limited capacity in solving the region-specific security threats and a means for military regimes to circumvent regional democratic norms. While the pact offers faster decision-making, operational autonomy, and targeted resource allocation, these advantages come at a substantial political cost. The pact weakens ECOWAS's legitimacy and normative authority as the primary regional framework, normalizing authoritarian governance. By consolidating a military-led alliance, the pact erodes civilian oversight and threatens constitutional order and regional integration. However, the study concludes that without substantial reform of its security architecture and

enforcement mechanisms, ECOWAS risks marginalization in a region increasingly shaped by militarized governance and declining democratic accountability.

KEYWORDS: Sahel Security Pact; ECOWAS; Democratic backsliding; Military rule; Regional security governance.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of democratic consolidation in West Africa has re-emerged as one of the major political problems of the 2020s. After two decades of democratic gains, a new wave of military coups has been reversing most of the gains that the region had made towards stable constitutional governance (Aina *et al.*, 2025). This resurgence of unconstitutional seizure of power indicates profound structural deficits in state institutions, economic instability, and insecurity, particularly in West Africa. Coups in Mali (2020 and 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Guinea-Bissau (2025), and the unsuccessful coup in Benin (2025) illustrate how the failure of governance and security crises have continued to be used by political elites and military actors to legitimize the overthrow of elected regimes. Such developments include a larger democratic regression that has now put West Africa at the centre of academic and policy discussion of democratic backsliding in Africa (Arthur, 2025).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with the responsibility of not only ensuring economic integration within the region but also maintaining democratic standards and the resolution of conflicts in the region. ECOWAS, over the decades, created protocols that discourage unconstitutional seizure of government and has imposed sanctions on member states after coup, including diplomatic and economic sanctions meant to restore civilian rule (Odubajo & Ishola, 2024). Its ability to impose these norms has, however, been sharply challenged in recent years. The 2023 coup in Niger has resulted in a historic standoff in the region: ECOWAS threatened military action to restore President Mohamed Bazoum (Wada & Garba, 2025). Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger did not yield to these pressures, and the three juntas officially led their respective countries to exit the ECOWAS in January 2025. The ECOWAS became more politically and institutionally divided (Asante & Bembir, 2025).

The juntas responded to this change by forming the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a mutual-defence and political alliance aimed at overcoming external pressures and establishing a unique regional framework of security cooperation (Aina *et al.*, 2025). The AES represents the interests of the political forces of military regimes in the Sahel. This is in contrast to the

liberal-democratic perspective that ECOWAS purports to hold. The AES has institutionalized a different model of regional cooperation by making a commitment to collective defense and harmonized security reactions, which has made military independence and robustness a priority rather than democratic conditionalities. This has created normative and pragmatic problems for the power of ECOWAS. It corrodes common regional standards of constitutionalism, compromises common security arrangements, thus casting doubt on the fragmentation of West African political societies.

The rise of the AES marks a historical point in the politics of regional governance in West Africa. Unlike the past, when ECOWAS' democratic mandate served as a stabilizing mechanism facilitating constitutional order, the establishment of the AES is an indication of a two-track architecture of security that military regimes would rebel against external imposition or safeguard of democracy. This kind of fragmentation makes it difficult to respond to the interdependent crises of insecurity, economic stagnation and governance shortages that have been the cause of democratic fragility in the first place. The attitudes of people towards governance have also been influenced by the constant insecurity within the Sahel, which is perpetrated by violent extremism, insurgencies and communal conflicts. According to Zagre (2025), the long-term violence is likely to lower the public attitude to democratic principles and raise the level of the authoritarian attitude towards such actions. This study, however, analyses these trends by assessing the Sahel Security Pact and the consequences of the same on the legitimacy and democratic consolidation of ECOWAS in West Africa. In particular, the paper evaluates the extent to which the AES questions the credibility and normative authority of ECOWAS to intervene on issues that bother on democratic governance of the region.

Democratic Consolidation and Regional Security Governance in West Africa

The security situation in West Africa and the ability of regional institutions to cope with the recurrent threats continue to influence democratic consolidation in the region. The past decade has seen a dramatic increase in the use of military coups, violent extremism, and political instability in the sub-region and has contributed greatly to undermining democratic norms and institutions. The resurgence of coups in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger points to the fact that insecurity affects the entrenchment of democratic governance (Williams and Sunjo, 2024). Many of these countries in the West African region and most especially the countries within the Lake Chad Basin belt have been under

attacks of violent extremist terrorist groups (IseOlorunkanmi, Rotimi, Ahmed & Nweke-Love, 2023)

Since its creation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has expanded its mandate to from economic integration to the promotion of democracy and security governance. In 2001, ECOWAS signed the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance aimed at ensuring that member states of the union would not engage in unconstitutional transitions of government, enhancing civilian oversight of the security forces, and maintaining the rule of law (Odubajo 2025). Nonetheless, normative standards by themselves have not been effective without the presence of effective enforcement measures.

There have been barriers to the operationalization of regional security governance. ECOWAS employs sanctions, diplomatic pressure and mediation. While these mechanisms have been successful in some instances, these measures have not been consistent and effective. It has been noted, for example, that sanctions imposed in the event of coups have been ineffective due to their inability to block economic activity, impose travel bans on coup leaders, and enforcement of diplomatic suspension (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024). This underscores the deficiencies in the regional capacity in terms of discouraging interventions in military matters and imposing democratic standards in an effective way. The existence of coup regimes suggests that the instruments of enforcement in the region are frequently inactive, sporadic and reliant on the political determination of the member governments.

The issue of security governance is important as the long-term existence of insecurity erodes the democratic basis. Constant dangers of jihadist violence, banditry, and inter-communal strife focus the state on issues other than democratic deepening, usually resulting in increased executive power and civil liberties at the expense of security. In this case, the political intervention is justified by the military as required to ensure order, which undermines the civilian powers and instils authoritarian behaviours (Bangura, 2025).

More so, states where the violence is very high tended to experience derailed electoral procedures through fear, displacement, and participation. If the citizens feel that democracy fails to ensure their safety or development, they can switch their political loyalty to other structures that guarantee order, even if is against their democratic rights. This trend is obvious in the populations that were affected by the conflict showing the decreasing trust in the institutions of democracy and growing uncertainty regarding civilian rule (Williams and Sunjo, 2024).

According to scholars, the balance between national institutions and regional forms of governance needs to be enhanced in order to provide sustainable democratic consolidation.

The strengthening of democratic norms at the national level, such as the independence of the judiciary, free and fair elections, and accountability mechanisms, should be supported by the regional cooperation, which should focus on preventative diplomacy, effective implementation of the democratic procedures, and comprehensive security policies (Odubajo and Ishola, 2025; Williams and Sunjo, 2024).

Resurgence of Military Coups in West Africa

Military coups have become a frequent occurrence in West Africa. They are instrumental in destabilizing democratic consolidation and integration in the region. Shortly after gaining independence, factors such as weak institutions, elite predation, and disputed access to state resources resulted in coups (Falola, 2022). Even though the democratization waves of 1990s resulted in civilian leadership, institutional frailty, patronage, and weak civil-military ties left behind chronic gaps of intervention (Kieh, 2009). The recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea represents example of this weakness. Military actors defended their interventions as the need to counter the insurgencies of Islamists, and depicts civilian governments as unable to guarantee security (ICG, 2022). Even though it appears that they are fighting the extremists, these takeovers are also a consolidation of military power and the weakening of constitutional control, which is a challenge to democratic standards and regional structures. The less powerful officers who were marginalized by the top elites also used systemic corruption and economic decay to justify their power takeovers (Bayart et al., 2015).

Military intervention is also encouraged by economic and social instability. The lack of trust in the government, low employment, and a weakening state apparatus undermine trust, and authoritarian solutions seem believable (Chilaka & Peter, 2022). In addition to this, the prevalence of systemic corruption undermines civilian regimes, that justifies material and normative reasons for military coups (Maiangwa, 2003). These dynamics are complicated by the modern security environment. Consequently, West African coups are no longer merely episodic crises but structural threats that intersect with regional security realignments. Their persistence accentuates the fragility of democratic institutions, the limits of ECOWAS enforcement, and the risk that security-driven treaties could institutionalize military dominance at the expense of democratic consolidation.

Regional response to Military Coups and the formation of Sahel Security Treaty

Military interventions have been a historical phenomenon in West Africa, and they have compromised democratic consolidations. Africa has experienced more than 200 successful and attempted coups since the 1960s, which are usually instigated by weak institutions, poor leadership, economic crises and power rivalry among the elite (Falola, 2022; Barka and Ncube, 2012). In West Africa, the early 1990s saw the opening of the door to democratisation, which gave hope to civilian rule, however, due to institutional weaknesses, ethnicized clientele systems, and poor civil-military accountability, there was room to allow repeated military incursions (Kieh, 2015). Coups have often been explained with the argument of combating corruption, securing the resources of the state, or the national security threat, but these arguments were often simply a mask of the selfish interests of the elite and the desire to retain military privilege (Bayart et al., 2015; McGowan, 2003).

These coups undermined democracies, legitimacy, and structural weaknesses of West African governments, such as poor judicial checks and balances, a lack of parliamentary oversight of defence, and poor civil-military relationships. The entrenchment of military rule is a direct challenge to ECOWAS as an organization that is concerned with the implementation of democratic norms and constitutional order.

The recent formation of the Sahel Security Treaty, technically known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) attest to how military regimes are consolidating their collaboration to thwart democratic imposition. The AES is a union of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, all under juntas, institutionalizing mutual defense and coordination against perceived threats, especially ECOWAS interventions. This emerges following the failure of the G5 Sahel alliance, which was initially established in 2014, to organize security and development policies between Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania (Al Jazeera, 2023). The AES discourages the motivation toward democratic restoration and produces an indicator of parallel regional alliance in which military dominance over civilian control is produced by establishing a different security structure.

The consequences of this agreement to the democratic consolidation are far-reaching. To begin with, it formalizes the political seclusion of member countries of ECOWAS' constitutional implementation systems. Second, focusing on security instead of democratic accountability, the AES becomes a threat to justify the endless military dictatorship in the name of fighting terrorism (Vines, 2022). Thirdly, it is likely to undermine regional integration and cooperation over transnational threats, which creates friction with Western partners whose involvement is conditional on democratic compliance (Freedom House,

2025). In this way, the return of coups and the advent of the AES signify a decisive conflict in West African politics, namely, the necessity to provide credible security interests with the demand to enforce democratic standards. Without ECOWAS and international actors coming up with mechanisms that would help in balancing security-based requirements with democratic accountability, the region will face a long period during which military power becomes institutionalized, democratic consolidation fails, and the overall mandate of regionalism is undermined.

Theoretical Framework: Collective Defense and Regional Security Dynamics in West Africa

The collective defence theory states that states share security burdens to prevent or react to conflicts which could not be handled by individual states. In this system, any attack on a member is considered as an attack on the rest and this necessitates the mechanism of coordinated response (Organski, 1968; Orakhelashvili, 2011). Applying the theory to the West African situation, it is possible to understand why ECOWAS has been making security interventions, as well as the new Sahel Security Treaty, in which Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are pursuing mutual security against insurgencies and regional isolation.

There are intrinsic limitations to collective defence theory. Alliances are prone to divergent threat perception, coordination problems and conflicting national interests that undermine their overall effectiveness (Claude, 2000). Military responses can also contribute to tensions, especially in fragile democracies whose civilian institutions are weak (Mearsheimer, 1999). Such processes can be observed in the Sahel, where juntas defend military rule as a requirement to combat terrorism at the expense of regional democratic standards and the ECOWAS (Vines, 2022).

To understand the regional interactions of security, politics, and democracy, the study also relies on Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The RSCT theory assumes that security threats are usually concentrated in geographically adjacent areas, forming mutually dependent security relations. Military coups, insurgencies by Islamist groups, and the establishment of the Sahel Security Treaty are examples of such interdependence in West Africa. Events in one state have a direct impact on neighbouring states and disrupt systems of regional governance (Adeleke, 2020). Combining the theory of RSCT with the theory of collective defence, the structure clarifies the reasons why the normative power of ECOWAS is challenged, and how regional security structures can stabilize, as well as destabilize, the process of democratic consolidation.

This unified framework puts the Sahel Security Treaty in the context of the regional security dynamics. It shows that collective defence mechanisms can help to stabilize tactically, but this can only be achieved at the expense of authoritarian practices, as it undermines ECOWAS normative and democratic mandates. Therefore, these overlapping security and political issues are critical to the analysis of the implications of the treaty on democratic consolidation in West Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative, exploratory research design to analyze the consequences of Sahel Security Treaty on the process of democratic consolidation in West Africa. The novelty and complexity of the topic suggested the use of the exploratory nature of the research, which would be capable of capturing the nuanced information and framing of the dynamics. The data were gathered through semi-structured key informant interviews of ten purposely sampled respondents, who are officials of ECOWAS, the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Nigeria, the National Defence headquarters of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution. Triangulation of findings was done with secondary sources, such as policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature in order to add depth to the analysis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The section provides and discusses the fieldwork data collected. The research employed in-depth interviews to obtain information from ten informants who were selected as a result of being part of stakeholders dealing in the regional security and diplomacy. Particularly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ECOWAS, and Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) were the sources of attraction of the participants. More importantly, the serving and retired ambassadors, senior ECOWAS officials as well as the top management personnel of IPCR participated in the research.

Perceived Operational Advantages of the Sahel Security Treaty in Addressing Regional Security Challenges

The establishment of the Sahel Security Treaty has raised much academic debate among the scholars and actors in the regional security system in West Africa. Nonetheless, instead of viewing the security pact as an act of denying ECOWAS, the majority of the participants saw the formation of the security pact as an act of practical reaction to the long-term insecurity and in particular, terrorism, insurgency and cross-border crime. The respondents identified a

number of operational benefits of Sahel Security Treaty as compared to ECOWAS. Most of the respondents mentioned improved concentration, greater velocity, greater coordination, and a shared sense of threats as some of the key perceived advantages of the pact. All these aspects, respondents opined, render the treaty more sensitive to the short-term security realities of the Sahel, and at the same time reveal structural constraints of the ECOWAS structure.

One respondent argued that;

In my view, the Security Treaty provides a laser-focused strategy that ECOWAS cannot match due to its large scope. This pact enables the military regimes to address specific security threats directly, rather than waiting for the sluggish wheels of regional consensus to revolve (R1)

This submission indicates an understanding that the inclusiveness of ECOWAS, as good as it is, is a limitation to its performance in addressing security crises within the region. To a greater extent, the participants also mentioned the speed of decision-making as one of the benefits of the treaty. Among the participants, one of them claims that the treaty cuts down bureaucratic delays to a considerable extent, and their one of the main advantages is the ability to accelerate the process of making decisions, as opposed to the multilayered institutional processes of ECOWAS (R4). In this light, the treaty is perceived to be more fit to a quick response to emerging security threats that require a prompt and coordinated response. The respondents also emphasized the ability of the treaty to improve military coordination and the efficiency of resources. According to one respondent, the Sahel alliance allows close coordination of military activity, better intelligence sharing, and efficient distribution of scarce resources (R2). This operational coherence was considered to be very crucial in dealing with insurgent groups that operated across permeable boundaries within the region.

In addition to the efficiency of operations, shared purpose and mutual assurance among treaty members were also mentioned by the respondents. One of the interviewees emphasized that;

The Sahel Security Treaty is a beautiful thing, as it is full of a common purpose and mutual protection. This confidence is immense to such countries, knowing that they are not alone, that they have friends who are willing to step in at any moment. This agreement guarantees that all perceived threats are met with a coordinated and aggressive defence, which is much more effective than the diffuse response in ECOWAS. During such stressful moments, trust and collaboration are very important (R5).

In general, the respondents saw these benefits as enhancing the Sahel Security Treaty to be more appealing to its member states. Nevertheless, they also recognized that the same

characteristics endanger the promotion of institutional fragmentation in ECOWAS by authorizing parallel security formations, which raises wider concerns about the regional integrity and joint control in West Africa.

Effect of the Sahel Security Treaty on the Legitimacy of ECOWAS.

In interviews, respondents always construed the establishment of the Sahel Security Treaty as a tacit abandonment of trust in ECOWAS as the leading regional security system. The move by Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to form a separate security group was widely regarded as an indication of discontent with the ability of ECOWAS to effectively respond to the specific and urgent security issues facing the Sahel, especially, terrorism, insurgency and cross-border crime. One of the respondents, in his response, says that;

The pact implies that these countries consider the existing mechanisms of the ECOWAS to be inadequate in solving their unique security issues, which are cross-border crime, terrorism, and insurgency. A separate security alliance in my opinion is a vote of disbelief in the capability of the ECOWAS to effectively deal with these threats, which directly sabotages the authority and unity of the organization in the region (R2).

To further lead the argument, the other participant says that the junta decision indicates that there is a major schism in the regional organization. Through this new formation, these nations are in a way proclaiming that they need to act on their own to secure their safety. He also claims that this perception of the weak nature of ECOWAS might make the rest of the member states re-evaluate their dependence on ECOWAS which would further jeopardize the standing and effectiveness of the organization in maintaining regional stability. (R5). In this sense, the treaty is not just an addition to ECOWAS activities but a direct challenge to its applicability. This issue was also strengthened by another top official who cautioned that the treaty is an indication of a greater division in the regional organization. This respondent said that the alliance is an indication that member states are becoming more ready to take action beyond the framework of ECOWAS, a phenomenon that may further weaken the legitimacy and power of the organization as other members will be increasingly tempted to review their degree of dependency on it as a source of security assurance (R7). The institutional implications of this fragmentation were highlighted by other respondents. According to one of the officers of ECOWAS, the rise of an independent security bloc has weakened the capacity of ECOWAS to act as a single actor, whereby Sahel states no longer look to ECOWAS as the primary actor in their security matters (R3). This image, respondents

contended, renders the coordination of collective security ineffective, and it negates the role of ECOWAS as the hub of regional peace and stability.

The response to this is that the Sahel Security Treaty is largely viewed not as a complementary agreement, but as a direct threat to the legitimacy of ECOWAS. By revealing the perceived lack of responsiveness, flexibility and efficacy, the treaty may hasten the process of institutional fragmentation and undermine the role of ECOWAS as the primary security and management institution in West Africa.

The Sahel Security Treaty and its implications on the Democratic Frameworks in West Africa.

There were varied yet mostly negative opinions about the implications of the Sahel Security Treaty on democratic governance in West Africa by the respondents. Although some of the minority admitted that there might be certain security-related advantages, which, in turn, might favour democratic stability, the prevailing fear was that the treaty would only deepen the military regime and undermine democratic principles throughout the region.

Several respondents described the treaty as a “mixed outcome” for democracy. One respondent cautioned that:

The treaty also has the potential to sabotage democratic norms as it will legitimize governments led by the military in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, who have had a recent coup and are, of course, members of the treaty. This may provide a worrying precedent indicating that military coups may be a legitimate way of dealing with security problems, which nullifies the notion of a democratic state (R1).

Nevertheless, the respondent also said that in the long-run, the enhanced security may lead to more favourable circumstances that would facilitate the democratic consolidation, as he added that long-term peace is a precondition of democratic progress (R1). Another respondent echoed this ambivalence and admitted that there is need to have regional cooperation in fighting terrorism and organized crime, but he cautioned that the security arrangements of such a kind are frequently employed to legitimize authoritarian tendencies. The respondent was worried that calls to security and stability might be used to curb dissent, limit civil freedoms, and postpone democratic changes and thus violate human rights and democratic governance (R3).

The other respondents were more unequivocal in their evaluations. One of the respondents contended that;

The Sahel Security Treaty could promote authoritarian governments in the area. Through the unification of these military-led regimes in an alliance that prioritizes security above democratic principles, there is a high likelihood that other military forces in the region might be emboldened to make any attempts at coups. This agreement can be regarded as the validation of military power, and the democratic institutions will find it harder to thrive. It's frightening to think that this may launch a wave of authoritarianism, undoing decades of progress toward democracy in West Africa... (R2)

In this regard, it can be inferred that the treaty risks encouraging further coups and reversing democratic gains made in West Africa over recent decades. Equally, the other respondent cautioned that long-term military collaboration would increase the participation of the military in political affairs, delaying the shift to the civilian government and deteriorating the normative power of ECOWAS to enhance democracy and constitutional governance (R4).

Issues of militarization were prevalent in interviews. Respondents claimed that the existence of more military presence and coordination in the treaty would marginalize the civilian institutions and civil societies (R5). Other respondents referred to the treaty as a direct challenge to democratic participation, citing that it does not include the popular consent and that the security considerations are put above the will of the people. One of the interviewees asserted that:

The formation of Sahel Security is a slapstick to democracy in West Africa. The fact that military leaders who have not been elected by the citizens unite and lock out the entire civilian population is a dangerous initial step towards authoritarianism becoming established in the area. It conveys a shocking message of not needing to meet even the most elementary democratic principles and the respect to popular will where armies can justify their actions by national security concerns as a convenient tool.... (R8)

Regardless of these issues, one of the respondents took a more pragmatic stance and recognized the possibility that extreme security threats would require military coordination in the short term. This perception, however, came with a heavy injunction that this should not be taken to mean that lengthy military regimes and slow democratic transitions are justified. This respondent believes that the top priority should always be restoration of civilian, constitutional governance by conducting credible elections (R10). Based on the general views of the interviewees, one may assume that although the Sahel Security Treaty can be viewed by certain people as a strategic approach towards dealing with insecurity, the general feeling of most of the interviewees is that it is a major threat to democratic systems in West Africa.

Such risks are normalization of military rule, erosion of democratic norms, poor political transitions, and poor regional commitment to democratic rule.

The findings from the study suggest that the Alliance of Sahel States (Sahel Security Treaty) is widely perceived as both a signal and accelerator of institutional crisis in West Africa's regional security architecture. Many of the views assert that the treaty is symptomatic of the diminished ability of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to provide prompt and effective security responses to rising terrorist and insurgent threats in the region. These findings resonate with scholarly evidence that where regional institutions fail to adapt to evolving security challenges, member states increasingly seek alternative alignments outside existing frameworks (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024; Daffeh, 2024).

Participants repeatedly characterized the treaty as exposing ECOWAS's waning legitimacy in matters of security, heightening concerns about fragmentation and institutional decay. Empirical studies confirm that recurrent military interventions, weak enforcement capacity, and governance deficits undermine both national democratic institutions and the coherence of regional order (McGowan, 2006; Noutchie, 2025). The formal withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from ECOWAS illustrates how growing dissatisfaction with regional governance mechanisms can lead to open rupture in institutional solidarity (Reuters, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2023).

The democratic costs of this shift are profound. Respondents voiced concern that the treaty may legitimize prolonged military rule by framing authoritarian governance as the only viable response to insecurity. This aligns with literature showing that military takeovers often lead to democratic backsliding, weakened civil institutions, and diminished political accountability (Acho & Tacham, 2023; Ayoola, Ojo & Kugbayi, 2024). Under such conditions, the risk is that the new security arrangement entrenches a cycle of authoritarian rule rather than offering a genuine pathway back to constitutional democracy.

Concerns over militarization were particularly acute. Without robust safeguards for civilian oversight, human rights, and rule of law, respondents feared that states under the treaty might use security as a pretext to suppress dissent, curtail civil liberties, and marginalize civil society. Scholars warn that when militarized governance becomes institutionalized, it tends to deepen democratic erosion rather than resolve structural instability (Olubiyo & Ayodele, 2024; Daffeh, 2024).

Some respondents, however, admitted that improved security, if managed democratically, might support stabilization and set the stage for democratic recovery. This view reflects theoretical arguments suggesting that basic security is a precondition for meaningful

participation, institutional trust, and the functioning of democratic norms. Nonetheless, most interviewees remained skeptical, arguing that without binding commitments to constitutionalism and civilian rule, the treaty's security-first orientation poses more danger than promise.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the Sahel Security Treaty has affected the validity and democratic leadership of ECOWAS in West Africa. The results show that the establishment of the treaty undermines the authority of ECOWAS since the decision of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to establish a separate security coalition is an indication that they have no trust in the ability of the organization to manage the complex security challenges in the Sahel. This breakaway will embolden other member states to reconsider their reliance on ECOWAS, and this has the tendency to destabilize the region the more. Despite the operational advantages of the Sahel treaty, such as faster decision-making and collective military response, it is evident that centralization of the treaty by the military regimes is a threat to democratic principles, civilian establishments and human rights. However, the enhancement of security and protection of the democratic principles should be balanced. ECOWAS must improve its processes to regain the trust of its member states and hold them accountable and under civilian control. Otherwise, institutional division and solidification of authoritarian tendencies that can undermine decades of democratic success in West Africa will be a threat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the Sahel Security Treaty has operational advantages and grave threats to the security management and democratic consolidation in the West African region. Arising from these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to increase the legitimacy of ECOWAS, safeguard democratic values and customs and ensure that security operations do not impair the governance and human rights.

1. ECOWAS should enhance its coordination of security activities, enhance the capacity to operate promptly and put in place strong actions to discourage unilateral security activities of member countries that can destabilize the unity of the region.
2. The other states in West Africa under democratic rule must follow the principles of democracy and address insurgency and security threats. The recent coup in Guinea-Bissau and the failed coup attempt in Benin make it apparent that the member states should

consolidate a strong democracy that has effective security structures to ensure that the region is stable and the democratization is consolidated.

3. More importantly, the international community must ensure that the improved militarisation and security partnership in the context of the Sahel Security Treaty will not lead to human rights infringement or the persecution of political opposition.

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