

AFRICAN UNION–ECOWAS Collaboration and the Crisis of Democratic Governance: Can Regional Institutions Contain the Resurgence of Coups?

Omotola Adeyoju Ilesanmi

*Gen. LEO Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre,
Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, Nigeria*

West Africa has recently experienced a resurgence of military coups, threatening the fragile progress of democracy in countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These coups, which often emerge amid widespread dissatisfaction with elected governments due to corruption, poor governance, and extensions of presidential terms, have reignited the debate on the ability of regional institutions to uphold democratic governance. The African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have established strong legal and normative frameworks that condemn unconstitutional changes of government, including the Lomé Declaration (2000), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). In response, both organisations have actively worked to defend democratic norms and uphold constitutional order. Despite these efforts, recent coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) reveal gaps between normative commitments and their enforcement. This paper critically explores the effectiveness of AU-ECOWAS collaboration in responding to unconstitutional government changes. Although both institutions strongly commit to democracy, employing both coercive and diplomatic tools such as suspensions, economic sanctions, and diplomatic mediation to ensure a return to constitutional order. These recent coups highlight significant challenges—such as inconsistent enforcement, lengthy mediation processes, and limited influence over military juntas. The study examines the obstacles faced by the African Union and ECOWAS in maintaining democracy across the continent and region. The paper concludes that, while AU and ECOWAS have made notable normative advancements, their capacity to uphold democracy remains constrained by structural and political complexities. It advocates reforms to bolster regional mechanisms, enhance coordination, and balance principled actions with pragmatic diplomacy.

Keywords: African Union (AU), ECOWAS, West Africa, Military coups, Democratic Governance

Introduction

The African continent has witnessed a troubling resurgence of military coups in recent years, especially within the West African subregion (Akinola & Makombe, 2025). Countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which were once budding democracies, have now experienced sudden and popular military coups. Indeed, Africa has been experiencing a worrisome re-emergence of military coups lately, a situation that challenges the post-Cold War narrative of democratic

consolidation and hopes for regional integration on the continent. From 2020 to 2023, not fewer than 7 military coups have taken place on the continent, with 4 in West Africa alone. These developments have challenged the democratic consolidation and progress in Africa since the 2000s, when the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) formalised a policy of “zero tolerance” toward unconstitutional changes of government by adopting legally binding charters and protocols (African Union, 2000;

ECOWAS, 2001). In many of these scenarios, the elected leaders were accused of being corrupt, mismanaging resources, or implementing a sit-tight syndrome through controversial constitutional amendments. As Basedau (2020) argues, military involvement in African politics usually arises from citizens' dissatisfaction with civilian governments and other grievances, which partly explains the popular support that the military juntas have received. Ufuoma & Eseoghene (2023) argue that, in addition to the above factors, in West African francophone countries, the military coups took place due to the rejection of French dominance and presidents who serve as stooges to their colonial masters.

The repeated interruption of constitutional rule is of serious concern to the sustainability of democracy in Africa. As Marinov and Goemans (2014) put it, coups remain the most important factor that orchestrates the downfall of democratic governments. Against this backdrop, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have been brought into the spotlight. In response to military coups and unconstitutional changes of government, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have taken active roles in defending democratic norms. Both organisations have adopted formal mechanisms to prevent and respond to unconstitutional changes of government, including suspensions, economic sanctions, and diplomatic mediation (Hartmann, 2017; Obasi, 2023). Both organisations carry a strong formal commitment to promoting democracy and preventing cases of unconstitutional change of government. Yet, their responses to recent coups experienced have brought to attention both the strengths and weaknesses of regional governance in Africa. Despite some of the most comprehensive regional instruments for democracy promotion in the Global South, West Africa has become the epicentre of contemporary coups. This is worrying because it creates the impression that African regional institutions, despite their strong commitments on paper, are weak in practice—more symbolic than effective, and unable to truly enforce the democratic standards they promote. This is because repeated coups undermine regional stability, development, and the credibility of Africa's governance architecture (Akinola & Makombe, 2025; Obinna, 2023).

The African Union, which was established in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity, has consistently emphasised an approach of “non-indifference” to unconstitutional changes of government. Ani (2016) describes how the foundation of the AU rests on a human security paradigm that obliges the African Union not to be indifferent to human rights abuses. This is why the African Union possesses a more proactive stance that commits to the principle of “non-indifference” to serious human rights violations, war crimes, and unconstitutional government changes. Similarly, ECOWAS, initially founded in 1975 to promote economic integration, has evolved into one of Africa's most proactive regional security actors. Thus, both institutions have consistently positioned themselves as champions of constitutional rule. Back in 2000, the AU made a significant shift with the Constitutive Act and the Lomé Declaration from the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) principle of non-interference in member states' affairs and committed to the principle of “non-indifference”, committing the AU to intervene in cases of serious human rights violations, war crimes, and unconstitutional government changes. Along the same lines, ECOWAS took a firm stand in 2001 with its Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, emphasising its zero tolerance for unconstitutional change in government. Both institutions, in addition to their established policy and legal frameworks on democracy, have not refrained from suspending member states after coups, imposing economic sanctions, or threatening military intervention (African Union, 2007; ECOWAS Commission, 2001; Hartmann, 2017; Obasi, 2023).

However, the persistence of coups raises critical questions about the effectiveness of these interventions. Despite these bold frameworks, the recurrence of coups raises pressing questions about the effectiveness of this AU-ECOWAS collaboration. In some cases, sanctions have failed to compel military juntas to relinquish power; instead, we have seen pockets of citizen support for the military juntas in some countries owing to widespread poverty, insecurity and corruption. For instance, in Mali (2020 and 2021) and Burkina Faso (2022), many people welcomed the military coups, seeing the juntas as a better alternative to civilian governments that had failed to address insecurity, corruption, and everyday economic hardships. In

both cases, growing frustration with poor governance and declining security had already led to protests, making it easier for sections of the public to accept military intervention as a necessary change (Institute for Security Studies, 2024; Monari, 2025). This creates a legitimacy dilemma for AU and ECOWAS: enforcing democracy in contexts where citizens appear to support military rule. In addition, Chigozie and Oyinmiebi (2022) argue that sanctions affect citizens more than the military themselves.

To understand the nature and limitations of AU-ECOWAS responses, this paper draws on Normative Institutionalism—a theoretical framework that views institutions not merely as arenas for strategic interaction but as carriers of shared norms, values, and identities (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 2019). From this perspective, AU and ECOWAS are normative actors whose legitimacy and influence depend on their ability to consistently uphold democratic principles. Their actions reflect a commitment to regional norms, yet their impact is often constrained by political complexities, inconsistent enforcement, and limited leverage over military regimes. This perspective sees bodies like the African Union and ECOWAS as more than just political actors playing power games. At their core, they are meant to represent shared values—especially a collective belief in democracy, constitutional rule, and good governance. In other words, they are not just reacting to crises; they are trying to shape what “good leadership” should look like across the region. But their influence really depends on trust. When they respond firmly and consistently to coups, people are more likely to see them as credible and principled. When their responses are slow, uneven, or seem selective, that trust starts to weaken, and their authority begins to look more symbolic than real. However, the challenge is that these regional organisations operate in a very complex political environment. Member states have different priorities, some leaders are hesitant to act against one another, and military regimes are often resistant to external pressure. So even when these organisations speak strongly or take action, their ability to enforce democratic norms in countries are often limited. This creates a visible gap between what they stand for and what they are able to deliver in practice.

This study critically examines whether AU-ECOWAS collaboration can effectively uphold democracy amid recurrent coups. It examines whether the existing frameworks and mechanisms are sufficient to deter unconstitutional seizure of power, or whether they need significant reform to meet contemporary challenges. The study highlights both the normative advances made by the AU and ECOWAS, as well as the structural and political hindrances that limit their effectiveness. Particular attention is given to case studies from Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Contributing to the scholarship on regionalism, governance and democracy in Africa, the study argues that the future of Africa’s democratic project hinges on the ability of institutions not only to condemn coups but also to address the underlying governance failures that create fertile ground for military takeovers.

Theoretical Framework-Normative Institutionalism

This study uses Normative Institutionalism as a lens to understand how well the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS work together to respond to military coups in West Africa. Instead of seeing institutions simply as rule enforcers or places for political strategy, Normative Institutionalism highlights how institutions are shaped by—and in turn shape—people’s behaviours through shared values, norms, and identities. It emphasises that actors follow rules not just because of material gains, but also because they feel these rules are legitimate and appropriate (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 2019). This approach presents regional organisations not only as political players but as guardians of democratic values. Both the AU and ECOWAS have woven democratic principles into their founding documents. The African Union Constitutive Act condemns the unconstitutional change of government as a founding principle. As Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act clearly provides for the ‘*condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government*’. In addition, Article 30 of the AU Constitutive Act provides that ‘*Governments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union*’ (African Union, 2000). In a similar vein, Article 1(b) of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and

Good Governance explicitly states that ‘*Every accession to power must be made through free, fair and transparent elections*’. While Article 1(c) declares ‘*Zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means*’ (ECOWAS, 2001). Together, the AU and ECOWAS act as enforcers of shared commitments to democracy and stability. Their authority doesn’t just come from power but from their role in upholding agreed-upon rules, like their zero-tolerance stance on coups. In this way, how well AU and ECOWAS collaborate serves as a real-world test of whether member states and regional leaders truly accept these norms as legitimate—or if they ignore them when faced with local political pressures or external interests. At the heart of these frameworks is the belief that democracy is the only legitimate form of government.

Normative Institutionalism suggests that when such beliefs are deeply embraced, compliance happens naturally, even without force (Olsen, 2009). But recent coups reveal how fragile this belief can be, with some responses appearing uneven and uncertain, and some elites following democratic norms only when it suits them and reverting to authoritarian tactics when it doesn’t. So, while AU and ECOWAS have formal ways to respond to coups, their success often depends on how strongly member states share these norms and how determined they are to uphold them. Delays, inconsistent sanctions, or drawn-out negotiations might reveal weaknesses in these shared commitments or doubts about legitimacy. Outside influences and domestic politics can further muddy the waters, making enforcement complicated.

By applying Normative Institutionalism, this study examines the delicate balance AU and ECOWAS must strike between sticking to democratic ideals and managing political realities, and if member States truly see democracy as a core binding value. It looks at whether AU and ECOWAS responses strengthen democracy or, perhaps unintentionally, give military regimes more legitimacy, and whether their frameworks can effectively prevent future coups. The recent coups show that democratic norms haven’t yet fully taken root—there’s a clear gap between what’s written in official agreements and what actually happens on the ground. This perspective helps to understand both the symbolic meaning and practical challenges of regional governance in West Africa.

Historical and Institutional Background

For a clear understanding of the role of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in responding to coups, it is important to revisit their historical foundations and how their mandates have evolved. Neither institutions were originally designed to enforce democracy. Instead, their initial focus was on securing independence, sovereignty, and economic integration. Economic integration was particularly central to their focus, especially in the 1970s. The AU and the ECOWAS both came during the two waves of regional integration, which Iheduru (2016) describes as one where integration was justified on both political and economic grounds. During these times, the elite consensus was that most national markets were too narrow and insufficient to sustain significant economic operations. Hence, integration would make it possible to promote trade with neighbours within the region and pool resources together for investment and efficient industrialisation. The aim was to take advantage of the economies of scale that large markets provide. As a result, the cooperation and integration were seen as important catalysts for the proper utilisation of Africa’s agricultural and industrial potential, and to speed up the growth and development process of the continent, while reducing foreign influence and strengthening the balance of bargaining power in favour of Africa. Over time, however, the frequency of armed conflicts and fragile postcolonial states resulted in the organisations adopting stronger agendas for peace, security, and governance. This shift explains why democracy promotion and coup prevention now sit at the heart of their missions.

Origin of the ECOWAS: Historical Overview

The ECOWAS was founded on May 28, 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, in Nigeria, uniting fifteen West African states under the goal of creating a common market and enhancing regional cooperation (Onwuka, 1980). Its 15 founding member states were Benin, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), Cape Verde (joined 1977 but often listed), Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania (withdrew 2000), Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. For much of its early life, ECOWAS was primarily concerned with trade

liberalisation, customs unions, and economic integration, to eliminate trade barriers and simplify customs procedures from one state to another, according to Adda (2024). However, persistent political instability soon forced the body to expand its role. The 1980s and 1990s were particularly turbulent decades for the West Africa region. With civil wars in Liberia from 1989 to 1997, and 1999 - 2003, as well as in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002 (Ndiaye, 2011). ECOWAS responded with the Economic Community Cease-fire Monitoring Group ECOMOG, to enforce ceasefires, protect civilians and stabilise the countries. The civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone particularly encouraged the evolution of the ECOWAS into a peace and security organisation, with a focus on democracy, good governance, and human rights (Ndiaye, 2024). Crises like these made it impossible for ECOWAS to ignore questions of security and governance.

A turning point came in 1999, when the ECOWAS adopted the *Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* (Human Rights Law in Africa, 2004). This protocol gave the body authority to intervene in its member states during crises. It outlined constitutional principles that must be shared by all member states, instructing that every attainment of power must be through free, fair and transparent elections, with no tolerance for power obtained or maintained by means outside the constitution. The protocol also insists that the armed forces be apolitical, commanded by a legally constituted political authority, with none of the serving members of the armed forces eligible to run for elective political positions. From its past peacekeeping interventions, the ECOWAS has developed a reputation as a guardian of democratic order in West Africa. Two years later, the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 went even further with a “zero tolerance” stance towards unconstitutional changes of government (Basiru et al., 2019). For the first time, a sub-regional body in Africa explicitly declared that it would not accept military coups, electoral fraud, and attempts to alter constitutions for term extensions. ECOWAS, therefore, reinvented itself from an economic bloc into a political and security actor with the authority to suspend or sanction member states that

undermined the democratic norms the organisation stood for.

The African Union: Historical Overview

At the continental level, the African Union was established in 2002 as the successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The OAU, founded on May 25, 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, had championed decolonisation and the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its member states. However, such reluctance to confront authoritarianism or human rights abuses within its member states earned it the reputation of being a “club of dictators (BBC News, 2002). As Murithi (2007) explains, the OAU was perceived to be a club of African Heads of States at the time, and most of them were not legitimately elected representatives of their own citizens. Instead, they were self-appointed dictators, mostly through the use of the instruments of violence, which is why it became difficult for them to interfere in violent conflicts across member states. For instance, Akinyemi (1972) cites the case of the death of certain prisoners premeditated by General Jean Bokassa, the President of the Central African Republic, as well as General Idi Amin of Uganda’s expulsion of 20000 British Asians from his country in a very unfair manner, as instances where the OAU saw no need to even comment on these episodes, with member-states citing the non-interference principle. These limitations of the OAU created the momentum for institutional reform. Furthermore, with the start of the 21st century, and events such as the end of the Cold War, rapid globalisation, and more internal conflicts across the continent, African leaders saw the need to have a stronger body that would be able to address security threats. Thus, the AU was established in 2002, with a wider mandate of peace, security, and governance (Dogah, 2022).

The AU’s Constitutive Act (2000) broke with OAU tradition by introducing the principle of “non-indifference.” This meant that the AU could intervene in the domestic affairs of member states in cases of war crimes, genocide, or unconstitutional changes of government. Building on this foundation, the Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) of 2007 provided a normative framework that explicitly rejected coups

(Engel, 2019). ACDEG specifically stands as one of the most ambitious instruments of its kind, with signatories committed to strengthening democratic institutions, respecting the limits of their terms, and ensuring transparent electoral processes (Nyinevi & Fosu, 2023). These frameworks explicitly perceive coups as illegitimate and impose mandatory sanctions against regimes that seize power by force. According to Wiebusch, Aniekwe, Oette and Vandeginste (2019), the adoption of the ACDEG by the AU has produced a more robust framework of continental accountability for norms related to democratic governance in Africa. The AU also established the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to serve as its decision-making body for conflict prevention and resolution (African Union, 2024). The historical evolution of the ECOWAS and the AU shows that promotion of democracy and preventing coups were not accidental add-ons but intentional adjustments to the realities of African politics. The institutions have moved from economic integration and protecting sovereignty to actual governance enforcement and peace operations.

AU and ECOWAS Normative Frameworks on Democracy

Regional organisations do not act in a vacuum. Their legitimacy and authority are usually grounded in the legal instruments, declarations, and institutional mechanisms that have been negotiated by member states over time. For the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the mandate of promoting democracy is strengthened by a set of rules and principles that clearly condemn unconstitutional changes of government. These frameworks show a conscious attempt to shift Africa away from its historical tolerance of coups to a culture where democratic governance is the minimum standard for political legitimacy. At the continental level, the AU Constitutive Act of 2000 adopted the principle of “non-indifference”, with African states collectively accepting that the AU had a right to intervene when peace, security, or constitutional order were threatened. According to Masuku (2022), the Act was the African version of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) of the United Nations, with the aim of intervening, brokering peace and ending armed conflict, all in a bid to protect vulnerable populations. It was a bold

confirmation that Africa respects ideals of human rights, good governance and democracy, and Article 4(p) of the Act clearly rejects unconstitutional changes of government (Masuku, 2022). This was reinforced by the Lomé Declaration (2000), which clearly defined coups, mercenary interventions, refusal to relinquish power after elections, and manipulation of constitutions for tenure extensions as illegitimate (Nyinevi & Fosu, 2023). The most comprehensive instrument of them all is the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) of 2007. It is often described as Africa’s “democracy constitution” because it commits member states to regular, free, and fair elections, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. It also includes sanctions for regimes that seize power by force (African Union, 2007). Even though not all AU members have ratified it, ACDEG gives a strong normative benchmark for judging political behaviour across the continent.

ECOWAS complements this continental framework with its own instruments. The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) gave ECOWAS a mandate to intervene in crises that threaten peace and stability (Human Rights in Africa, 2004). It is building on this that the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) established clear principles of separation of powers, no tolerance for unconstitutional changes, and rejection of third-term agendas (Basiru, Salawu, Mashud, & Adepoju, 2019). These commitments made ECOWAS one of the most progressive regional blocs in Africa when it comes to democratic governance.

Convergence and Divergence in AU–ECOWAS Norms

However, legal instruments are only as effective as the mechanisms put in place to enforce them. Both AU and ECOWAS rely on various political, diplomatic, and economic tools. For the AU, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) is the main enforcement body (Williams, 2009). From the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002):

“There is hereby established, within the African Union, a Peace and Security

Council which shall be the standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It shall be a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.”

It can suspend a member state from AU activities, as has been done before with Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger after their respective coups. The AU also coordinates sanctions, mediations, and fact-finding missions within the continent (Sturman & Hayatou, 2016). The ECOWAS, however, tends to act faster and have more direct leverage. The Authority of Heads of State and Government, which is its highest decision-making body, often imposes sanctions, travel bans, and trade restrictions on coup leaders (ECOWAS, n.d.). In The Gambia in 2017, ECOWAS ensured the restoration of democracy by the threat of military intervention through its standby force (ECOMOG), which compelled Yahya Jammeh to step down after he refused to concede his defeat in the elections (AfricaNews, 2017). Similarly, ECOWAS played a key role in restoring peace and order in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s through its ECOMOG missions, while the AU later helped to consolidate these benefits at the continental level (Ajala, 2024). According to Gberie (1997), the Sierra Leone crisis and intervention followed Major Johnny Paul Koroma’s overthrow of the elected civilian government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in a military coup. ECOMOG was able to move part of its personnel to recapture Freetown from the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and in February 1998, ECOMOG launched an attack that ousted the military regime and reinstalled Ahmed Tejan Kabbah as president. These mechanisms reveal a dual strategy, whereby the AU provides continental legitimacy and a unified voice, and the ECOWAS applies immediate pressure as the sub-regional enforcer. Recent instances include the AU and ECOWAS condemnation and suspension of Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger after the military coups that took place in these countries.

Although both the AU and ECOWAS uphold a strict “zero tolerance” stance toward military coups, their approaches reveal both alignment and divergence in practice. The AU and ECOWAS

share a foundational commitment to rejecting unconstitutional changes of government, with their democratic frameworks calling for the suspension of states that violate democratic norms such as the ECOWAS Protocol of Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), thereby stressing the importance of electoral legitimacy. In recent years, both institutions have jointly condemned coups and have worked together to impose sanctions and facilitate mediation efforts (International Crisis Group, 2023). However, despite these shared principles between both institutions, the AU and ECOWAS differ in scope and strategy. The AU operates with a continental, more universalist outlook, while ECOWAS adopts a regional, hands-on approach. ECOWAS has frequently acted more swiftly and decisively—sometimes imposing tougher sanctions—due to its immediate stake in West African stability. In contrast, the AU tends to be more cautious, often balancing its responses against the diverse political interests of its broader membership (International Crisis Group, 2023). These differences can lead to friction and weaken the coherence of their joint efforts. A notable example occurred in 2023, when ECOWAS threatened military intervention in Niger following a coup, while the AU hesitated to support the move. This hesitation highlighted the tension between regional autonomy and continental oversight, raising questions about the consistency and unity of Africa’s anti-coup stance (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Challenges of AU-ECOWAS Effectiveness at Upholding Democracy

While the AU and ECOWAS share similar commitments to democracy, their relationship and processes are not always seamless. The following are the most prominent challenges both bodies face in mutually discharging their responsibilities.

Overlapping Mandates and Subsidiarity Problems

The Institute for Security Studies (2025) notes that the African Peace and Security Architecture’s roadmap for 2016–2020 revealed significant gaps in how the African Union and its regional bodies, particularly ECOWAS, understood and applied the principle of subsidiarity. Instead of working seamlessly to complement one another and leverage

their comparative strengths, the lack of a shared vision often undermined effective collaboration. This has caused repeated tensions and limited interaction with them. Ajayi (2008) also argues that although the AU and ECOWAS both have active working relationships with the UN, the relationship between both organisations' interaction with the UN isn't a coordinated one. Normatively, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like the ECOWAS actually act as building blocks of the AU. The principle of subsidiarity holds that the RECs, being closer to the ground, should take the lead in responding to crises within their regions, while the AU provides continental legitimacy, coordination, and support. However, overlapping mandates sometimes create confusion about who should take the lead. The Institute for Security Studies (2025) points out that the principle of subsidiarity remains poorly defined and inconsistently applied, creating a major obstacle to effective collaboration between the African Union and its regional bodies. This lack of clarity often raises the question of which institution should take the lead when crises erupt, particularly in complex situations that demand swift action. The ECOWAS tends to interpret the principle of subsidiarity as the AU delegating primacy to the RECs, giving them full discretionary decision-making authority. On the other hand, the AU approaches it from a perspective in which its central role in continental peace and security still remains intact, with the RECs accountable to it and aligning with its established norms and frameworks in anything they do (ISS Africa, 2025). According to ISS Africa (2025), the differences over subsidiarity between the ECOWAS and the AU are reflected in the 2012/13 disagreements over the transition from the ECOWAS Mission in Mali to the African-led International Support Mission to Mali. In addition, the management and response to the Niger 2023 coup by the AU and ECOWAS have also shown divergent approaches. In responding to the Niger coup of 2023, ECOWAS adopted a hard-line posture, swiftly imposing sweeping sanctions and even threatening military intervention to restore constitutional order. By contrast, the African Union aligned itself with ECOWAS's condemnation but leaned toward a more measured approach, emphasising diplomacy, dialogue, and the need for continental consensus (ISS Africa, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023).

This divergence underscored the tension between ECOWAS's urgency to act decisively and the AU's preference for collective legitimacy and cautious engagement. According to Chacha and Powell (2023), these inconsistent reactions from the AU and ECOWAS have rather undermined efforts to prevent coups and promote democracy instead of enforcing zero tolerance for it. The crisis in Mali, for instance, exposed cracks in coordination between the AU and ECOWAS, as overlapping mandates and inconsistent approaches undermined the credibility of both institutions. The 2023 Niger coup highlighted ongoing tensions between the African Union's cautious, consensus-driven approach and ECOWAS's more immediate, hardline stance. ECOWAS responded quickly with sanctions and threats of military intervention, while the AU only suspended Niger weeks later. Scholars note that these inconsistencies weaken the deterrent effect of regional measures, embolden juntas that exploit divisions, and expose the lack of a clear division of labour between the two institutions. As seen in Mali and Niger, fragmented responses undermine the credibility of sanctions, delay collective action, and complicate efforts to enforce democratic norms across West Africa (Chacha & Powell, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023; Maluleke & Bennett, 2022).

Selective Enforcement of Democratic Norms

In spite of the plethora of AU and ECOWAS democratic norms, the responses of both institutions to infringements have not been even. The gap between principle and practice remains wide, as both the AU and ECOWAS face accusations of selective enforcement. For example, both bodies can be quick to sanction juntas, yet often remain silent when incumbents manipulate constitutions to extend their stay in power. Coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022) triggered suspensions and sanctions, yet comparable democratic erosions through constitutional manipulations and tenure extension in Côte d'Ivoire (2020) and Togo (2019) received muted or no response. This double standard undermines the credibility of these bodies, as ordinary citizens perceive them to be defending incumbents rather than democratic principles (Muhammed, 2022). Nebo (2023), argues that the AU and ECOWAS are always quick to denounce military coups, quickly and openly, however, they

show little or no concern to constitutional or institutional coups that usually provoke popular uprisings even more. Selective enforcement significantly undermines the credibility of institutions such as the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS, as member states often perceive their actions to be influenced by geopolitical alliances, regime solidarity, or the strategic interests of dominant powers, resulting in the application of double standards (Omobowale & Oni, 2022). Responding to the AU and ECOWAS' condemnation, sanctions, and military ultimatum action against the military junta's overthrow of the democratically elected President Mohammed Bazoum of Niger in 2023, former President George Weah of Liberia stated that, *"as long as ECOWAS tolerates institutional coups that allow lifetime presidencies, there will always be military coups...and we cannot condemn military coups when we do not condemn those who carry out institutional coups"* (Obinna, 2023).

While the AU and ECOWAS condemn military coups, the ones who commit institutional or constitutional coups keep going off the hook, enjoying impunity. Ironically, some of these leaders have served as Chairperson for AU and ECOWAS, with others being appointed to strategic positions (Nebo, 2023). For example, the Chairperson of the AU from February 2023 to February 2024, President Azali Assoumani of the Comoros, recently extended the term limit in his country to allow him to run for two more five-year terms (Human Rights Foundation, 2023). Similarly, the current president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obi Mbasogo, who has ruled from 1979 to date and was once described as the world's longest serving president by Al Jazeera, served as AU Chairperson from January 2011 to January 2012, with records of authoritarian rule, marked by alleged rights abuses and corruption. He has elevated his son as Vice President of Equatorial Guinea and is likely to continue the dynasty (African news, 2024).

Resource Constraints and Dependence on External Actors

One of the most fundamental challenges faced by the AU and ECOWAS in their collaboration is the limited financial and logistical capacity of both institutions. Financial and logistical constraints constrain their level of enforcement. Both bodies

struggle with resource limitations, often relying on external partners like the European Union or the United Nations to finance their interventions (Bakwesegha, 2025; Sperling, 2011). Keeping peace and enforcing sanctions usually require resources that the AU and ECOWAS do not always have (Ajayi, 2008). Similarly, the AU's Peace and Security Council often depends on external funding from the European Union or the United Nations to sustain its operations. This dependence weakens the credibility of its enforcement, as juntas may gamble on donor fatigue or exploit geopolitical rivalries to resist the pressure coming against them. In Niger in 2023, the ECOWAS threatened military intervention to restore President Mohamed Bazoum, yet the high costs of such an operation, and the lack of guaranteed AU and international financial backing, made the threat difficult to effect, coupled with other factors such as divisions among member states, public resistance to external intervention, and the risk of worsening instability in the already fragile Sahel (Lawal, 2023).

Popular Support for Military Rule

There is also the challenge of popular legitimacy. In several countries, coups have been welcomed even by populations who are not well disposed to corrupt civilian governments. When this happens, the AU and the ECOWAS sanctions seem to be out of touch with local realities, thereby making enforcement politically costly and less effective. Unlike in the Cold War era, when coups were often resisted by citizens, recent juntas have sometimes been greeted with street celebrations. Onyejekwe (2024) gives a more detailed explanation of this situation. The challenge is that the form of democracy practised in Africa is one characterised by widespread electoral malpractices and producing leaders lacking popular legitimacy. Scholars have described the elections in Africa as hollow exercises that produced dictators with the title of "democrats", through undemocratic electoral processes as a means to "legitimise" their dictatorship. As a result, there has been increasing popularity and nostalgia for the return of military regimes, particularly in West Africa. Several countries have experienced military coups in Africa in the past five years, with the new military juntas welcomed with enthusiasm in their respective countries and becoming "causes célèbres" in these

African countries (Onyejekwe, 2024). These incessant coups and the reactions that have followed have sent shock waves to other African leaders, with reports of some African presidents reshuffling their military cabinets, cracking down on dissent, and muzzling the press in a bid to avert military coups in their respective countries (Onyejekwe, 2024). In Burkina, the 2022 military coup was welcomed by some segments of the population who had gotten tired of the civilian government's failure to contain jihadist violence (Javierre, 2023). When coups have a dose of public legitimacy, sanctions from the AU and ECOWAS appear to contradict the popular will. As a result, they risk being portrayed as outsiders helping discredited elites, instead of defenders of democracy. This legitimacy crisis weakens the moral force of the interventions and mediation efforts of the AU and ECOWAS.

Socio-Economic Impact of AU-ECOWAS Sanctions

AU-ECOWAS responses are often undermined by the harsh socio-economic realities facing West African citizens. Sanctions intended to pressure juntas often inflict hardship on ordinary populations, resulting in increased inflation and food prices (Annafa, Tagowa, & Maikomo, 2025). In Mali, regional sanctions made inflation and shortages worse, causing resentment against ECOWAS rather than the military rulers (France 24, 2022). This backlash allowed the junta to frame themselves as defenders of national sovereignty against external actors. According to Onyejekwe (2024), ECOWAS sanctions are imposed in a bid to pressure military leaders to return to civilian rule through a democratic transition and serve as a deterrence for future coups. The objective is to isolate military regimes and exert economic pressure on them by freezing their financial assets. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, for instance, ECOWAS closed land and air borders to the affected countries (except for humanitarian supplies) and suspended financial aid coming from ECOWAS institutions. However, these sanctions and economic pressure most times backfire, compelling regional bodies to ease sanctions prematurely. Reactions from military leaders and citizens to the sanctions imposed by the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS often compel these organisations to lift sanctions prematurely, even in

the absence of meaningful dialogue. This pattern was evident in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, where the countries effectively demonstrated their ability to operate independently of ECOWAS's authority. Such developments reveal a weakened stance by these regional bodies against coups and risk indirectly legitimising military takeovers. Scholars argue that without sanctions that carry real deterrent weight, military leaders are less likely to commit to a clear and credible timeline for restoring civilian rule (Onyejekwe, 2024).

Rethinking Regional Governance and Reform Options

The recurrence of coups across West Africa has clearly exposed the limitations of current AU-ECOWAS frameworks. Yet, the persistence of these institutions themselves, despite their shortcomings, shows that reform, rather than abandonment, is the best path forward (Good Governance Africa, 2024; ISS Africa, 2024). Both organisations still possess the normative legitimacy to shape the political order in Africa. What is needed, however, is greater coherence, credibility, and capacity. The following reform options, therefore, offer practical steps to strengthen their role in upholding democracy.

Strengthening Institutional Cooperation

One of the most urgent reforms is clarifying the division of labour between the AU and ECOWAS. The principle of subsidiarity is meant to guide interventions: ECOWAS, as the sub-regional body, should lead initial responses, while the AU should provide continental endorsement and wider legitimacy. However, in practice, confusion has often delayed or weakened these responses. To address this, both organisations can establish joint rapid-response mechanisms for instances of unconstitutional changes of government. This would include pre-agreed protocols on sanctions, timelines for mediation, and potential deployments for peacekeeping duties. A standing AU–ECOWAS crisis task force could ensure coordination rather than duplication, thereby enabling quicker and more unified responses.

Improving Legitimacy and Credibility

For reforms to succeed, both institutions must confront the prevalent perception of double standards. Citizens often view AU and ECOWAS as defending incumbents rather than democracy itself (Nebo, 2023; Afolabi, 2023). To counter this, enforcement must extend not only to military juntas but also to civilian leaders who manipulate constitutions or suppress opposition. The reluctance to confront “third-termism” has been one of the most damaging gaps in credibility that both institutions have. An independent mechanism for democracy monitoring, modelled on the African Peer Review Mechanism, could regularly assess the governance performance in member states. Publishing these assessments could increase transparency and reduce accusations of bias. By applying their standards consistently, the AU and ECOWAS can rebuild public trust and weaken the popular legitimacy of coups.

Achieving Financial Independence

A major structural weakness of the AU-ECOWAS collaboration is overreliance on external donors, which often dictates the scope and sustainability of interventions. The AU’s 0.2% import levy, which is meant to finance continental operations, has been unevenly implemented. ECOWAS, too, relies on contributions from member states that are often delayed or incomplete (African Union, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2023). To gain independence, both organisations need to fully operationalise these financing mechanisms, tying them to obligations of membership for the constituent states. In ECOWAS, this could include more effective collection of the ECOWAS community levy. For the AU, it could also mean universal compliance with the import levy. These would ensure predictable resources for peace and democracy initiatives, while also shielding institutions from accusations of serving foreign interests.

Addressing Root Causes of Coups

Coups do not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, they are usually symptoms of deeper governance and security crises. For reforms to be sustainable, AU and ECOWAS must address these root causes rather than only responding to the symptoms. Both institutions must support credible electoral management bodies, independent judiciaries, and

stronger parliaments that would help prevent electoral disputes that often trigger coups. Security stabilisation is another way. In Burkina Faso and Mali, the inability of civilian governments to contain jihadist violence is a key factor that created a fertile ground for a coup. A joint AU–ECOWAS stabilisation initiative, with contributions from the African Standby Force, could enhance security credibility across its member states.

Building Inclusive Mediation and Dialogue

Finally, reform should also involve inclusive mediation strategies. Past negotiations have often been elite-driven, thus usually sidelining civil society, women’s groups, youth movements, and local leaders. This exclusion weakens legitimacy and narrows the scope of possible solutions proffered. In Guinea and Burkina Faso, for example, mediation efforts might have been more effective if popular movements that supported the coups were brought into dialogue. AU–ECOWAS mediation frameworks should work towards the involvement of civil society coalitions, women’s groups, and youth representatives. This would not only widen legitimacy but also ensure that any transition roadmap reflects the priority of citizens, rather than elite bargains.

Conclusion

The uneven record of the interventions from the AU and ECOWAS in joint democratic consolidation efforts in Africa is a clear representation of the reality that having strong norms on paper does not always translate into effective action on the ground. The AU and ECOWAS have both demonstrated capacity to act decisively, but they have also hesitated a number of times, and were inconsistent in some others, especially when powerful member states are involved or when popular support for juntas complicates their legitimacy. All these challenges are interconnected, and each reduces the effectiveness of AU-ECOWAS collaboration, allowing juntas to withstand regional pressure. Case studies from Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger demonstrate that coups do not occur in isolation but thrive where regional institutions lack the capacity, unity, or legitimacy to enforce democratic norms. Reforms will not be easy. They require political will from member states that are

themselves often unstable when it comes to strict enforcement, and are also often complicit in tenure extension practices of incumbents. By strengthening synergy, ensuring consistency, securing financial independence, addressing root causes, and widening dialogue, both institutions can better fulfil their promise as guardians of democracy in Africa.

References

- Adda, S. M. (2024). Implementation of ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme and its influence on ECOWAS GDP. *Pan African University - Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Science*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4832295>.
- AfricaNews. (2017, January 18). ECOWAS okays military intervention in Gambia, joint troops stationed at the border. <https://www.africanews.com/2017/01/18/ecowas-okays-military-intervention-in-gambia-joint-troop-stationed-at-border/>.
- AfricaNews. (2021, September 6). Guineans celebrate the removal of Alpha Conde by the military. <https://www.africanews.com/2021/09/06/guineans-celebrate-removal-of-alpha-conde-by-the-military/>.
- Africanews. (2024, August). Equatorial Guinea's president elevates son to Vice President. <https://www.africanews.com/Equatorial%20Guinea%20president%20elevates%20son%20to%20Vice%20President%20%20Africanews>.
- African Union. (2000). Constitutive Act. <https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact-en.pdf>.
- African Union. (2002). Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. Addis Ababa: African Union. <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-relating-establishment-peace-and-security-council.pdf>.
- African Union. (2007). *African charter on democracy, elections and governance*. <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-democracy-elections-and-governance>.
- African Union. (2010). *Report on the implementation of the African Union 0.2% levy on imports*. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38503-doc-report_on_the_implementation_of_the_au_levy.pdf.
- African Union. (2024). *The peace and security council*. <https://au.int/en/psc>.
- Afolabi, M. M. (2023). The paradox of regional intervention: ECOWAS and the politics of democratic legitimacy in West Africa. *African Journal of Political Science*, 18(2), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajps.v18i2.4>.
- Ajala, O. (2024, April 2). Ecowas: 6 steps the leaders can take to restore stability and growth in West Africa. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/ecowas-6-steps-the-leaders-can-take-to-restore-stability-and-growth-in-west-africa-233997>.
- Ajayi, T. (2008). The UN, the AU and ECOWAS: A triangle for peace and security in West Africa? *FES Briefing Paper*. <https://share.google/NaJgV6veQ8ZAKvMwC>.
- Akinola, A. O., & Makombe, R. (2025). Rethinking the resurgence of military coups in Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 60(5).
- Akinola, R., & Makombe, T. (2025). Democracy interrupted: Military coups and political transitions in West Africa. *African Governance Review*.
- Akinyemi, B. (1972). The Organization of African Unity and the concept of non-interference in international affairs of member-states. *British Yearbook of International Law*, 46, 393.
- Annafa, E. F., Tagowa, W. N., & Maikomo, J. M. (2025). The efficacy of ECOWAS sanctions on member states. *International Journal of Innovative Legal & Political Studies*, 13(2), 110–114.
- Ani, N. C. (2016). The African Union non-indifference stance: Lessons from Sudan and Libya. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 6(2), 1–22.
- Bakwesegha, M. (2025). Overcoming challenges to reform the African Union. *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies*. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/overcoming-challenges-to-implement-the-african-unions-reforms/>.
- Basedau, M. (2020). The logic of military intervention in African politics. *Journal of African Studies*, 58(3), 245–263.
- Basiru, A. S., Salawu, Mashud, L. A., & Adepoju, A. (2019). The 2001 ECOWAS supplementary protocol on democracy in light of recent

- developments in the subregion of Africa. *International Social Science Review*, 95(3), 1–24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26872107>.
- BBC News. (2022, November 27). Equatorial Guinea: World's longest-serving president to continue 43-year rule. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63770351>.
- BBC News. (2002, July 9). *African Union replaces dictators' club*. BBC News. <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2115736.stm>.
- Cameroon News Agency. (2023, August 14). Niger: Laurent Gbagbo breaks silence, says most ECOWAS leaders are constitutional coup plotters. Cameroon News Agency. <https://cameroonnewsagency.com/niger-laurent-gbagbo-breaks-silence-says-mostecowas-leaders-are-constitutional-coup-plotters/>.
- Chacha, M., & Powell, J. (2023). The credibility crisis of African regional organizations in the face of coups. *Democracy in Africa*. <https://democracyinafrica.org/the-credibility-crisis-of-african-regional-organizations-in-the-face-of-coups/>.
- Chigozie, C. F., & Oyinmiebi, P. T. (2022). Resurgence of military coups in West Africa: Implications for ECOWAS. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5(2), 52–64.
- Dogah, D. (2022). From the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU): Regionalism, international organization and institutional change in Africa. *Simon Fraser University*.
- ECOWAS. (2001). ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance • Page 1 • African Human Rights CLA 2.0.
- ECOWAS. (n.d.). Authority of heads of state. <https://www.ecowas.int/authority-of-heads-of-states/>.
- Engel, U. (2019). The 2007 African charter on democracy, elections and governance: Trying to make sense of the late ratification of the African charter and non-implementation of its compliance mechanism. *Africa Spectrum*, 54(2), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002039719890185>.
- France 24. (2022, January 24). Hit by sanctions, Mali faces price hikes and shortages of essential goods. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220124-hit-by-sanctions-mali-faces-price-hikes-and-shortages-of-essential-goods>.
- Gberie, L. (1997). The May 25 Coup d'Etat in Sierra Leone: A Militarist Revolt? *Africa Development*, 22(3/4), 161–178. Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24486736>.
- Good Governance Africa. (2024, February 5). Coups in West Africa: A critical analysis of AU and ECOWAS responses. <https://gga.org/coups-in-west-africa-a-critical-analysis-of-au-and-ecowas-responses/>.
- Hartmann, C. (2017). ECOWAS and the restoration of democracy in the Gambia. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(1), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971705200104>.
- Human Rights Foundation. (2023). Comoros leader says wins vote to extend presidential term limits. <https://hrf.org/latest/comoros-leader-says-wins-vote-to-extend-presidential-term-limits/>.
- Human Rights Law in Africa. (2004). Protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security. *Human Rights Law in Africa Online*, 1(1), 653–656.
- Iheduru, O. C. (2016). The 'New' ECOWAS: Implications for the study of regional integration. In T. M. Shaw, J. A. Grant and S. Cornelissen (Eds.), *The Ashgate research companion to regionalisms*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613499>.
- Institute for Security Studies. (2024). Rethinking responses to coups in West Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/rethinking-responses-to-coups-in-west-africa>.
- Institute for Security Studies. (2024). *Burkina Faso: Progress and problems after two years of transition*. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/burkina-faso-progress-and-problems-after-two-years-of-transition>.
- International Crisis Group. (2022). Mali: Staying engaged despite souring relations. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/mali/mali-staying-engaged-despite-souring-relations>.

- International Crisis Group. (2023). West Africa: Managing the fallout of coups. Brussels: <https://www.crisisgroup.com>.
- International Crisis Group. (2023). Saving ECOWAS: How to restore West Africa's regional bloc. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/saving-ecowas-how-restore-west-africas-regional-bloc>.
- ISS Africa. (2025). Enhancing PSC-ECOWAS collaboration to counteract challenges. *PSC Insights*. <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/enhancing-psc-ecowas-collaboration-to-counteract-challenges>.
- Javierre, M. (2023, January 4). Burkina Faso: A 2022 marked by coups d'état. <https://www.democratic-erosion.com/2023/01/04/burkina-faso-a-2022-marked-by-coups-detat/>.
- Lawal, S. B. (2023, August 6). Niger coup: Divisions as ECOWAS military threat fails to play out. *Aljazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/6/niger-coup-divisions-as-ecowas-military-threat-fails-to-play-out>.
- Maluleke, L., & Bennett, M. (2022). Coups in West Africa – a critical analysis of AU and ECOWAS responses. *Good Governance Africa*. <https://gga.org/coups-in-west-africa-a-critical-analysis-of-au-and-ecowas-responses/>.
- March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (1989). *Rediscovering institutions: The organizational basis of politics*. Free Press.
- Marinov, N., & Goemans, H. (2014). Coups and democracy. *British Journal of Political Science*, 44(4), 799–825.
- Masuku, S. (2022). The AU's constitutive act: Contextual threats and its implementation in modern-day Africa. *Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development*, 751–761. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92474-4_55.
- Monari, K. (2025). *Crisis of trust and military takeovers in West Africa: Analyzing factors and citizen reactions in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger*. The Thinker.
- Muhammed, H. (2022). The resurgence of military coups in Africa and the role of the African Union (AU). *Socialscientia: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 7(3).
- Murithi, T. (2007). Reflections on leadership: From the OAU to the AU. *Conflict Trends*, 2, 9–14. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC15972>.
- Ndiaye, B. (2011). Conflicts and crises in West Africa: Internal and international dimensions. *Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa*. <https://share.google/t83h7trgfigHmZmdl>.
- Ndiaye, B. (2024). A shift of the collective security architecture in West Africa. <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/collective-security-west-africa-ecowas/>.
- Nebo, A. M. (2023). By double standards, the African Union, and ECOWAS threaten the continent's political stability. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 7(10), 179–190.
- Nyinevi, C., & Fosu, R. (2023). The African Union's prohibition of unconstitutional changes of government: An uneasy choice between fidelity to principle and pragmatism. *African Security*, 16(1), 95–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2023.2195748>.
- Obasi, N. (2023). ECOWAS, Nigeria and the Niger coup sanctions: Time to recalibrate. *International Crisis Group*, 5.
- Obasi, N. (2023). ECOWAS and the Niger crisis: Between diplomacy and deterrence. *West African Policy Briefs*, 12(2), 34–47.
- Obinna, E. (2023, August 6). African leaders must lead right, to end coups. https://businessday.ng/politics/article/african-leaders-must-lead-right-to-end-coups/#google_vignette.
- Omobowale, A. O., & Oni, E. O. (2022). Regional organisations and the enforcement of democratic norms in Africa. *African Journal of Political Science*, 26(1), 45–63.
- Olsen, J. P. (2009). Change and continuity: An institutional approach to institutions of democratic government. *European Political Science Review*, 1(1), 3–32.
- Onwuka, R. I. (1980). The ECOWAS treaty: Inching towards implementation. *The World Today*, 36(2), 52–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40395168>.
- Onyejekwe, O. (2024). ECOWAS misguided sanctions: Why good governance matters. *African Centre for Governance and Economic Management*. <https://acgemafrica.org/ecowas->

misguided-sanctions-why-good-governance-matters/.

- Peters, B. G. (2019). *Institutional theory in political science: The new institutionalism* (4th ed.). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sperling, S. (2011). ECOWAS in Crisis Mode: Strengths and limits of regional security policy in West Africa. *Regional Security Policy in West Africa*.
<https://share.google/pdCghUHoJicZsM39W>.
- Sturman, K., & Hayatou, A. (2016). The Peace and Security Council of the African Union: From design to reality. In U. Engel & J. Gomes Porto (Eds.), *Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms, Institutionalizing Solutions*, 67–82. Routledge.
- Ufuoma, O., & Eseoghene, A. (2023). Colonial legacies and the resurgence of military coups in francophone West Africa. *Journal of African Governance Studies*, 18(2), 145–162.
- Wiebusch, M., Aniekwe, C. C., Oette, L., & Vandeginste, S. (2019). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: Past, present and future. *Journal of African Law*, 63(S1), 9–38
- Williams, P. D. (2009). The Peace and Security Council of the African Union: evaluating an embryonic international institution. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47(4), 603–626. doi:10.1017/S0022278X09990048.