



## Challenges of ECOWAS on Governance and Democratic Consolidation in West Africa Sub-Region

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### Abstract

*In the wake of ECOWAS 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in May 2025, it has become pertinent to ask; how has the organization fared in its goal of promoting good governance and democratization within its member countries? This paper sets out to interrogate this issue, in the light of claims by ECOWAS to have made efforts at consolidating democracy in the subregion. This is even more urgent because of the challenges posed to ECOWAS and its operating philosophy by coup plotters who have seized power in Burkina F, Faso, Mali and Niger and the inability of ECOWAS to reign them in. They present a formidable threat to ECOWAS, whom they accuse of weakness in the face of external threats and of being undemocratic. This research adopted the qualitative approach to analyze predominantly secondary data used in this study. The paper also employed the theory of functionalism in interrogating the claims and counter claims of both ECOWAS and the emerging Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to democracy, authenticity and effective representation of the people of West Africa. This paper argues that democracy and representation must go beyond conforming to extant structures and international expectations to represent the desires and aspirations of the people. It argues further that ECOWAS leaders do not have the moral right to impose sanctions on the coup plotters and their governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger when they can hardly address the governance crisis in their own states. This paper recommends that ECOWAS leaders must have the 'will power' to lead by example in enforcing democratic norms and principles. ECOWAS must also employ dialogue, diplomacy and tacit enforcement of rules rather than threat, in navigating the current crisis facing the sub regional block, if it hopes to succeed.*

**Keywords:** ECOWAS, democratic consolidation, democratic principles, good governance and democracy

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### 1. Introduction

The pursuit of good governance and democratic consolidation in West African sub-region has been one of the focal points of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since the early 90s. Originally, ECOWAS was established as an economic union in West Africa to promote economic co-operation among its member states. However, the inevitable link between economic growth and

stability within the sub-region made it necessary for ECOWAS to embrace the promotion of good governance and the pursuit of democratic consolidation as part of its mandate (Nwagbo & Ofike, 2025; Chilaka et al., 2023). It is believed that the promotion of good governance and the practice of democracy in West Africa will lay the foundation for economic cooperation of ECOWAS member states. As a result, ECOWAS has relentlessly

championed the course of good governance and the pursuit of democratic consolidation within the African Sub-region (Gwaza, 2016). This has not been without some challenges.

In fact, ECOWAS has faced formidable challenges in its determination to entrench good governance and the promotion of democratic values among its member states (Ademola, 2025). The sub-regional body is currently witnessing across its member states, a rising wave of coup d'états that can be compared to what obtained within the 1960s (Chilaka et al., 2023). Some scholars have opined that, the revival of coups in West Africa from the period of 2010-2023, is a testimony that West African States are more prone to "Coups than democratic rule" (e.g Chilaka et al., 2025, p.144). This remains arguable, however resurgence of coups in West Africa is attributable to factors such as poor governance, systemic corruption, insecurity, election rigging, and Human rights violations among others. Facts show that these political and economic crimes are committed by political leader of member states of ECOWAS who are still the leaders of ECOWAS clamoring for good governance and democratic consolidation in West Africa under the platform of ECOWAS (Chilaka & Onyinmiebi, 2022; Chilaka et al, 2023). It is this contradiction, some scholars argue, that has led to the rising wave of coups in West Africa (Ojo, 2012; Olusanjo, 2025).

An attempt by ECOWAS to sanction the military juntas in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso in line with its 2001 Supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance has led to the exit of the three West African States from ECOWAS (Bi Africa Contributor, 2025, August 16). It equally resulted to the formation of a new sub-regional body in the Sahel region called Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by the three Francophone ECOWAS members. This scenario presents one of the

most formidable challenges facing ECOWAS in its effort toward good governance and the consolidation of democracy in West Africa. This paper examines the challenges of ECOWAS on good governance and democratic consolidation in West African sub-region in the light of the above challenges.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several scholars in the past hard empirically looked at the role of ECOWAS in promoting good governance and democratic consideration in West African sub-region. Some of these works are as follows:

AGWU and Gilbert (2019) using qualitative research based on a study of West and Central African regions investigated the challenge of ECOWAS toward enhancing regional and sub-regional co-operations in Africa. Guided by the rational theory of neo-liberalism, they argued that through international co-operation and collaboration, ECOWAS like Central Africa region can address the challenge of conflicts and terrorism through the promotion of regional and economic development in West Africa. Their findings show that there exist opportunities and prospects for economic growth and development in West Africa through careful intervention and trade co-operation.

Sesay (2000) using a qualitative study of ECOWAS intervention in Liberia and Sierre Leone observed that regional peace enforcement is vital for the prevention of instability and regional conflict in west Africa. In their own work, Omotola and Saliu (2010) investigated the role of ECOWAS in democratic consolidation through election monitoring and observation. Using the case studies of Niger and Guinea, they posited that ECOWAS has been a strong force in the promotion of constitutional order in West African sub-region.

Akpuru-Aja (2007) using the case studies of ECOWAS- ECOMOG Peace Support in Liberia and Sierra Leone emphasized the need for critical interventions of ECOWAS as a sub-regional political and economic union. His findings showed that ECOWAS had promoted peace and stability in the past through very critical and necessary intervention in those two countries. He recommended a top-down approach to peacekeeping and peace building as vital planks of promoting good governance and democratic values in West Africa. In his own work, Ofofiele (2026) investigated the role of ECOWAS toward the promotion of peace and sustainable development in West Africa. He adopted a qualitative research design based on secondary mode of data collection. Adopting the theory of regionalism and neo-functionalism and a content analytical approach, his study indicated that ECOWAS from 1990s-2024 had made tremendous contributions toward regional peace, stability and development through various mechanisms of peaceful resolution of regional conflict and the promotion of democratic norms.

There are also empirical studies that canvas for the promotion of good governance through trade and arms control as pragmatic options for ECOWAS in its bid toward good governance and democratic consolidation in West Africa sub-region. Nworgu and Nwankwo (2014) in their qualitative studies investigated the challenges of the inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapon (SALWS) in Africa and West African Subregion. Using the democratic peace theory, they argue that ECOWAS member states and indeed all the African Countries with the support of the international Community must use the instrument of good governance and the genuine practice of democracy internally to discourage the spread of small Arms and light weapon within the shores of African continent. Using the Nigeria case, the scholars concluded that Arms control are

no longer enough in the promoting of regional peace and security in Africa and West Africa sub-region.

In their own work, Okolie and Okoli (2014) investigated the challenges of ECOWAS in the area of financial globalization and promotion of monetary union in the sub-region. As a functionalist strategy, they argue that ECOWAS regional integration strategies needs a fine-tuning due to the challenge of financial globalization which affects the economic autonomy of member states. Using the Complex Interdependence Theory and a qualitative description analytical approach, they advocated that ECOWAS should show strong political will in its economic reforms and good governance as necessary sub-structure for regional peace, security and political stability in the West Africa sub-region. Abdoukabir (2024) investigated the effort of ECOWAS in democratic consolidation. Using the case of Gambia, a case study design and triangular data collection. The study finds that the political impasse in the Gambia in 2016 was a product of institutional weakness of the electoral body in that country. The timely intervention of ECOWAS in that case through mediation & preventive diplomacy was commended by the researcher. The study concluded that institutional reforms, national unity and improved security sector reforms are necessary for the consolidation of democracy in West Africa.

These empirical reviews, though beneficial to this work in several ways, did not however deal with the current challenge to ECOWAS involving the resurgence of coups in the sub-region and the withdrawal of the Sahel states from the regional body with the other associated consequences, and these needs to be investigated.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, we adopted a qualitative research design. The study relied heavily

on secondary method of data collection. Relevant textbooks, Journal sources, on line sources, newspaper, magazine and ECOWAS treaties and protocol were made use of. We equally adopted the content analytical method to interpret our data.

**Conceptual Explanation; Democracy, democratization and democratic consolidation.**

The concept of democracy has been defined by several scholars. The most popular definition of it was given by Abraham Lincoln as “the government of the people by the people and for the people” (Guaba, 2009, p. 472). In his own words, Guaba (2009) sees democracy “as a form of government where the ultimate authority of government is vested in the ordinary people so that public policy is made to conform to the will of the people and to serve the interest of the people” (p. 472). Boutros - Ghali (1995) in Gwaza (2016) sees democracy as “a system of government which embodies in a variety of institutions and mechanisms the ideal of political power based on the will of the people” (p.5). This means that democracy as a form of government involves the active participation of the people in government and must serve the interest of majority of the people for it to thrive. This is why Nwagbo and ofike (2025) observe that in a democracy, the right and responsibility of the state and citizens are guaranteed. Chilaka et al., (2023) highlighted some of the common features of democracy to include, popular participation, constitutionalism, protection of human rights and rule of law among others.

Democratization is the process of entrenching the process of democracy in any political system. It involves the process of deepening democracy and the responsibility of elected representatives in a democracy (Chilaka et al., 2023). It involves “both the theory and practice of democracy” (p.140).

Mainwaring (1989) sees democratization as “a movement toward democracy” (p.6). He further opined that it is a process of deepening the culture and norms of democracy to promote the workings of democracy in any political system.

Meanwhile, the concept of democratic consolidation has been explained by several scholars in various ways. Democracy is said to be consolidated in any political system when:

*None of the major political actors, parties or organized interests, forces or institutions consider that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision-makers (Linz, 1985 in Ebegbulem, 2017, P. 4).*

Ebegbulem (2017) in his own exact words affirms that it is “an affirmation and strengthening of certain institutions, such as the electoral system, vibrant political parties, judicial independence and respect for human rights and rule of law” (P.4). He added that “real democratic consolidation requires a demonstrable relationship between political accountability and quality governance” (P.4).

According to Diamond (1999) in Ebegbulem 2017), democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for the society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine” (P.4). Nwagbo and Ofike (2025) opined that democratic consolidation involves the process of upholding the principles of democracy and the sustenance of such principles for a very long period of time without interruptions. We see democratic consolidation here as the institutionalization of democratic principles, values, structures and practices in ways that make them enduring and acceptable by all political actors in any democratic political system. It is anchored

on total commitment of the political actors as well as the defender or monitoring agents of democracy toward the entrenchment of democracy (Nwaigwe, 2019).

### Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by the functionalist theory. The central notion of functionalism according to Mac Ogonor (2003), is the necessity for the cooperation of nation states in the realization and defense of global peace through mutual collaboration and corporation. It opines that to promote world peace, collective projects can be carried out by the international community through the creation of regional, sub-regional and global organizations that promote the collective interest of member states.

The theory was first propounded by David Mitrany after the second world war (Mac Ogonor, 2003). He saw the limitation of nation states as individual states in the maintenance and defense of global peace. It is his view that such project is better carried out through mutual agreement of the international community via the formation or establishment of regional and sub-regional economic and political organization as well as other collective projects that would involve the collaboration of nation states in world affairs. Joseph Nye and other scholars made contributions toward the promotion of the theory (Mac Ogonor, 2003). For example, Mac Ogonor (2003) highlighted five conditions suggested by Joseph Nye for successful integration in the world. These include:

- i. The promotion of increased mutual transaction in trade, investment, communication and movement of people across the world.

- ii. The encouragement of elite socialization toward regional integration.
- iii. The propagation of a core ideology in support of regional integration.
- iv. The necessity of equal economic footing among member states of a regional body.
- v. Equal distribution of expected benefits among all the member states.

The above conditions as noted by Joseph Nye are necessary for the success of any “regional integration project”. Other core principles of the theory include existence of mutual needs and interest among members of a regional body, incremental integration process, key roles of international organizations and gradual reduction of state sovereignty (Klabbers, 2014).

The theory of functionalism in international relations has been vividly applied in the establishment of the UN and its agencies as well as the establishment of African union (AU) and other regional organizations in the world including the formation of Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) in May 28, 1975. This theory is suitable for this paper as it enables us situate the ambitious roles of ECOWAS in the consolidation of democracy in West Africa and the huge challenges faced by the sub-regional body in, the face of the current reality of “democratic backsliding” in West Africa in forms of rising rate of coup D’etat, manipulation of democratic election to favour “ special parties and candidates”, violation of term limit by some ECOWAS member states as well as the abuse of political powers by some of the elected members states of ECOWAS (Nte, 2018). The theory is a good guide to investigate the claim of ECOWAS and the challenges it faces on its quest for democratic consolidation in West Africa.

**FIGURE 1- MAP OF ECOWAS**



### **The Aims of ECOWAS and Its Expanded Goal on Democratization and Democratic Consolidation in West Africa**

At its establishment in 1975, ECOWAS aimed at the promotion of economic cooperation among its member states in West Africa. It started as Economic union in West Africa.

According to Olusanjo (2025) “ECOWAS was founded on 28 May, 1975 through the treaty of Lagos. Its main goal is to promote cooperation and integration towards establishing an economic union in West Africa “(P.3). The fifteen (15) member sub- regional organization in its revised treaty of 1993 (signed in Cotonou on 23 July 1993) recognized the inevitable role of the organization in the promotion of peace and democracy in the sub-region. As such, the revised treaty provided for the promotion of democratic values including the protection and defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens of member states. In the wisdom of the leaders of ECOWAS, it is impossible to achieve regional integration in West African in the midst of insecurity and political violence which most times are caused due to authoritarian regimes in West Africa (Ojo, 2012). Thus, by the content of the 1993 revised treaty of ECOWAS, its leaders assumed the role of the promotion of democracy and its values in West Africa. In the view of Gwaza (2016), ECOWAS expanded its “core

mandate from the promotion of regional cooperation and economic developments to the broader issues of peace, security and democracy “(P.3).

Two additional instruments – The ECOWAS protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace keeping and security and its supplementing protocol in Democracy and good governance in 2001 further made ECOWAS to assume the role of democratic consolidation in West Africa (Gwaza, 2016). According to the former president of the ECOWAS Commission, Ibm Chamba:

ECOWAS started as an inter-governmental organization with diplomatic and economic development agenda. However, it did not take long before ECOWAS realized the missing link in the equation: peace and security. The obvious nexus between peace, security and development cannot be over-emphasized. Barely a decade after the erection of ECOWAS, conflict emerged in Liberia and Sierra Leone as a phenomenon not confined to the borders of individual nation state, but with serious regional implications both in its causes and effects (Chamba, 2005 in Gwaza, 2016, p.5).

The above quote depicts the rationale for ECOWAS expanded core mandate on the promotion of peace, security and democracy in West Africa. Thus from 1993, ECOWAS has championed the course of peace and security by resisting authoritarian regimes in West Africa and encouraging the promotion of democracy and its core values in its member states (Akinola & Makomba, 2024). Article 25 of

the supplementary protocol on Democracy and good governance granted ECOWAS the right to intervene in situation of unconstitutional change of governments. It equally urged ECOWAS member states to promote free fair and credible democratic elections, judicial impartiality, and the neutrality of the security forces in the conduct of democratic elections (Chilaka & Oyinmiebi, 2022).

Thus, ECOWAS intervened in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gambia to restore democratic governance in those states. These interventions in the internal affairs of its member states were said to be in order based on the expanded core goals of ECOWAS (Nte, 2018). However, unfolding events in ECOWAS reveals that the sub-regional body is facing difficult

huddles in the enforcement of its expanded core mandate on the promotion of peace, security and democratization in West Africa. The exit of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso following an attempt by ECOWAS to sanction the military junta that staged coup D'états in those states exposed the complex challenges facing ECOWAS in its efforts to promote democratization and democratic consolidation in West Africa. It demonstrates the dilemma faced by ECOWAS in its mandate of promoting the unity of member states and at the same time ensuring genuine effort toward democratization and democratic consolidation in all its member states in the face of sovereignty (Chilaka & Iseke, 2024).

**FIGURE 2: MAP OF WESTAFRICA STATE: INDICATING THE 3 COUNTRIES THAT EXITED ECOWAS**



**Challenges Faced by ECOWAS in the Process of Democratic Consolidation in West Africa**

There is no doubt that ECOWAS is facing serious challenges in its ambitious goal of democratic consolidation in West Africa. As noted above, despite some of its successes in the past in that direction, the sub-regional body is facing the challenges that may lead to its implosion if not carefully managed. Thus it is observed that “as Alliance of Sahel states (AES) members increasingly engage with Beijing

and Moscow, ECOWAS faces the challenge of reconciling its commitment to democratic governance with the realities of regional instability” (Bi Africa Contributor, 2025, August 16, P.3). One of the challenges facing ECOWAS is how to effectively prevent the erosion of democratic gains in West Africa through effective engagement/sanction of member states that violate the provisions of its revised treaty of 1993, the supplementary protocol on Democracy and good governance (2001) and other related instruments that are geared toward the

promotion of democracy and its interrelated goal of peace building and security in West Africa. Thus, it is noted that the:

Recent resurgence of military coups seems to have thwarted democratic consolidation particularly in West Africa sub- region. This is exemplified by recent military coups in Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sudan, Niger, Gabon, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. The trend commands attention because of its contagious nature as it can spread (Nwagbo & Ofike, 2025, P.2)

Thus, the challenge of how to activate the deterrent powers of ECOWAS in preventing the “deviant states” from leaving ECOWAS but at the same time ensuring their compliance to the provisions of ECOWAS treaty and protocols-provisions they signed and ratified is a huge one. This is especially in the face of the shifting pattern of geo-politics /geo strategic relations going on in West Africa. Obadare (2024, Feb 2), acknowledge this challenge when he stated thus:

The most likely beneficiary is Russia, fronted by the Wagner Group Mercenaries which have been courting the three countries. Moscow can be expected to exploit the growing-wedge with security and other forms of support for the renegades. The division within ECOWAS is significant opportunity for Russia which always been eager to undermine democracy by recruiting converts to its authoritarian model. There are also indications that Chad, Togo, could be interested in drawing closer to Russia’s Orbit. This does not augur well for the flourishing of democracy (Obadare, 2024, Feb 2, P.3).

So, the challenge of how to retain the “deviant states but ensure their compliance to the ECOWAS principles of democracy is the first formidable challenge of ECOWAS in its ambitious goal of democratic consolidation in West Africa. The second challenge facing ECOWAS in

its mission of democratic consolidation in West Africa is the challenge of uniform enforcement of its agreed principles of term limit in all the member states. This is one of the odds facing ECOWAS in its assumed duty of democratic consolidation in West Africa. For example, Darko (2015) observed that ECOWAS was unable to take a position on matter of 3<sup>rd</sup> term by all West African states which was resisted by Togo and Gambia. He equally noted that the inability of ECOWAS to act in the face of the unethical amendment of the constitution in Togo, Gambia, Senegal and other West African states by their incumbent presidents just to remain in power undermined ECOWAS mission of democratic consolidation in West Africa. This of course emboldened the incumbents in those states and shows the “unseriousness” or powerlessness of ECOWAS in its ambitious goal of democratic consolidation in West African sub-region.

The third challenge facing ECOWAS in its assumed role of democratic consolidation in West Africa is its inability to checkmate the abuse of power by most of the West African political leaders. Nwagbo and Ofike (2025) noted how over seventy-nine (79) percent of the citizens in Niger supported the military junta that staged the coup in that country and how this undermined ECOWAS sanction on the junta. The seriousness of the above challenge was harped on by Okeke et al. (2014 in Gwaza 2016) when they opined that the aim of ECOWAS provision on intervention in the internal affairs of member state when coup is staged is to prevent the military from interfering in democratic governance in West Africa. But they raised vital question bordering on the abuse of power by the political leaders of West African states including those who are holding leadership position in ECOWAS. According to them:

But the root causes of military interventions into politics and crisis of regime change or political succession are yet to be adequately addressed by the ECOWAS. For example, issues of legitimacy crisis, poor governance, bad leadership, political leadership failures, political corruption, electoral crisis and political violence have been largely left unattended or ignored. The political conditions in most of the countries in the subregion and indeed, Africa as a whole are not democracy friendly or unsuitable for democratization and flourishing of democracy or demilitarization (Okeke et al. 2014 in Gwaza, 2016, P.17)

The above stance depicts a kind of dishonesty and insincerity on the part of ECOWAS in its quest for the promotion of good governance and democratic consolidation in West Africa.

This indeed, is a huge deficit on the ambitious role of ECOWAS on democratic consolidation in West Africa. Nwagbo and Ofike (2025) specifically noted that the cases of elite corruption and failure of elected political leaders in Guinea led to the coup that removed Alpha Conde of Guinea. This was also responsible for the political crisis in Togo and accounts why citizens were celebrating military takeover in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Woldense (2022) agrees that the abuse of electoral processes and powers by political leaders in West Africa undermines the general principles of democracy and constitutes a big challenge to “democratic consolidation project” in West Africa. Indeed, it gives credence to the argument that these military coups in West Africa are responding to popular expectations and desires and are indeed forces of democracy.

Another challenge facing ECOWAS is the challenge of insecurity and political instability in the face of a divided ECOWAS. This constitutes a big obstacle to the attainment of both the “original

goals” of ECOWAS and its expanded mandate of the promotion of good governance and democratic consolidation in West Africa. The current ECOWAS president Julius Madia Bio acknowledged this during the 67<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of ECOWAS when he mentioned the issue of terrorism, illicit arms flow, political instability and transnational crimes particularly across the Sahel and coastal states as some of the confronting challenges facing ECOWAS (Bi Africa Contributor, 2025, August 16). Chilaka et al; (2023) opined that the rising wave of coups in West Africa constitutes a dangerous threat to security and political stability of the region. He noted that:

The spate of coups in the 2020s in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger continue to pose far-reaching challenges to ECOWAS and West Africa. The vulnerability of West Africa portends several critical implications for security, peace, development and democratic consolidation in the sub-region (Chilaka et al, 2023, p.149).

Indeed, the rising wave, of coups in West Africa and the attempt by ECOWAS to contain it poses a dangerous threat to peace, security and political stability of the sub-region. This entails very careful and strategic response from ECOWAS

#### **EXPECTED ROLE OF ECOWAS IN THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN WEST AFRICA**

The dilemma faced by ECOWAS in its effort toward the promotion of good governance and democratic consolidation amidst the rising wave of coup d'états in the sub-region calls for smarter ways of enforcing its rules on the promotion of democracy in West Africa. This assertion is especially true considering the deviancy posed by the coup plotters in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso - a disposition that has led to the formation of a rival sub-region economic union in the name of Alliance of

Sahel States (AES) nations by the three francophone countries of West Africa.

Lending credence to the above assertion Ademola (2025) calls for preventive diplomacy and consistent and uniform enforcement of democratic norms by ECOWAS across its member states. He cited the cases of Cote D'ivoire where Alassan Quattera is elongating tenure through 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> term bids; the cases of Guinea and Mali when Alpha Conde and Ibrahim Boubaca Keita were over-thrown due to their undemocratic actions in power. According to him;

*ECOWAS sanctions in these cases lacked bite and inconsistent responses to constitutional manipulation have weakened ECOWAS deterrent power, preventive diplomacy must therefore, be recalibrated to match today's challenges moving beyond rhetorical concern to agile political engagement, operational readiness and credibility rooted in consistent enforcement of democratic norms (Ademola, 2025, p.3).*

The scholar above praised the activation of the standby force training policy of ECOWAS and noted that it would boost the deterrent power of ECOWAS in the enforcement of its protocol on good governance and democratic consolidation in West Africa. But he cautioned that force or threat of force should only be a last resort. He is convinced that preventive diplomacy guided by expert – led mediation, quick response to early warnings and confidence building measures would address the rising wave of coups in West Africa. But for this to be effective, he advised that “ECOWAS must apply democratic norms uniformly, regardless of the country or leader involved, and act early when red flags emerge, such as eroded term limit, politicized judiciaries and shrinking civic space “(Ademola, 2025, p.4.). This is a pro-active strategy that can help ECOWAS navigate the dual but difficult and complex

task of maintaining the genuine promotion of good governance and democratic consolidation in the West African sub-region.

Giving his own thought on the best strategy ECOWAS could adopt in promoting democratic consolidation in West Africa in the face of the shifting geo politics of the sub-region; without triggering the implosion of the union, Gwaza (2016) warned that any preventive diplomacy or conflict resolution measure by ECOWAS must include “action to address the underlying economic, social, cultural, humanitarian and political roots of conflict and to strengthen the foundation for development” (P.3). This holistic approach to us is necessary as it would help in finding solutions to the underlying triggers of coup in West Africa beyond the realms of politics and security. Additionally, ECOWAS must put its house in order and strengthen its structure and system of governance/administration. According to Julius Maada Bio, the current ECOWAS chairman “ECOWAS must return itself to become more transparent, efficient and responsive to the needs of its people. This is how we will rebuild trust in regional cooperation” (in Bi Africa contributor, 2025, August 16, P.4). In fact, this reform should be holistic including the aspect that would not allow any violator of democratic norms to hold any leadership position in ECOWAS. This would help ECOWAS to lead by example and give its leadership the moral right to sanction military juntas in the sub-region. Thus, the interests of the peoples of ECOWAS member states shall occupy the front burner in the agenda of ECOWAS, including a realistic and demonstrable kind of democratic consolidation programme for the sub-region. (Fatola, 2022, Jan,29).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

Having X-rayed the challenges facing ECOWAS in its ambitious goal of democratic consolidation in West Africa, it is our view that with the right strategies of astute and preventive diplomacy, in addition to strong political will and an earned moral right, ECOWAS can make headway in its determined will to promote democratic consolidation in West Africa. Its achievement so far in the direction may not be enough in the face of the current geopolitical realities of the sub-region. The formation of Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by the military juntas of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso is a pointer to this geopolitical reality.

It is therefore hoped that ECOWAS should put its house in order before trying to impose any sanction on its erring member states who breached the regional body's position stand on democracy, even as democracy is renegotiated by popular forces in the region. This way, it might be able to realize its goal of democratic consolidation in West Africa without its implosion.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we make the following recommendations:

- I. **ECOWAS must be willing to enforce its rules across board:** For ECOWAS to succeed in its mission of democratic consolidation in West Africa, it must be willing to enforce its agreed rules when violated by any member state. The demonstration of strong political will in the enforcement of such rules will send a clear warning to Member states that would like to test the waters on democratic rules, including coup plotters.
- II. **ECOWAS should embrace preventive diplomacy before the threat of sanction or Force:** In the face of current geo-political realities in West

Africa, ECOWAS should embrace preventive diplomacy as the first step in its attempt to promote good governance and deepen democracy in the sub-region. Diplomacy involves the skills of mediation, identification of early warning signs and skills of confidence-building by parties in conflict. The careful deployment of these skills in the enforcement of ECOWAS treaty and protocol, especially those relating to good governance and democracy will enhance the attainment of ECOWAS goal of democratic consolidation in West Africa. Preventive diplomacy yield the best result when the deterrent power of the user is intact. Threat of sanction or force or their application should be the last resort.

### III. **Active engagement with the citizens and stakeholders of Democracy in ECOWAS member states;**

It has become imperative for ECOWAS to begin to engage with the peoples of ECOWAS member states and other civil society groups in the member states. Such engagement and dialogues that border on their active participation in the democratic processes of their states would equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills that can help them hold their political leaders accountable in their individual member states. It would educate them and enlighten them on the ECOWAS mission on democratic consolidation in West Africa, making them embrace it since it is for the genuine interest of the people. When this happens, the organic support given to military juntas after coup might disappear, making it possible for ECOWAS to enforce its rules on its member states.

### IV. **ECOWAS should reform its internal structures:**

To succeed in its mission of Democratic consolidation in West Africa, ECOWAS' leadership must be made up of shining examples of democrats who have shown the way genuine democracy is practiced in their

individual states. This would help ECOWAS avoid the leap service on the promotion of good governance and the mantra of democratic consolidation. It would give ECOWAS leadership the moral right to sanction violators of its rules on democracy and good governance, including coup plotters in West Africa. Such reforms would equally boost the deterrent powers of ECOWAS making it easy to achieve its intended goal on good governance and democracy.

**A Rapprochement strategy should be explored to See How the Alliance for Sahel States (AES) should be brought back:** ECOWAS leadership should explore other options of peace to see how the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) could be brought back to the regional organization. This may require diplomatic approaches or dialogue, persuasion and positive and reasonable explanation of the necessities for the military heads in those states to restoring powers to the civilian authorities within a specified period that may be acceptable to the military leaders in those states.

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