Original Article

Authoritarianism and Regional Security Complexes in West Africa: A Case Study of Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso

Maryam Bashir Aliyu[1], OGUNDARE, Yemi Daniel[2]

[1,2,3] *Skyline University Nigeria*

Abstract: *This development of authoritarianism in West Africa, through recent military coups in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, raises important questions to the security and democratic strength in the region. The given article investigates the dynamics between authoritarian reversals and the logic of Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) in West Africa based on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) of Buzan and Waeaver. The conceptual and comparative analysis in the paper questions the ways in which internal power grab in fragile state systems are affected and how they in turn affect transnational security threats, political instability, and changing regional norms. It investigates the two-way correlation between domestic authoritarian entrenchment and insecurity in the region, and in the Sahel in particular: the state unravelling, violent extremism, and anti-democratic regress work in a mutually supportive way. The paper identifies how ECOWAS and other regional organizations have not been able to act coherently in reacting to these problems usually hampered by the competing interests of regional security and notional demands of democratic governance. Through synthesis of available theoretical and empirical literature, as well as contextualizing the incidents of Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso in terms of greater regional patterns, the paper also helps to comprehend authoritarianism rather as regionalized security issue that is more of an international problem than national one. Its conclusion is that the sustainable solutions need the re-conceptualization of the regional responses in terms of security-governance nexus that both considers spatial diffusion of authoritarianism as well as the interdependency in West African state and regional security.*

Keywords: *Authoritarian Reversal, Regional Security Complex, West Africa, ECOWAS, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Military. Democracy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The post-cold war led to a democratization movement in the continent of Africa and West Africa became one of the sub-regions of a great normative transformation. Countries that used to have military dictatorship or a single party rule started implementing multipartyism, constitutional rule, and democratic systems of government, most of the time at the instance of regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Such transitions became entrenched by normative procedures such as the 2001 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that placed the organization as a central player in the protection of constitutional order (Adebajo, 2021; Hartmann, 2017). But lately, there are signals showing that democracy is being reversed. This is all in deterrence to three West African nations Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso occurring in between 2020 and 2022 period that saw the displacement of the current elected governments and subsequent installment of totalitarian forms of government.

On the one hand, these incidents are determined by local factors of discontent and failure to govern, and from another perspective, they are a variation on regional trends of insecurity, the declining support of electoral processes among the population, and the use of the military power to gain political legitimacy (Boisvert, 2023). These reversals do not only impose a challenge to the normative consensus regarding democracy, but it also makes the regional security framework of the west Africa region a complicated one.

In a nutshell, this paper examines these turnarounds utilizing the regional security complex theory (RSCT) which defines a regional security as a complex of inter-related threats and responses that are as a result of proximity to each other in terms of physical location and are also determined by common historical and political aspirations (Buzan & Waeber, 2003). This research starts with a conceptual departure point, an understanding of authoritarianism as a fundamental aspect of regional security in West Africa, as opposed to what authoritarianism has been reduced into: a local dysfunction. The intimations of renewed military takeovers in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso suggest an emergent authoritarian security subcomplex a pattern of politically and security-supported logics that disrupt and destabilize even erstwhile stable democracies and generate alternate regional

alignments founded on military authoritarianism and illiberalism. This conceptual research question is, unlike the empirical work on specific regimes and a detailed analysis of one personal coup, tries to be more regional and systemic. It questions the ways in which the re-emergence of authoritarianism has been entrenched in and works together with a broader regional complex of insecurity, the jihadist insurgencies, transnational criminal economies and the shrinking popular support to liberal democratic institutions (Aning & Abdallah, 2021). In the region, authoritarian governments, in this case, are not just domestic reactions to local anarchy, but creators and carriers of the transformation of the security rationales in the region. The military men behind the coups have in many instances tried to justify their acts as defending against regional instability factors like terrorism and state failure hence creating a type of military securitized governance that prioritizes dictatorship as the state offered to regional security.

This article therefore makes three related conceptual arguments. First, that what is going on in West Africa is not an isolated trend of the reinstatement of the authoritarian rule, but it is a part of what is referred to as the regional security complex where, the states are facing certain common vulnerability and taking up corresponding extraconstitutional solutions. Second, that regional institutions like ECOWAS are confronted with a strategic dilemma of harmonizing their normative commitments to democracy with strategic interactions with situations whereby authoritarian regimes have domestically legitimacy, as well as domination of security collaborations. Third, the research argues that the relationship between the regime type and regional insecurity is constitutive: both military regimes and regional security arrangement condition each other. Based on a conceptual synthesis of RSCT, regime theory, and African regionalism, this paper provides a theoretical framework through which the relationship between the two neighboring concepts, namely authoritarianism and regional security should be viewed. The paper attempts to contribute to the scholarly discussion of regional security governance, regression of democracies as well as political transformation of regionalism in Africa through the conceptual case of Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso not only because of their national traits, but also because of their symbolic and structural values in the context of the West African security order.

A. Theorizing Regional Security in Africa

Fragility to Complex Interdependence In an attempt to capture authoritarianism with larger regional processes, researchers have made use of theories like Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Buzan and Weaiver (2003) explain that security problems tend to be geographically concentrated because of the geographical nearness, history relations as well as common political weaknesses. In these complexes, any instability observed in one state is the concern of neighbors, which will result in mutual creation of threats and regional feedbacks. The theory is especially relevant to West Africa, where failures of internal governance has a historical track record of spilling over to neighboring countries, either through refugee resettlement, human trafficking, or by putting certain regions into the risk of spreading violent extremism. The issue of military takeovers in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso can usefully be analyzed, using RSCT, as to how they work against any form of integration of regional security cooperation. According to the regional security complex becoming crisscrossed by crises, as is the case of West Africa considering the entanglement of terrorism, illegitimate commerce, climatic insecurity, and currently; governance regressions (Aning and Abdallah 2021). The emergence of authoritarian states brings political rearrangements, which can be restructuring the perception of threats, security cooperation and institutional agendas. ECOWAS and Regional Norm of Democratic Governance. It has been argued that ECOWAS was and remains such a normative innovator within the context of Africa as the organization has been aggressive about constitutional governance and democratic standards. This was ratified in 2001 in its Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that outlaws' unconstitutional changes of government, and authorizes the regional body to be diplomatic, and where so required, military intervene to restore constitutional order (Souaré, 2009). It is with this promise that the credibility of ECOWAS has been based in the past, which was witnessed in Cote d Ivoire (2002), Guinea-Bissau (2012), and The Gambia (2016/2017) (Hartmann, 2017). Nonetheless, the ability of the organization to impose its norms is getting weakened. The legitimacy and competence of the instruments of ECOWAS have been questioned by the recent authoritarian takeovers. The existing literature has detected the increasingly widening divergence between normative dedication and strategic realism, particularly in rare situations wherein the regime change is motivated by popular backing or in the setting of unsuccessful civilian dominance (Abatan & Spies, 2016). ECOWAS failure to avert a spate of coups in Mali as well as its caving into junta-led transitions in Burkina Faso and Guinea have cast serious doubts on its enforcement capacity and regional solidarity.

B. Related Literature Review

a) The Resurgence of Authoritarianism in West Africa

The revival of authoritarianism in West Africa represents a major setback in established democratic progresses made during the liberal trend in the post-cold war period. Most of the West African countries have made a transition to the use of

multiparty systems of democracies through the entrenchment of international norms and regional protocols, as well as by local forces (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). Nonetheless, this advance has been wavered in the past ten years. The military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022), are a good example of a trend in the region where the elected governments are overthrown by juntas on the basis of the failure to ensure the security, corruption, or political stagnation (Boisvert, 2023).

Authoritarian turnarounds in these policies are not constituted in the mist. They indicate further institutional crises that feature the loss of democratic legitimacy, elite disillusionment, mass disappointment in liberal elections (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018). Studies are mounting to indicate that these non-democratic alternatives have been energized by disillusionment especially in cases where such actors offer quick solutions to security and governance related issues (Bleck & Michelitch, 2018).

In the situation when the state is torn by conflicts, military regimes have applied the argument of failure of democracy to intervene unconstitutionally, and the argument has gained partial acceptance of the population.

C. Authoritarianism and Regional Security Alignment

How the resurgence of authoritarian government can influence the security cooperation in the region is now a critical body of literature. Strong governments are keen on preserving their regimes at the expense of common manner of governance norms, which may spark disrupted strategic coalitions. As an example, in the Sahel fresh juntas have been progressively more attracted to bilateral security arrangements principally with Russia at the hurdle of established regional and multilateral ones (Ndiaye, 2023). This change has discouraged the security regimes of mutual assurance and made governance of regional responses to transnational problems involving jihadist insurgency a challenging task. In line, Boisvert (2023) adds that the expulsion of French troops and lessened ties with ECOWAS and G5 Sahel group by the Malian junta reveals the conflict between authoritarian consolidation and the norms of collective security. Essentially, authoritarian regimes can rebalance their regional affiliations to acquire new security guarantors which will be less normative and transactional to deal with.

a) The Rise of an Authoritarian Security Sub-Complex

It is out of the RSCT that new literature now refers to the development of authoritarian subcomplexes, clusters of authoritarian regimes that contribute to the process of strengthening each other, applying similar practices, shaped by a similar security discourse, resistant to foreign pressure (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The pattern of similar development of Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, and the fact that they all support evolution through the military way and the exit together from ECOWAS systems speak of a new sub-regional formation. Although this is an informal convergence it has the potential of undermining the normative base of ECOWAS and will encourage other states to take the same routes. However, other researchers (e.g., Lynch and Crawford (2022) caution that this trend portends danger of normalizing that type of military-led governance in fragile states, particularly with the participation of external forces (Russia) to offer diplomatic protection and material assistance. Thus, authoritarianism is shifted not only into a type of regime but also a practice of regional security redefining the norms of legitimacy and sovereignty. It states that authoritarianism in West Africa is not only a domestic governance problem but is a regional security situation with border spill-over effects. It also explains the fact that regional institutions such as ECOWAS are situated in a normative environment that is contested and democratic commitments are becoming more conflicting with the political realities of weak states. Although RSCT provides a powerful structural account of these dynamics, conceptual research is still required to combine the actions of sovereign states and its agents, external participation, and the instability of regional political blocks in terms of how we should view regional security in future West Africa.

II. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent trend of authoritarian rebound in West Africa has catalyzed a rudimentary amount of empirical work which have tried to identify with nexus between the breakdown of these governances, regional security, and the reaction of regional organizations like the ECOWAS. The case-based approaches (in combination with field interviews, institutional data, and conflict measures) have become more common among scholars and policy analysts interested in evaluating the patterns and effects of military takeovers of fragile democracies. This review summarizes the most pertinent empirical evidence about Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, in terms of governance failure, regime legitimacy, regional contagion and the institutional reactions adopted by ECOWAS.

A. Patterns of Empirical Coups and Public Opinion

The recent coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021) and Burkina Faso (2022) took place in the environments of extreme governance failures, increasing levels of insecurity and growing civil discontent with democratically elected regimes. The

empirical data related to surveys conducted by Afrobarometer (2022) show that, although the normative support of democracy is quite high in these countries, frequently, it has conditional character. The survey revealed that two out of every three people interviewed were not satisfied with the working of democracy in Mali before the coup of 2020 and more than half of the respondents felt that military force was necessary in cases of national crisis (Afrobarometer, 2022). A like-minded voice was documented in Guinea, where the third term candidature of the President Alpha Cond later led to widespread protests and military anger (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2021). In Burkina Faso, in a country of numerous protest the inability of the government to deal with jihadist insurgencies, there was also the transitional military leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traor. In a poll published by the Centre pour la Gouvernance Ddemocratique (CGD) in Ouagadougou (2022), more than 60 percent of them were ready to change their security system by passing it over to the military as something less permanent than the reinstatement of a civil regime, in the face of increased lawlessness. This observation hypothecates that there is an accreditation of lack of interest in the part of the masses that facilitated the military regimes in the region and in this sense makes such regimes legitimized by a crisis management rule.

B. Security, Insecurity Nexus and Durability

A correlation can be proven to exist between unstable security and the ascendency of military regimes in West Africa as well as between their resilience. Experience shows that extended presence of insecurity may not only facilitate erosion of democratic governance but also facilitate a strong support of the action of military interventions. In actuality, in such nations as Mali and Burkina Faso, where jihadist violence had become widespread and the state authority lost grip on vast areas of land, this led to power vacuums and a weakening of the governing abilities and the democratic right of elected governments (ACLED, 2023).

The report by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) explained that violent activities including the actions of the state authorities and jihadist groups increased by 45 percent in the six months preceding the 2020 coup in Mali. The number of civilian casualties in this time was also at its peak having been at the highest point in the last five years. These are all worsening security menaces which had helped to fuel the disillusionment of those in the civilian leadership hence a favourable setting to the intervention of the military. Notably, insecurity does not only become a precipitant of coups but can as well lead to the resilience of coups. An example of this in Mali, statistics showed that the ruling junta postponed democratic elections citing the instability and unstable security conditions in the country since making an early transition would jeopardize the already fragile cases. This story is part of the wider pattern in which authoritarian, military governments use the situation of insecurity as an opportunity to consolidate their power, harness temporary popular support and withhold domestic and international pressure to restore democracy. Consequently, the relationship of security-insecurity is a bilateral predisposition affecting both the democratic breakdown as well as the cause of its insecurity and henceforth leads the complex relationship of weak governance-violent conflict and resilience of authoritarianism in the region.

In the same sense, postponed democratic elections in Burkina Faso have been announced regularly by the military regime on the pretext that there should first be a restoration of security before we can have a serious political transition. The junta has used the excuse of winning the war against the jihadist rebels citing the need to carry on with its rule as the only way to see institutional reform and stabilization of the country (OECD, 2023). The trend of deferment is indicative of a larger trend where security regimes form a narrative of securitization in order to justify authoritarian rule. It can be inferred that authoritarianism in such settings is not a temporary and episodic political anomaly. It is in fact becoming incorporated deeply in the security discourses that are gaining popularity among its domestic population and even the international community at large. On the local scale, the violence of extremists, the territorial disbanding and failure of the state, have all promoted the form of populist acceptance or at least tolerance of military rule especially in cases where the governments are thought not to responsibly serve the civilians. At the same time, external powers, such as regional bodies and donor countries have a tendency to sanitize their condemnation of juntas with the short-term priority over restoring democracy now. Authoritarianism in the context of a country such as Burkina Faso is thus not perpetuated by the coercive authority all by itself but rather in coalescence with other halucinogens of a destabilization in the region. This duality of national vulnerability and global panic places an enabling condition on authoritarian backsliding in the name of security worship in governing.

C. Mixed Empirical Results on ECOWAS Interventions

The normative structure of ECOWAS based on the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 gives the regional body the capacity to punish, manage transitions and exceptional outcomes of deploying military intervention. Empirical analyses of such interventions are mixed, however. ECOWAS military pressure and diplomacy were seen as successful

in the transition of power peacefully in the case of The Gambia (2016-2017) (Hartmann, 2017). The reactions though have not been as good in the situation in Mali, Guinea and in Burkina Faso. The quantitative analysis by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS, 2022) reveals that the coercive effects of ECOWAS-imposed sanctions, including border closures and financial locks, were weak, and, at some points, it also led to nationalistic reactions.

In Mali, the junta used ECOWAS sanctions to promote anti-Western message and reposition itself strategically with non-traditional allies and especially Russia via the Wagner Group (Boisvert, 2023). In Burkina Faso, the military-controlled government did not welcome regional mediation, but preferred bilateral military assistance between governing junta-controllable nations-neighboring Niger and Guinea. These have been the results of eroding normative power of ECOWAS and showing weakness of regional enforcement mechanisms in situations whereby more than one state is violating democratic norms. Also, collective action is impaired by the absence of a common stance on ECOWAS member countries in some of which the internal governance gaps are significant (Ndiaye, 2023).

D. Spillover and Dictatorial Contagion in the Region

A new branch of empirical study is devoted to the idea of authoritarian contagion the diffusion of military-led regimes to other neighboring countries. Based on empirical analyses of spatial regressions, Asunka and Ferree (2022) prove that when one state undergoes a successful coup that enjoys popular support, the other neighboring states are susceptible to democratic erosion. The 2024 January withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea out of ECOWAS was the turning point of the regional governance. It was the initial instance that three states left a regional bloc in parting expressions in objection to democratic rules and sanctions concurrently. Through empirical mapping of ECOWARN, the early warning directorate of the ECOWAS, there is increased coupling risk of coup in weak democracies like Niger (achieved in 2023), Sierra Leone among others including Ghana, where the citizens do not trust their democracies due to the expedited loss of confidence in the past 10 years (ECOWARN, 2023).

Towards this, these developments indicate that retrogressive authoritarian reversals could be turning in to a self-sustaining regional bloc, and this is testing the very premise of collective democratic enforcement.

E. Actors Overseas and Changing Geometry of Security

The other aspect of empirical literature dwells on external agents reconstructing regional security alliance. Countries in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso have also been drifting further out of traditional partnerships with France and the United Nations toward bilateral security relations with Russia, Turkey, and China (OECD, 2023). Real figures provided in SIPRI (2022) show that Russia exported its arms to these countries by a factor of more than 40 percent between 2020 and 2022, and French defense ties are being rolled back. By introducing non-normative actors into the region and providing them with military assistance free of political prerequisites, the weakening front of normative regimes manifests itself, and ECOWAS begins to have problems with its normative mandate (Lynch & Crawford, 2022).

Empirical literature demonstrates clearly that the process of authoritarian resurgence in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso is part of a larger system driven reorganization of security, governance and regional legitimacy. This is not a case of isolated outliers but a progressively interrelated group of actors in a developing authoritarian security subcomplex. Member states have all put into practice military rule to survive due to the lack of democratic, non-military alternatives following the growing disillusionment with democracy, the failure to ensure the security of the region, poor enforcement by the ECOWAS and the change of allies of member states. Such empirical observations preach a redesign of regional models of governance and norms enforcement approaches in West Africa.

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Recent empirical studies carried out on authoritarian reversals in West Africa has demonstrated that the re-emergence of military dictatorships in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso has been more of a complex structural, institutional, and regional interaction that has re-established and has continued to sustain them. They are five main themes to include the failure of governance and conditional popular support, insecurity and regime resilience, mixed intervention results in ECOWAS, regional contagion, and external security realignment.

A. Weaknesses of Governance and Limited Strategies of Democratic Support

Recent coups have been highly supported by empirical data to indicate that such coups have not only been based on internal elite machinations in the military but are widespread connections on how people have generally not been satisfied with the performance of elected governments. Before 2020 coup, in Mali, 69 percent of residents disapproved of democratic

governance and 55 percent said they would support the intervention of the military when the country was facing national crisis (Afrobarometer, 2022).

Likewise, in Guinea, when President Cond was attempting to run illegally on a third term, this enacted an outpour of mass dissatisfaction against him and an inconsistency in the military (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2021). According to a CGD (2022) survey, more than 60 percent of the Burkinabes surveyed in Burkina Faso supported a temporary military rule in order to bring order back. These are in line with the growing theories of contingent legitimacy according to which citizens will rally behind democracy but will pull out when they are not provided with public goods particularly security and accountability.

B. Justification and Cause of Insecurity as a Pretext to Coup

One of the underlying trends in all the cases is that insecurity has been strategically employed to justify the overthrow of governments by the military and the postponement of the democratic process. In Mali and Burkina Faso, the spread of violence of jihadists and loss of territory played a key role in undermining the legitimacy of the state (ACLED, 2023). As an example, the ACLED statistics on the month leading up to the coup of Mali in 2020 showed a 45 percent increase in violent clashes between the jihadist organizations and the government forces, as well as an unprecedented number of civilians who were affected by these confrontations. Such confrontations provided a practical and rhetorical vacuum to declare that elections would disrupt the fragile security initiatives by juntas. According to the results of the OECD (2023), it becomes clear that such security-first discourses have been quite successful within the realms of public discussions and allowed military states to consolidate authority in the name of crisis management. Therefore, insecurity does not only lead to coups, but it contributes to the authoritarian regime.

C. ECOWAS Interventions

Little Bit of Coercion and Unintended Results Although, normative framework, of ECOWAS, which is built on the Supplementary Protocol of 2001, equips this organization to sanction and mediate transitions, its coercive instruments have become less effective. The reaction to the recent coups has been limited in comparison to its success on intervening in The Gambia (Hartmann, 2017). According to ISS (2022) quantitative measures, the sanctions the U.S. doled out to Yugoslavia by closing their borders and imposing financial embargo had oftentimes resulted in nationalist retaliation as opposed to compliance. The junta in Mali has been using ECOWAS sanctions to fuel anti-Western feelings and reaffirm alliances with other entities such as Russia Wagner Group (Boisvert, 2023). In the same way, Burkina Faso did not accept the ECOWAS mediation in favor of the regional military alliance with other neighbors that had junta-led governments hurt the bloc collective standing. These trends highlight the lack of power that ECOWAS enjoys when there are perpetrators of democratic norms among a confluence of member nations (Ndiaye, 2023).

D. Spillover and Authoritarian Contagion Regional

The envisagement of authoritarian contagion is becoming empirically backed. Asunka and Ferree (2022) employed spatial regression models to establish the findings that the successful coups in a given state raise the chances of democratic erosion in other neighboring states particularly when coups are viewed as popular or successful. This has been seen evidenced after the recent 2024 simultaneous withdrawal of Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso which are big billets in ECOWAS in normative enforcement. ECOWARN (2023) has raised alerts about high risks of coups in unstable democracies like Sierra Leone and Ghana as a result of the erosion of confidence of the population in the civilian institutions. The tendency is dangerous because it risks having counter-normative blocs in West Africa that will ruin the system of democracy by setting up a self-supporting circle of dictatorship by military rule.

E. External Actors and Reconfiguring Alliance of Security

Lastly, external actors have drastically changed the geometry of security in the area. As the relations with their usual partners like France and the UN have gotten tense, the three military-ruling regimes have turned towards new friends Russia, Turkey, and China. SIPRI (2022) reported that Russian arm export to these countries increased more than 40% between 2020 and 2022, while Western military and development assistance was reduced. It occurs in response to the popularity of no-strings-attached security cooperation, foreign military assistance, and the lack of governance, or human rights conditionality (Lynch & Crawford, 2022). These alliances have allowed juntas to defy the pressure not only of ECOWAS, but also of increasing domestic support, despite international legitimacy being in dispute. These trends depict the strengthening of authoritarian survival through the process of geopolitical realignment. The authoritarianism revival in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso is not a deviant exception but a systemic aspect, in which poor governance, prolonged insecurity, inefficient regional enforcement, and transnational imitation effects, as well as changing international relations are involved. The results highlight the fact that

ECOWAS and the rest of the international players need to reconsider the way they promote the norms of democracy not just by being punitive, but rather by engaging more profoundly in the fields of governance, security, and inclusive institution-building.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Malian, Guinea, and Burkina Faso empirical evidence stipulate the necessity of a quick response to authoritarian retrogression of the West African region in the form of multidimensional and context-specific policies. The above policy implications are such that:

A. Realign Regional Enforcing Mechanism

The focus of ECOWAS has to change since it has to stop focusing primarily on punitive sanctions. The small coercive success as well as the backlash in Mali and Burkina Faso point to the insufficiency of sanctions and the possibility of its counterproductivity. Rather, the emphasis of ECOWAS should be focused on preventive diplomacy, early warning systems and political inclusive dialogue, particularly, prior to the breakdown of democratization. It is possible through the enhancement of the ECOWARN system and improvement of the predictive analytics and fast response means to forestall crisis instead of only trying to counter them.

B. Consider the Security Governance as a Democratic Necessity

The reform of security sector should be made part of democracy promotion in regions. During a situation whereby people feel that their safety is being threatened in any way, they would be more inclined to accept or even condone military rule. Hence, the policies should target on civilian-centered security reformation such as, training and professionalization of armed forces, enhancement of sharing of intelligence, and effective collation with the civil governance institutional mechanism. They should not solely look at how to arm them in terms of the security outcome as donors. They should look at the governance outcome in security.

C. Fortify National Authority

By Inclusive Institutions Considering that the previous public backing of democracy has been found to be conditional the nation and regional players ought to get involved in building up institutes that enhance legitimacy and accountability like the anti-corruption agencies, local governments and the independent courts. Fostering the creation of responsive institutions would minimize the distinction between the ideals of democracy and the realities of living, similar to weakening the attractiveness of military interventions.

D. Advance Regional Standard Durability by Peer Responsibility

The fact that the same democratic rules are being violated in several countries at the same time in ECOWAS member states demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the peer accountability systems. A graduated scheme of responses should be considered by the ECOWAS, such as diplomatic isolation of the concerned states, suspension of voting rights, and reward-based reintegration plans of coup-prone states. Transparency and peer pressure could also be increased by a more formalised version of the so-called democracy scoreboard in which the level of compliance with standards of governance by the member states is publicly monitored.

E. Change with the Shifting Scene of Outward Influence

The shift of West African military governments towards Russia, Turkey and China illustrates a phase of reorganization geopolitical alliances which ignore traditional principles of governance conditionality. ECOWAS and its collaborators need to come up with newer diplomatic means, which can interact with these forces via multilateral formulas and also make the partnerships based on democratic principles, growth of the economy and respect feel much lavish. Such collaboration between regional and global forces is needed to overcome the impact of these actors who promote the resilience of authoritarianism.

F. Restore the Credibility of ECOWAS by Internal Self Reform

In search of entering legitimacy, even ECOWAS has to go through the process of institutional self-reflection and metamorphosis. These are in form of increased transparency in decision-making, the inability of member states possessing internal governance gaps to control agenda-setting activity regionally, and establishment of more participatory forms through civil society contribution. Unless political leaders in ECOWAS put in place these reforms, it will continue to erode its moral authority and the capacity to operate effectively. This policy guidance focus on updating short and reactive stance of the policies to long and systemic approaches which is built on prevention policies, legitimacy and regional solidarity. To reverse the wave of authoritarian backslides and to build trust in democratic leadership, there must be a fresh imagination of democratic support mechanisms in West Africa through a courageous leadership within ECOWAS and the ECOWAS international partners.

V. CONCLUSION

The renewed military rule in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso signal an important break in the democratic path of West Africa and a crisis of governance, legitimacy and regional order. The results of recent empirical research highlight that this wave of authoritarian reversals is not an isolated and limited phenomenon, but an embodiment of more fundamental structural and systemic turmoil including the widespread insecurity and poor institutional functioning to growing popular alienation towards the workings of democracy. The normative favorability of democracy faces an increased conditionality in the mind of the people as they are influenced by the images of government performance, mainly on the security. These circumstances have been used by military agents as justifications to intervene and have established themselves in the name of crisis management. Regional enforcement systems especially that in ECOWAS have been limited and mostly ineffective with sanctions and diplomacy avenues recording mixed results or in some instances counterproductive ones.

In addition, regional contagion effect and the withdrawal of several states to ECOWAS spells out an anti-normative bloc that is an objection to the principles of collective democratic enforcement. This has been coupled with an increasing presence of the external players like Russia and China who are offering security services without demanding governance reforms, thus transforming the geopolitical map in a manner that intensifies authoritarian resilience. Considering such dynamics, it becomes obvious that classical models of the regional authority governance and democratizations should be reassessed.

A new focus on preventive diplomacy, institutional legitimacy, civilian security reform and flexible regional structures is essential. It is only with coordinated and integrated approach, which may target not only symptoms of democratic erosion, but also underlying causes of the same, that West Africa can dream of leading to permanent order of constitutional stability to overcome the illegitimacy of the regional frameworks of governance.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Primarily, based on the empirical data and the existing processes of military-factored governance in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, the following suggestions of how regional organizations, governments at the national levels, civil society, and international partners could act are offered:

A. Strengthen the ECOWAS Preventative Capacity

ECOWAS needs to move towards proactive conflict prevention to proactive conflict prevention, which involves sending of early- warning missions to politically unstable countries. Becoming proactive concerning capacity-building in mediation with attention to neutral and respected envoys to take the lead in dialogue before the occurrence of the democratic breakdowns.

B. A West African Security and Governance Compact should be Established.

Build a security-governance bargain between support of counterterrorism and measures that meet the standards of democratic accountability, transparency, and civil-military equilibrium. Promoting shared security activities by the regional forces under civilian control particularity in areas that are vulnerable to insurgency. Likewise Becoming a supporter of constitutional and electoral reforms enhance the perusal of constitutional clauses on term limits and poll integrity region wide to deter the exploitation of the democratic processes. Urging ECOWAS to embrace a military-to-civilian transition protocol that stipulates time-bound processes that can be monitored in the process of restoration of civilian rule.

C. Revitalize of Civic Education and Democratic Literacy

Conduct ECOWAS sponsored civic education programs focusing on youths and the rural people to raise awareness of costs of military rule in the long run. Introducing democratic education at the national curriculum and community-based dialogue efforts. In addition, hasten regional unity and peer pressure to inspire member states to institutionalize the peer review structures such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in ECOWAS level. Establishing a democracy observatory in ECOWAS to keep track and release an annual report on compliance of states to democratic norms increasing transparency and accountability.

D. Respond to Outside Players Positively

ECOWAS and African Union need to embark on formal consultation processes with foreign powers such as Russia, Turkey, and China to ensure that the military intervention is in tandem with African governance rules. Consulting the donor countries to synchronize their aid policies to make sure that military assistance is not to jeopardize African interest.

E. Revision of ECOWAS Institutional Governance

Enhance internal credibility of ECOWAS by insisting on leadership rotation, transparency and civil society representation at all of its commissions. Enforcement of ECOWAS Court of Justice to deal with constitutional breaches and democratic infringements with a more sober, trustworthy justice decision.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

VIII. REFERENCES

[1] Adebajo, A. (2021). *The curse of Berlin: Africa after the Cold War*. Oxford University Press.

[2] Abatan, J. E., & Spies, Y. K. (2016). ECOWAS and the promotion of democratic governance in West Africa. *Africa Insight, 46*(1), 19–35.

[3] ACLED. (2023). *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project dashboard*. https://acleddata.com

[4] Afrobarometer. (2022). *Dispatch No. 505: Support for democracy and military intervention in West Africa*. https://www.afrobarometer.org

[5] Afrobarometer. (2022). *Summary of results: Afrobarometer survey round 9 – Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso*. https://www.afrobarometer.org

[6] Aning, K., & Abdallah, M. (2021). West Africa's complex security terrain: Regional security complexes and fragile states. *African Security Review, 30*(2), 145–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1910791

[7] Asunka, J., & Ferree, K. E. (2022). Regional contagion and the dynamics of democratic reversals in West Africa. *Journal of Democracy, 33*(4), 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0064

[8] Asunka, J., & Ferree, K. E. (2022). The regional diffusion of coups: Evidence from West Africa. *Journal of Peace Research, 59*(5), 703–719.

[9] Bleck, J., & Michelitch, K. (2018). Capturing the airwaves, capturing the nation? A field experiment on state-run media effects in the Sahel. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 10*(3), 1–22.

[10] Boisvert, M. A. (2023). Coups as popular revolt? Rethinking the Malian and Burkinabé transitions. *African Affairs, 122*(487), 283–303. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad015

[11] Boisvert, M. A. (2023). Russia in the Sahel: The Wagner Group and the limits of Western influence. *African Affairs, 122*(486), 187–209. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad010

[12] Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*. Cambridge University Press.

[13] Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique (CGD). (2022). *Opinion publique et gouvernance au Burkina Faso*. Ouagadougou: CGD Reports.

[14] Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique (CGD). (2022). *Perceptions des citoyens burkinabè sur la transition et les priorités sécuritaires*. Ouagadougou: CGD.

[15] Cheeseman, N., & Klaas, B. (2018). *How to rig an election*. Yale University Press.

[16] ECOWARN. (2023). *Regional early warning reports: Political instability metrics in West Africa*. ECOWAS Commission.

[17] ECOWARN. (2023). *West Africa risk analysis and early warning bulletin*. ECOWAS Commission, Directorate of Early Warning.

[18] Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2019). Democratic backsliding in West Africa. *Journal of Democracy, 30*(4), 126–140. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0089

[19] Hartmann, C. (2017). ECOWAS and the restoration of democracy in The Gambia. *Africa Spectrum, 52*(1), 85–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971705200105

[20] ICG (International Crisis Group). (2021). *Saving Guinea's democracy: A new chapter for ECOWAS?* https://www.crisisgroup.org

[21] International Crisis Group. (2021). *Stopping Guinea's slide into authoritarianism* (Africa Briefing No. 174). https://www.crisisgroup.org

[22] Institute for Security Studies (ISS). (2022). *ECOWAS and coups: Rethinking enforcement strategies*. https://issafrica.org

[23] Institute for Security Studies (ISS). (2022). *Sanctions and sovereignty: ECOWAS and the junta dilemma* (ISS Policy Brief). https://issafrica.org

[24] Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

[25] Lynch, G., & Crawford, G. (2022). Authoritarianism, democracy, and Africa's normative evolution. *Third World Quarterly, 43*(2), 285–305.

[26] Lynch, G., & Crawford, G. (2022). Authoritarian internationalism and African security: The new geopolitics of military partnerships. *Third World Quarterly, 43*(7), 1430–1447. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2043224

[27] Ndiaye, M. (2023). ECOWAS, sovereignty, and democratic conditionality in West Africa. *Journal of African Union Studies, 12*(2), 34–57. https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4292/2023/v12n2a2

[28] Ndiaye, N. (2023). Regional responses to coups in Francophone West Africa: Between normative ambition and political realism. *African Affairs, 122*(488), 391–409. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad020

[29] Newman, E. (2010). Non-state actors and global security: Theoretical challenges and policy responses. *Contemporary Security Policy, 30*(3), 396–420. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523261003640819

[30] OECD. (2023). *Sahel security and governance outlook 2023*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

[31] OECD. (2023). *Changing dynamics in Sahelian security partnerships* (OECD Sahel and West Africa Club Report). https://www.oecd.org/swac

[32] SIPRI. (2022). *Trends in international arms transfers, 2022*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. https://sipri.org

[33] Souaré, I. K. (2009). *The AU and the challenge of unconstitutional changes of government in Africa* (ISS Paper No. 197). Institute for Security Studies.