Research Article

Digital Diplomacy and Military Coup in Africa: Empirical Analysis of ECOWAS Intervention in Niger and Burkina Faso

Mark Kingsley Chinonso PhD[1], Chukwuma Ogonna Ebenezer[2], Obinna Okechukwu Celestine[3]

[1]Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
[2]Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
[3]MSc Student, Department of Political ScienceNnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract: The rise of military coups in Africa in recent times, especially in West Africa has intensified, raised concerns about the capacity of regional institutions like ECOWAS to uphold democratic governance amid deep-seated socio-political crises. The adoption of digital diplomacy by ECOWAS along the traditional method of diplomacy, calls for serious interrogation, with regards to its effectiveness in addressing the military coup in members states of Burkina Faso and Niger Republic. Anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) of Fred Davis (1985), utilizing the secondary method of data collection and the content analysis. The study found that military coups in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic were orchestrated by enduring structural weaknesses in governance and security, prompting ECOWAS to utilize digital diplomacy as a crucial tool to inform and engage stakeholders while asserting its role in upholding democratic norms. Despite ECOWAS's swift use of digital platforms to condemn the coups, impose sanctions, and encourage dialogue, the formal withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS signals a significant challenge to regional cohesion and the limits of ECOWAS's digital diplomacy in preventing and resolving deep-rooted political crises. The study therefore recommends among others that ECOWAS needs to move beyond digital diplomacy of condemning military coups, imposing sanctions, and invest in proactive measures like early-warning systems, local peace building, and community empowerment to tackle the root causes of military coups in West Africa.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Digital Diplomacy, socio-political crises, Military coup, ECOWAS Intervention,

INTRODUCTION

The re-emergence of military coups in Africa, particularly in the West African region, has dominated governance debates and raised concerns among stakeholders about the effectiveness of regional institutions in sustaining democracy in recent times. These military interventions have been attributed to deep-seated grievances, systemic corruption, and external pressures that characterize democratic governance on the continent (Biney, 2013; Thomas, 2022; Kante, 2023). Particularly in West Africa, the recent cases of military coups in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic, among others, have led to a re-evaluation of the role and effectiveness of the diplomatic responses of regional institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS, as a preeminent regional organization, has not only relied on traditional diplomacy rooted in in-person, confidential, and formal state-to-state negotiations, dialogue, and conflict resolution, but has also leveraged modern information and communication technology (ICT) to advance its diplomatic engagements with relevant domestic and international stakeholders (Frey, 2024; Alade in Ebegbulem and Adams, 2022). This is evident in its use of digital tools like video-conference gadgets and applications for official meetings, along with the publication of official statements denouncing military coups that overthrew democratic governments, and the imposition of membership suspensions and economic sanctions on the juntas through its websites and social media platforms.

Despite the digital diplomacy initiatives adopted by ECOWAS, the persistence of military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic, coupled with popular support for these coups that topple democratic governments, raises fundamental questions about the durability of ECOWAS's diplomatic response. While ECOWAS's digital diplomacy efforts, demonstrate an embrace of modern communicative tools, their effectiveness in countering the deeper socio-political undercurrents driving military rule in West Africa remains a matter of critical concern (Obasi, 2023; Fasan, 2015). Against this backdrop, this study employed a secondary data collection approach, drawing extensively from scholarly literature, including textbooks and online journal publications, alongside news media reports and official publications from ECOWAS websites and social media platforms, as well as updates from Nigeria Presidency's X (formerly Twitter) account. Using the content analysis to analyze and illuminate how digital tools are reshaping regional governance

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*Corresponding Author: Mark Kingsley Chinonso PhD

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frameworks and what this evolution portends for the future of democracy and security in West Africa.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Digital Diplomacy

The academic discourse on digital diplomacy begins with the foundational understanding of diplomacy itself, as articulated by Frey (2024), who conceptualizes diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy and a peaceful alternative to war, primarily rooted in negotiations and dialogue. This aligns with Alade's (1997) classic definition, cited in Ebegbulem and Adams (2022), where diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact in the conduct of official relations between states, with an emphasis on reaching agreements that advance a state's welfare or power. These classical notions underscore the historical role of diplomacy as a means to resolve conflicts, coordinate policies, and forge international alliances without resorting to violence. Ebegbulem and Adams (2022) extend this view by emphasizing diplomacy as the principal vehicle for state communication in international affairs. Their study reveals the directness and formality of diplomatic exchanges, which have traditionally been confined to state actors in a bilateral or multilateral setting, privileging in-person negotiation and confidential state-to-state dialogue.

Against this backdrop, Frey (2024) and Teibowei (2024) introduce digital diplomacy as an evolution of these traditional practices, redefining the field as the strategic deployment of digital technologies by diplomatic actors, including states, diplomats, and international organisations, to engage with foreign publics and pursue diplomatic objectives. They converge in defining digital diplomacy as the use of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to shape a nation's global image, manage crises, and interact with audiences beyond governmental circles. Frey (2024) places particular emphasis on the broad scope of digital diplomacy, noting its applications in public, cultural, and crisis diplomacy, all oriented towards harnessing digital platforms to foster influence and connectivity. Teibowei (2024), however, widens this understanding by highlighting the use of blogs, podcasts, virtual meetings, and data-driven approaches to refine diplomatic strategies and extend outreach. This expansion suggests that digital diplomacy is not simply about social media engagement, but about leveraging a full spectrum of digital tools to achieve nuanced diplomatic goals in real time.

Similarly, Manor and Segev (2015) and Bjola and Holmes (2015) equally focused on the transformative impact of social media on diplomatic practice. They emphasize how digital diplomacy signifies a shift in power dynamics, redistributing the traditional diplomatic prerogative of networking, intelligence gathering, and influence from state actors to a more diffused and interactive social web. This reallocation of agency challenges the exclusivity of state-centric diplomacy, acknowledging the enhanced role of civil society and non-state actors in global affairs. Manor and Segev's (2015) emphasis on national image management through social media complements Bjola and Holmes's (2015) assertion that digital diplomacy is a tool for change management—an adaptation to the new digital ecosystem. Collectively, these scholars highlight digital diplomacy as both a response to and a catalyst for the democratization of diplomatic processes, where the speed and transparency of digital interactions challenge the slower, hierarchical structures of classical diplomacy.

Offering a broader lens to the discussion, Wekesa, Turianskyi, and Ayodele (2021) identified digital diplomacy as encompassing various digital formats beyond social media, including virtual diplomacy and networked diplomacy. They argue that ICTs have been integrated into multiple aspects of diplomacy—ranging from negotiation and public diplomacy to consular services and internal communications within foreign ministries. This perspective highlights the embeddedness of digital tools in both outward-facing image promotion and inward-facing administrative functions, expanding the domain of digital diplomacy beyond public engagement to include the internal recalibration of diplomatic apparatuses. Frey (2024) reinforces this point by exploring the historical evolution of diplomacy alongside technological innovation, from the printing press to the internet, suggesting that digital diplomacy is the latest stage in a long trajectory of technological mediation in international relations.

The intersection between traditional and digital diplomacy emerges as a key theme in these scholarly explorations. Frey (2024) underscores how the digital age has reconfigured diplomacy from slow, personal negotiations to an accelerated, globalised practice, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This digital transformation facilitates real-time exchanges and unprecedented levels of connectivity, yet it simultaneously introduces vulnerabilities such as cyber threats and information warfare. Aktaş (2021) echoes this tension, positing that while digital diplomacy enhances outreach and policy communication, it cannot fully supplant the confidentiality and formality of traditional diplomacy. This suggests a complementary relationship rather than a substitutional one, wherein digital diplomacy serves as a supplement that enhances the immediacy, reach, and efficiency of classical diplomatic efforts.

Summa in Theander (2021) brings a clear perspective by focusing on the tempo and procedural shifts in diplomacy introduced by social media. Summa's view complements Aktaş's (2021) argument by illustrating how digital platforms have accelerated the

pace of diplomatic action, changing the traditional structures of state interaction and information dissemination. However, Summa also warns of the risk of procedural dilution, where the speed and informality of digital communication may undermine the careful deliberation and strategic caution that have traditionally characterised diplomacy. This points to a critical area of divergence among scholars: whether digital diplomacy represents a fundamental transformation of diplomacy or merely an adaptation of enduring principles to new technological contexts.

In synthesizing these scholarly views, it becomes apparent that digital diplomacy is broadly defined as the strategic use of digital technologies, ranging from social media, websites, and blogs to AI-driven analytics, to conduct and enhance diplomatic activities across multiple levels of international engagement. While Frey (2024) and Teibowei (2024) highlight its broad applications and strategic potential, scholars like Aktaş (2021) and Summa (2020) caution that digital diplomacy complements, rather than replaces, traditional diplomacy's core functions. Meanwhile, Wekesa *et al.* (2021) situate digital diplomacy within a continuum of technological adaptation, echoing the historical interplay between diplomacy and communication tools. In light of these insights, digital diplomacy can be define as the deliberate and strategic employment of digital technologies, encompassing social media, websites, data analytics, and virtual platforms, by state and non-state actors to engage diverse audiences, shape global narratives, and manage the complex, fast-paced landscape of contemporary international relations.

Military Interventions in Africa

Military interventions in Africa have become a recurring theme in political discourse, eliciting critical attention from scholars across the continent and beyond. Chinweuba, Emeka, and Ezeugwu (2024) articulate that the advent of democracy was once seen as a panacea for the governance challenges plaguing African states. Yet, recent developments, including successful military coups in Sudan, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, and Gabon, challenge this assumption. According to Chinweuba *et al.*, the enthusiasm and jubilation accompanying these coups, along with the supportive social media discourse in countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana, reflect widespread disillusionment with democratic governance. They maintain that African democracy has become more imperial and predatory than service-driven, marked by a betrayal of the masses' interests. Despite regional and international efforts by the UN, AU, and ECOWAS to curb unconstitutional changes of government, military interventions have surged, suggesting a systemic failure of liberal democracy to meet the needs and aspirations of ordinary Africans.

Similarly, Cheeseman (2021) interrogates the fragility of democracy in Africa, linking the phenomenon of military coups to deep-seated dissatisfaction with governance. Drawing on data from the Afrobarometer survey, Cheeseman demonstrates that citizens in 26 out of 34 African countries are disenchanted not with democracy itself, but with the political elites who manipulate it. The drivers of democracy are often corrupt and self-serving, undermining the core democratic principles of accountability and popular participation. The growing popularity of military interventions reflects a collective sense of despair, wherein military juntas are perceived as viable correctives to democratic failures. In Cheeseman's analysis, the military coups are not merely political aberrations but are indicative of an emerging nostalgia for authoritarianism as a remedy to endemic governance failures.

In tandem with this perspective, Rosenje, Siyanbola, and Adeniyi (2024) extend the critique of African democracy by exploring the triggers of military resurgence. They argue that internal factors such as ethnic dominance and the sit-tight syndrome of African leaders intersect with external pressures to fuel military takeovers. This convergence of internal and external factors, they contend, reveals the vulnerability of democratic institutions in Africa. However, Rosenje *et al.* (2024) underscore the paradox of military rule, which, while seemingly addressing popular grievances, ultimately violates constitutional norms and curtails fundamental freedoms, including media independence and civil liberties. Thus, they present military interventions as both a consequence of democratic decay and a further threat to democratic consolidation.

A more structural analysis emerges in the work of Mohammed (2022), who underscores the role of ethnic rivalry and economic dependency in shaping the political landscape conducive to military interventions. Ethnic domination, according to Mohammed, consolidates power within certain groups, thereby marginalising others and fostering discontent. This structural framework of exclusion and rivalry, coupled with chronic economic dependency, renders political systems vulnerable to military takeovers. The inability of democratic governments to mediate these tensions effectively leaves a void that the military readily exploits, perpetuating a cycle of instability.

Complimenting the above structural analysis, Yusuf (2023) pointed to the weakness of democratic institutions and leadership vacuums as proximate causes of military resurgence. Using the example of Mali's 2020 coup, Yusuf illustrates how fragile institutions and widespread protests against corruption and insecurity create opportunities for military actors to seize power. The pattern of disillusionment and subsequent military intervention, he argues, is not coincidental but a reflection of the fundamental weaknesses in African democratic states. The author concludes that military actors, exploiting these fissures, step in as perceived

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stabilisers, only to reinforce the cycle of governance failures and coups.

Further broadening this discourse, Adams, Ashibi, George, and Ashibi (2025) trace the phenomenon of military resurgence in Africa to a combination of internal democratic failures and external neo-colonial pressures, particularly from France in its former colonies. These authors highlight that while democratic governance has made significant inroads over the past three decades, the re-emergence of military coups, particularly in Francophone West and Central Africa, signals a retreat from democratic norms. The popular support for military regimes, they argue, is fuelled by a toxic mix of socio-economic frustrations and the continued exploitation of African economies by external actors. This dual crisis of internal misgovernance and external exploitation feeds into a political culture where military interventions are seen as both an expression of and a response to popular disenchantment.

Yet, Daffeh (2024) offers a cautionary perspective that challenges the romanticisation of military rule. His study, grounded in empirical data from West Africa, contends that military interventions ultimately exacerbate the very problems they purport to solve. Dictatorship, limited citizen participation, underdevelopment, and financial crises are some of the adverse outcomes identified by Daffeh. He argues that military leaders, despite initial promises of reform and stability, often become more entrenched and repressive. The case of Yaya Jammeh in Gambia exemplifies this trend of military rulers who abandon transitional pledges to entrench personal power. Moreover, military regimes' noncompliance with AU financial obligations undermines regional development efforts and compromises the collective African response to governance challenges.

In synthesising these scholarly views, a clear consensus emerges: military coups in Africa are symptomatic of deep democratic deficits, including corruption, ethnic exclusion, external exploitation, and institutional weakness. However, scholars differ in their assessments of the military's role in redressing these deficits. While Chinweuba, Emeka, and Ezeugwu (2024), Cheeseman (2021), and Adams *et al.* (2025) highlight the popular appeal and structural underpinnings of military coups, Rosenje *et al.* (2024), Yusuf (2023), and Daffeh (2024) stress the perils and failures of military rule. Based on the foregoing scholarly submissions, it could be concluded that military coups are not viable solutions to Africa's democratic challenges. While they may temporarily reflect popular frustration, they ultimately undermine constitutionalism, breed authoritarianism, and stymie development. A sustainable way forward lies in strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusivity, and addressing socio-economic grievances through genuine democratic

reforms rather than reverting to military authoritarianism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) of Fred Davis (1985). Fred Davis first proposed TAM in 1985 as part of his doctoral dissertation at the MIT Sloan School of Management. The model was officially published in the academic literature in 1989 (Davis, 1989). Drawing from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), TAM specifically aimed to explain and predict user acceptance of computer technology by focusing on individual attitudes toward system use. Davis's work was later expanded and refined through the efforts of other scholars, including Richard Bagozzi and Paul Warshaw, who contributed to the broader understanding and validation of TAM in organizational contexts (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989).

At its core, the model argues that two primary factors—Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)—determine an individual's intention to use a technology, which in turn influences actual system usage. PU refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will enhance their job performance, while PEOU refers to the degree to which a person believes that using the system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989). These constructs feed into the user's attitude towards using the system, ultimately predicting the behavioral intention to adopt or reject the technology.

Based on the argument of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), ECOWAS's adoption of digital diplomacy to address military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic can be understood as a strategic response shaped by both perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The perceived usefulness of digital diplomacy, its capacity to swiftly communicate condemnations, sanctions, and diplomatic outcomes to both domestic and international stakeholders, provided ECOWAS with a tool to project legitimacy and reinforce regional norms of democratic governance (Davis, 1989). Simultaneously, the perceived ease of use of digital platforms, such as social media and websites, allowed ECOWAS to navigate logistical challenges inherent in rapidly unfolding political crises and to maintain engagement with stakeholders in a transparent and accessible manner (Davis *et al.*, 1989). This dual perception of utility and simplicity shaped ECOWAS's intention to deploy digital diplomacy, yet the limited capacity of digital communication to address structural drivers of military coups, such as systemic corruption and governance failures, suggests the boundaries of TAM in explaining organizational strategies in complex political crises.

ECOWAS and Military Coup in West Africa

The phenomenon of military coups in West Africa has been a recurring political feature even in

present time. Acho and Tacham (2023), Biney (2013), Aborisade (2018), and Nwosu (2018), chronicle how military incursions have historically disrupted democratic processes and caused significant political upheaval. The coup in Ghana in 1966, Nigeria's first coup in the same year, and Thomas Sankara's socialist-inspired coup in Burkina Faso in 1983 are all part of a broader pattern that shows the region's vulnerability to military takeovers (Biney, 2013; Folarin, 2015). The studies also link these coups to grievances against corruption and state mismanagement, as seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Thomas, 2022; Woods & Reese, 2008). While these accounts highlight the historical roots and motivations for coups, they reveal a consistent pattern: military interventions are often portrayed as short-term remedies for systemic failures, yet they typically exacerbate instability and hinder democratic consolidation.

A significant contribution to the discourse is made by Omolara *et al.* (2024), who argue that the causes of military interventions are multifaceted, stemming from deep-seated issues such as political impunity and historical conflicts. They highlight how these military incursions have strained regional relationships and hindered socioeconomic and democratic development. This perspective aligns with Kante (2023), who characterises the recent coups as not just historical anomalies but as an emerging trend in the political landscape of West Africa. Kante's observation that these coups persist despite the ECOWAS Lome Declaration suggests a troubling gap between regional commitments and practical enforcement. This critical insight underscores the need for ECOWAS to address not only the immediate military takeovers but also the structural weaknesses that enable them.

In exploring ECOWAS's responses, Kew (2020) and the International IDEA (2024) provide a comprehensive account of the organisation's efforts to establish a democratic framework, particularly through mechanisms like the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC). Obasi (2023) and Gomes (2018) discuss how ECOWAS has employed economic sanctions against military juntas in countries like Guinea and Mali, revealing an institutional preference for economic leverage over military force. However, Fasan (2015) and Umaru (2019) argue that these sanctions have often proved ineffective, citing Guinea-Bissau as a case in point where sanctions failed to forestall military coups. This shared observation highlights a crucial tension within ECOWAS's approach, which is its reliance on sanctions as a deterrent often overlooks the need for sustained capacity building and institutional reform within member states.

The role of mediation in ECOWAS's response to military interventions has been extensively explored by Ezeilo (2018) and Ronceray (2023). ECOWAS's creation of a Mediation and Security Council and its deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force, although notable, have been constrained by limited resources and inconsistent political will among member states (Kew, 2020). While Olonisakin (2016) attributes this to weak institutional structures in the region, Mills (2022) contends that ECOWAS's own internal contradictions, such as its tendency to legitimise unconstitutional third-term extensions, also play a role. These internal contradictions, according to Mills, weaken the credibility of ECOWAS's democratic norms and make it easier for military actors to justify their interventions. This tension between stated democratic ideals and actual practices reveals a fundamental challenge for ECOWAS as both a mediator and enforcer of regional stability.

Mills (2022) further critiques ECOWAS for treating post-coup elections as legitimate despite clear violations of constitutional order, a view echoed by Olubiyo and Ayodele (2024). These authors argue that ECOWAS's moral obligations, manifested in sanctions and diplomatic condemnation, have not been matched by practical frameworks to entrench good governance. The reluctance of ECOWAS to treat constitutional manipulations by civilian leaders with the same urgency as military coups signals an inconsistency that ultimately emboldens anti-democratic actors. This inconsistency, as noted by Onapajo and Babalola (2024), has fostered a reactive, rather than proactive, approach in ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms. This critique points to the necessity for ECOWAS to move beyond crisis-response and adopt a preventive orientation that addresses root causes such as political exclusion, poverty, and the manipulation of democratic processes.

Highlighting the limitations of sanctions and other punitive measures, Olubiyo and Ayodele (2024) argue that they have not significantly deterred military juntas or hastened transitions to civilian rule. They suggests that while ECOWAS's interventions have symbolic importance, they do not address the structural drivers of military coups, such as endemic corruption and a lack of political inclusivity. Onapajo and Babalola (2024) also observe that domestic and international geopolitical factors undermine ECOWAS's effectiveness, reinforcing the idea that regional stability cannot be separated from broader global power dynamics. This observation is crucial as it draws attention to the interconnectedness of local, regional, and international political orders in shaping the security landscape of West Africa.

From the foregoing, the body of literature collectively points to a recurring dilemma, which is ECOWAS's effort to combat military coups being hampered not only by external factors but also by internal divisions and contradictions within the organization. Umaru (2019) observes that some member states are reluctant to criticize others because of strategic alliances or economic ties, further weakening ECOWAS's collective resolve. Despite the adoption of frameworks

like the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Onapajo & Babalola, 2024), ECOWAS's struggle to enforce these norms consistently underscores a gap between policy and practice. This division within ECOWAS has important implications for regional governance and highlights the limitations of relying on punitive measures alone to restore democratic order.

In conclusion, there is a consensus among scholars that military coups in West Africa are driven by a combination of structural weaknesses, political exclusion, and the failure of democratic institutions. While ECOWAS has developed legal and diplomatic frameworks to address these coups, its efforts are undermined by a lack of capacity, political will, and coherence among member states. Scholars such as Mills (2022), Omolara *et al.* (2024), and Onapajo and Babalola (2024) argue that ECOWAS must move beyond a reactive posture towards preventive governance reforms that tackle root causes of instability. Thus, the need for ECOWAS to deepen its preventive diplomacy by bolstering democratic institutions and promoting inclusive governance across member states. Until ECOWAS can ensure that its democratic protocols are not just rhetorical but practically enforced, military coups will remain an enduring feature of West African political life.

Military Coup in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic
The military coup in Burkina Faso that deposed President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in 2022 epitomizes the enduring cycle of political upheaval and military interventions in the country's postcolonial trajectory. This pattern of instability has been largely driven by widespread disillusionment with state incapacity, particularly in confronting jihadist insurgencies. Since achieving independence in 1960, Burkina Faso has witnessed a succession of coups, each fueled by grievances against entrenched political leadership or mishandling of crises. The inaugural coup in 1966 that ousted President Maurice Yaméogo set a precedent, followed by repeated military seizures of power in 1980, 1982, 1983, and 1987, culminating in the assassination of the revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara. These recurrent takeovers reveal persistent tensions between military elites and civilian governments, highlighting the military's enduring role as an arbiter of political disputes (Rédaction Africanews with AFP, 2022). The dramatic toppling of Blaise Compaoré in 2014, provoked by mass protests against his prolonged rule, reinforces a pattern in which popular disenchantment consistently facilitates military or popular uprisings.

The disintegration of Blaise Compaoré's 27-year regime in 2014, widely regarded by activists as being co-opted by the military establishment, created an institutional vacuum that was quickly exploited by non-state armed actors. Subsequent administrations, particularly under President Roch Kaboré, responded to the intensifying security challenges through increasingly authoritarian policies. These included suppressing civil liberties, curbing dissent, and manipulating digital platforms to control public discourse, effectively criminalising and stifling human rights activists and social movements (Engels, 2025). The imposition of a state of emergency in 2018, compounded by broader regional conflicts, entrenched these repressive dynamics. Consequently, activists have found themselves navigating a precarious landscape, threatened both by jihadist violence and by the coercive measures of the state itself (Engels, 2025).

On 24 January 2022, President Roch Kaboré was forcibly removed from office through a military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandogo Damiba and the newly formed junta, the Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration (MPSR). Given widespread perceptions of Kaboré's administration as inept in addressing the escalating security crisis, significant segments of the population either endorsed the coup or chose not to actively oppose it. In this context, the Kaboré government's systematic use of the terrorist threat as a justification to curtail civil liberties and restrict social movements effectively muted potential resistance, in stark contrast to the successful mobilisation that thwarted an attempted coup in September 2015 (Engels, 2022).

Merely eight months later, on 30 September 2022, another coup occurred, this time orchestrated by junior officers led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré. Despite Damiba's pledge to prioritise the battle against jihadist insurgents, the frequency of attacks had, in fact, increased over the preceding six months. This second coup within a single year did not come as a shock to observers, given the growing frustration within the military ranks regarding the leadership's apparent inability to contain the jihadist threat (Engels, 2025). Notably, Traoré had been an early supporter of Damiba's January coup and a founding member of the MPSR. The September coup thus represented a classic "coup from below," initiated by lower-ranking officers who felt alienated and saw no avenue for advancement within the existing military hierarchy. The new junta subsequently branded itself as MPSR2 (Engels, 2025).

Following the 30 September 2022 coup, the "transition phase" was initially intended to conclude in July 2024 with the election of a civilian government. However, in late May 2024, Captain Traoré announced that the transitional regime would be prolonged by an additional 60 months. The newly constituted transitional assembly, in a significant departure from previous arrangements, eliminated guaranteed seats for political parties, instead prioritising "patriotism" as the criterion for membership selection (Engels, 2025). This shift signaled a deliberate attempt to marginalise traditional

political actors and entrench military control over the political process.

The administration of Captain Traoré and the MPSR2, now in power for two years, has been distinguished by a reorientation of foreign policy away from France and by intensifying domestic repression of civil society. Anti-French sentiment in the region, long present, has intensified considerably over the past decade. Persistent protests have emerged in response to French military presence and the continued use of the CFA franc, a colonial-era currency still in circulation in much of West Africa (Taylor, 2019; Sylla, 2021). These dynamics underscore the broader regional contestations over sovereignty and neo-colonial structures of economic and military dependency.

Turning to Niger, the military has similarly played a central role in shaping the country's political history since its independence from France in 1960. Recurrent military interventions have typically arisen from domestic political crises. A notable example occurred in 2010, when the military overthrew President Mamadou Tandja following his unconstitutional attempt to extend his term. This coup was initially seen as paving the way for democratic reforms. However, the spectre of military intervention persisted despite the 2011 election of Mahamadou Issoufou and Niger's first democratic transfer of power in 2021, when Mohamed Bazoum succeeded him (Tschörner, 2023). Despite periodic reshuffles in the military leadership, several coup attempts were suppressed in the intervening years.

Niger's post-independence history is marked by a series of coups in 1974, 1996, 1999, 2010, and most recently in 2023. On 26 July 2023, President Mohamed Bazoum was deposed in a military coup spearheaded by the Presidential Guard Regiment Command. General Abdourahmane Tchiani, the former commander of the Presidential Guard, assumed leadership, announcing the suspension of the constitution and the installation of a military administration. The 2023 coup was notable for its substantial public backing, as evidenced by the burning of the headquarters of Bazoum's Niger Democracy and Socialism Party in Niamey during pro-coup demonstrations (Emir, 2023). This incident underscores the deep-seated grievances and popular support that often accompany military takeovers in Niger.

ECOWAS Digital Diplomacy and Military Coup in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic

The repeated military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic have laid bare persistent structural weaknesses in governance and security across the West African region. ECOWAS's response, leveraging digital diplomacy such as it official website https://www.ecowas.int/ and social media platforms: X (formerly known as Twitter) - @ecowas cedeao, Facebook - Ecowas – Cedeao, and YouTube Channel -

Ecowas – Cedeao, as a strategic tool, not only informed regional stakeholders on its actions and positions on public matters but also asserted its role as the arbiter of collective democratic governance and security in West Africa.

Following the military coup on January 24, 2022, that deposed President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, ECOWAS promptly denounced the unconstitutional seizure of power through statements disseminated on its official website and social media platforms. The Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subsequently convened an Extraordinary Session via videoconference on January 28, 2022. This session, chaired by H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and then Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, was convened to deliberate on the unfolding political situation in Burkina Faso in the wake of the coup that disrupted the democratically elected administration of President Kaboré (Relief Web, 2022; ECOWAS, 2022a). As a direct outcome of this virtual meeting, ECOWAS announced the immediate suspension of Burkina Faso from its governing bodies, and the relevant communiqué was subsequently published on the organization's website (ECOWAS, 2022a). Such virtual meetings, shows ECOWAS's adaptability and digital agility. The publication of these proceedings on its website offered a sense of procedural legitimacy and inclusivity, highlighting ECOWAS's commitment to democratic norms despite the region's complex political terrain. By openly broadcasting these high-level deliberations, ECOWAS not only informed regional stakeholders but also asserted its role as the arbiter of collective security and governance.

Subsequently, on March 25, 2022, ECOWAS issued another communiqué on its official website, reiterating its condemnation of the unconstitutional change of government and calling for the unconditional and immediate release of President Kaboré (ECOWAS, 2022b). The communiqué not only affirmed Burkina Faso's suspension from all ECOWAS institutions, effective from January 28, 2022, but also stipulated a deadline for establishing an acceptable transitional framework. ECOWAS warned that failure to comply with this deadline would result in the imposition of economic and financial sanctions.

In the aftermath of the coup in the Republic of Niger, ECOWAS swiftly organized an Extraordinary Summit and, on July 30, 2023, issued a communiqué, published on its website, condemning the unconstitutional overthrow of government (ECOWAS, 2023a). The communiqué demanded the immediate and unconditional release and reinstatement of President Mohamed Bazoum. Moreover, ECOWAS announced comprehensive sanctions against Niger, including the closure of land and air borders, suspension of trade and

financial activities, and the freezing of state assets (ECOWAS, 2023a). These measures were made publicly accessible through ECOWAS's website to ensure transparency and wide dissemination of information. Later, in December 2023, at the conclusion of the sixty-fourth ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government held in Abuja, ECOWAS reaffirmed its sanctions against Niger in another communique published on its official website, again urging the restoration of constitutional order (ECOWAS, 2023b).ECOWAS also employed social media platforms to amplify its stance. For example, the official X (formerly Twitter) account of the Nigerian Presidency, which chairs the ECOWAS bloc, shared ECOWAS's communiqué on the sanctions against Niger, originally published on July 30, 2023 (Presidency Nigeria, 2023). This strategic use of social media enhanced ECOWAS's capacity to engage a wider audience, including international stakeholders and the general public, thus reinforcing its steadfast commitment to democratic governance and regional peace.

On February 24, 2024, ECOWAS published the final communiqué of an extraordinary summit on its website and social media accounts, particularly Facebook and X (ECOWAS, 2024). This communiqué acknowledged the formal notifications from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, under military rule, of their decision to withdraw from ECOWAS. ECOWAS reminded these states of Article 91 of the 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty, which outlines the procedure for withdrawal, and encouraged them to reconsider their decision in light of the benefits enjoyed by all member states and their citizens (ECOWAS, 2024).

In the same online published communiqué, ECOWAS officially lifted sanctions on the Republic of Niger, Mali, and Guinea, though Burkina Faso was notably excluded from this decision. Specifically, ECOWAS's Authority declared the immediate lifting of numerous sanctions on Niger, including the reopening of land and air borders, the removal of the no-fly zone, the resumption of commercial and financial activities, the restoration of utility and electricity services, the unfreezing of state assets held in ECOWAS Central Banks and commercial banks, the resumption of financial assistance and transactions with regional institutions such as EBID and BOAD, and the lifting of travel restrictions on Nigerien officials and their families (ECOWAS, 2024).

After receiving and acknowledging the withdrawal requests from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, ECOWAS, on January 29, 2025, issued a press statement published on its website and social media platforms, confirming that the withdrawal of these states had officially come into effect (ECOWAS, 2025). Nevertheless, in an effort to preserve regional cohesion and minimize disruptions to the livelihoods of citizens and businesses, ECOWAS called upon relevant authorities to continue recognizing ECOWAS-issued national passports and identification documents of these countries' citizens, to maintain existing trade and investment protocols for their goods and services, and to preserve visa-free travel, residency, and establishment rights (ECOWAS, 2025). Furthermore, ECOWAS requested that officials from these withdrawing states continue to receive full support in the execution of ECOWAS-related responsibilities, while also establishing a framework to deliberate on future relations to ensure that no confusion or disruption arises during this transitional period (ECOWAS, 2025).

FINDINGS

Military interventions in Africa emerge as complex responses to deep-seated democratic failures. Although there is widespread popular support for military takeovers in countries like Sudan, Chad, and Guinea, these coups are driven not by a rejection of democracy itself but by disillusionment with corrupt and self-serving elites who have hijacked democratic processes. Ethnic rivalry, economic dependency, and external neo-colonial pressures further erode state legitimacy, creating fertile ground for military actors to present themselves as stabilisers. In the West African sub-region, the persistent cycle of military interventions in West Africa, is rooted in deep-seated grievances against corruption and systemic mismanagement, as well as historical legacies of political exclusion (Biney, 2013; Thomas, 2022; Woods & Reese, 2008). This situation suggests that despite regional declarations like the ECOWAS Lome Declaration, the region's vulnerability to military takeovers persists, exposing a profound disconnect between stated democratic commitments and their implementation (Kante, 2023).

The cyclical pattern of military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger reflects profound state incapacity and widespread popular disillusionment for democracy in West Africa, driven largely by the inability of post-colonial regimes to address governance failures and the persistent jihadist threat (Rédaction Africanews with AFP, 2022; Engels, 2025). In Burkina Faso, the toppling of President Kaboré in January 2022 and the subsequent coup in September 2022 reveal the military's entrenched role as an arbiter of crises, especially as leadership repeatedly exploits security concerns to justify authoritarian measures (Engels, 2022; Engels, 2025). The military's consolidation of power under Captain Traoré's MPSR2 regime, which extended its transitional rule by 60 months and marginalized political parties, exemplifies the military's self-legitimizing logic under the guise of patriotism (Engels, 2025). Meanwhile, in Niger, military interventions have similarly punctuated political transitions since independence, with the 2023 coup led by General Tchiani reflecting both military opportunism and popular frustration with democratic institutions perceived as corrupt or ineffectual (Tschörner, 2023; Emir, 2023). These cases highlight how military elites repeatedly reassert

themselves as both protectors and rulers, exploiting societal divisions and external threats to sustain their dominance.

The military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic have prompted ECOWAS to intensify its role as a regional arbiter of democracy and stability through proactive digital diplomacy. Utilizing its official website and social media platforms, ECOWAS swiftly condemned the unconstitutional seizures of power, suspended the offending states from its institutions, and imposed sanctions, measures publicly communicated to reinforce transparency and legitimacy (ECOWAS, 2022a; 2023a). The organization's rapid convening of extraordinary summits and virtual meetings to diplomatically address these political crises, demonstrated adaptability in crisis management while broadcasting the outcomes of these deliberations digitally via its modern communication channels to assert procedural legitimacy and maintain stakeholder engagement (Relief Web, 2022; ECOWAS, 2022a). However, ECOWAS's responses to these military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic through digital democracy have revolved primarily around economic sanctions and diplomatic condemnation published on its various digital platforms rather than robust preventive measures (Obasi, 2023; Gomes, 2018; Fasan, 2015). Despite these efforts, the formal withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS in early 2025 signal a critical fragmentation risk; yet, ECOWAS's continued insistence on recognizing travel documents and trade protocols highlights its attempt to preserve regional cohesion amid political fractures (ECOWAS, 2025). Consequently, while ECOWAS's interventions, particularly through digital diplomacy are significant symbolically, its reactive posture and internal divisions render them insufficient in preventing the reoccurrence of military coups in West Africa.

CONCLUSION

ECOWAS's adoption of digital diplomacy in response to military interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger Republic shows the organization's symbolic commitment to democratic norms and regional stability yet reveals the profound limitations of this approach in the face of deep-seated structural challenges. ECOWAS's swift use of digital platforms such as video-conference applications for its official meetings, and publications on its official website and social media handles condemning coups that toppled democratic governments, and enforcing membership suspensions and sanctions against the military juntas signals an evolving communicative strategy that bolsters its legitimacy as a regulating actor. However, its reactive measures fall short of addressing the entrenched factors—corruption, governance failures, and external pressures, that sustain cycles of military rule in the region. Also, the continued withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS in early 2025, despite

the organization's digital diplomacy and other diplomatic measures adopted, highlight the fragility of regional unity and the symbolic rather than substantive impact of ECOWAS's digital diplomacy efforts. Thus, while digital diplomacy has augmented ECOWAS's visibility and discursive influence, it has done little to bridge the disjuncture between democratic rhetoric and practical governance reforms, leaving the region vulnerable to recurrent military interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, this study recommends that:

- ECOWAS should move beyond reactive digital condemnations by investing in early-warning systems and local peacebuilding initiatives that address the underlying drivers of military coups in the region, particularly corruption, exclusion, and socio-economic grievances. This could involve enhanced intelligence-sharing, community dialogues, and targeted development programmes that empower civil society to hold governments accountable, thereby reducing the legitimacy of military interventions.
- There is need for ECOWAS to develop a comprehensive digital diplomacy strategy that integrates consistent, transparent, and inclusive engagement with both state and non-state actors. This should include digital town halls with civil society, regular updates on ECOWAS's actions in local languages, and leveraging digital channels to foster democratic education and civic participation, thus expanding ECOWAS's legitimacy as a regional governance actor beyond crisis communication.
- ECOWAS should use digital platforms, particularly social media to facilitate dialogue around necessary constitutional and governance reforms, ensuring that these discussions are accessible and participatory. ECOWAS should prioritize supporting member states to implement institutional reforms that improve accountability and inclusivity, such as strengthening judicial independence, electoral processes, and anti-corruption agencies, while using digital diplomacy to highlight and track progress on these reforms.

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