

An Appraisal of ECOWAS in the 2023 Military Intervention in Niger Republic's Politics

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Oladapo Emmanuel Solaru¹ and Akeem Amodu²

Abstract

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has consistently been instrumental in fostering regional stability; however, its suggested military intervention after the 2023 coup in Niger Republic sparked significant discussions regarding the legitimacy, efficacy, and political ramifications of such measures. This paper evaluates ECOWAS's reaction to the July 2023 military coup that removed President Mohamed Bazoum, analysing the regional organisation's transition from diplomatic measures to the consideration of military intervention. The primary issue examined is the seeming disjunction between ECOWAS's normative pledges to democracy and the actual constraints in upholding constitutional order, particularly amid increasing public scepticism and regional security instability. The objective of the study is to critically examine the role played by ECOWAS in the 2023 military intervention in Niger

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1. Department of Politics and International Relations, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria; olasolaru@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5855-8832>.
 2. Department of Politics & International Relations, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria; amoduakeem@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8677-9948>.

Republic's politics. The research is guided by the question: What role did ECOWAS play during the 2023 military intervention in Niger's politics? The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising content analysis of official ECOWAS communiqués, interviews with regional policy analysts, and secondary sources including academic literature and news media. Initial findings indicate that although ECOWAS aimed to prevent the proliferation of coups and reinforce its normative authority, the action divided member states and incited local opposition in Niger, highlighting issues of legitimacy and regional cohesion. The paper concludes that ECOWAS' strategy to the Niger's political crisis demonstrates a tenuous equilibrium between normative enforcement and geopolitical realities. The intervention threat revealed internal fissures within the bloc and underscored the necessity for more participatory and locally rooted dispute management procedures. This evaluation provides insights into the changing functions of regional organisations in Africa's democratic consolidation and peacebuilding initiatives.

Keyword: ECOWAS, Military Intervention, Niger Republic, Politics, West Africa

Introduction

The 2023 military coup that removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power in Niger created a major shift in West African politics while straining the capabilities of the Economic Community of West African States (Sowale, 2024). This event put ECOWAS' dedication to democratic values to the test while exposing the various challenges of regional security and governance and international diplomacy in the Sahel region. On July 26, 2023 President Bazoum of Niger was detained and replaced with a new military regime by General Abdourahmane Tchiani of the Presidential Guard who formed the Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP). The takeover became one of multiple western African military coups, which started with Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea in 2020. President Bola Tinubu

of ECOWAS began quick action through several measures to criticie the coup in Niger and placed tough economic restrictions, while making direct military threats to restore legal governmental order.

African states executed financial sanctions against Niger by cutting border access and halting transactions and asset freezing to compel military leaders toward returning President Bazoum to power (Trifinova, 2024). The imposed economic sanctions created additional problems by causing more humanitarian disasters and weakening trade relationships between Niger and Nigeria and other neighbouring countries. The military government exploited the country's hatred towards France and local resentment to gain power and national support while standing firm against Western African economic measures (Oladoyin *et al*, 2025).

The military command of Mali and Burkina Faso threatened to treat any intervention in Niger as an immediate act of war against their governments which were under military rule. Alliance of Sahel States (AES) emerged as a regional defence alliance when Niger united with Mali and Burkina Faso to oppose ECOWAS authority, thus creating a direct challenge to ECOWAS' regional influence through the AES alliance. The AES's foundation made clear the escalating tensions across West Africa, besides demonstrating ECOWAS's inability to implement its agreed protocols.

ECOWAS declined to carry out military intervention, thus deciding to pursue diplomatic solutions first. ECOWAS gradually decreased its sanctions because humanitarian problems surfaced which demonstrated that the sanctions harmed Niger's population effectively while failing to advance political aims. The existing situation demonstrated ECOWAS had crucial constraints in its strategies for crisis management, thus requiring new assessments of its governance response tactics.

The Niger coup situation in 2023, along with ECOWAS' reaction, provides insights into regional management issues while showcasing the weak state of democracies and the changing Western African political environment. The AES alternative alliance, as well as international interventions, pressured ECOWAS's governance authority and demanded new approaches to uphold democratic principles and establish regional stability.

Statement of the Problem

As a West African regional bloc, ECOWAS dedicates itself to peace preservation, sustenance of democratic systems and maintenance of stability throughout the area. The ECOWAS organisation faced renewed criticism from academics because of its handling of the 2023 military coup in Niger that brought questions to its intervention tactics. A military junta removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power, and ECOWAS immediately condemned this coup while also threatening invasion unless the junta return political order to the nation. The organisation maintains its position on democracy through ECOWAS norms, yet faces questions from both the region and worldwide stakeholders. ECOWAS faces an issue because its standard-setting documents are not properly aligned with existing political situations throughout the region. The planned military operation generated doubt about ECOWAS' ability to execute forceful actions and its handling of state independence alongside the complete implications of such violent measures for the bloc's security and unity. ECOWAS experienced a breakdown in its collective security structure because member states lacked mutual agreement on enforcement methods while simultaneously exposing their internal differences. Neutralists contend that such security operations face both insufficient public backing and fail to resolve primary political instability factors, including corruption and inadequate governance and economic exclusion.

The proposed examination investigates ECOWAS' involvement during Niger's 2023 crisis by analysing its proposed intervention measures from legal, political and security perspectives. The study examines ECOWAS' adherence to its own protocols and international norms and evaluates the impact on its reputation as a West African peace and security leader. This study examines ECOWAS' approach by analysing its reasons for action while also evaluating implementation obstacles alongside resulting impacts to establish a complex evaluation of such regional initiatives in this West African political context.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is the investigation of ECOWAS in the 2023 Military Intervention in Niger Republic's Politics. However, specific objectives include:

- i. examining the role played by ECOWAS in the 2023 military intervention in Niger Republic's politics;
- ii. assessing the effectiveness of ECOWAS's intervention strategy in addressing the political instability arising from the 2023 military intervention in politics.

Research Questions

The research answers the following research questions:

- i. What role did ECOWAS play during the 2023 military intervention in Niger's politics?
- ii. How effective was ECOWAS's intervention strategy in addressing the political instability occasioned by the 2023 military intervention in politics?

Literature Review

ECOWAS and Its Security Framework

Since its founding in 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has become dedicated to the economic integration of its fifteen member states. Peace and security responsibilities have emerged as additional functions for the organisation due to the region-wide civil conflict history, as well as regional threats. ECOWAS transformed from an economic bloc to a regional security actor, while demonstrating its adaptability and showing the lasting difficulty of maintaining regional cooperation in Africa (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2024).

The regional development initiative of ECOWAS originated with Nigeria and Togo through the Treaty of Lagos in 1975. The organisation initially established its purpose around trade liberalisation while promoting the mobility of persons and constructing infrastructure. Economic integration proved insufficient during the 1980s and 1990s because West Africa experienced severe political unrest primarily in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia (Bah, 2024). Economic development becomes impossible without stable political conditions and peaceful relations throughout a region.

The ECOWAS organisation modified its governing document with the pivotal 1993 Revised Treaty to extend its authorities to political and security

areas. The security architecture of ECOWAS developed as a result of this framework transition so it could take forceful action during regional crises (Akindoyin & Akuche, 2023a). During the Liberian Civil War of 1990, ECOWAS established the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), marking its inaugural major move towards building peacekeeping institutions within the organisation. Nigeria started ECOMOG in an unorganised fashion, but this organisation would become the model for all future ECOWAS peacekeeping operations (Akuche & Akindoyin, 2025).

The ECOWAS security framework has evolved through time because of dual internal and external security conditions. The ECOWAS Mechanism, which was established through the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, functions as the essential foundation of its modern security structure. Through this Mechanism, ECOWAS formed the Mediation and Security Council and the Council of Elders and the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) as key institutions (Egbara, 2024). Within this procedure, ECOWAS develops a dual spectrum security strategy that combines conventional security challenges with human security problems. The 1999 Mechanism, together with Article 58 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty, establishes a precautionary policy framework that delivers warning systems and peace enforcement abilities alongside preventive diplomatic tools in order to stop escalating conflicts (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2024).

ECOWARN demonstrates an example of a preventative security approach through the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network. The system gathers member state data in order to monitor potential threats, thereby ensuring quick response actions. The ECOWARN system continues to rank as one of the best regional early warning platforms throughout Africa because of its advanced capabilities (Bonareri, 2022).

The 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, along with other normative instruments, are part of ECOWAS's adoption to promote democratic principles while protecting human rights and maintaining constitutional rule by member states. The protocol functions as both a protective instrument against potential conflicts and gives ECOWAS legal authorisation to intervene in member states when governmental changes

occur unlawfully which can be observed from Guinea-Bissau in 2012 to Mali in 2013 until the latest case of Niger in 2023 (Akuhe & Akindoyin, 2024).

The security framework of ECOWAS continues to face major difficulties, though it has progressed institutionally and generated policy norms. ECOWAS faces difficulties in effectively responding to crises because of its financial constraints, as well as its lack of logistical means and internal regional political tensions and heavy dependence on both Nigerian money and military strength (Gawi, 2024). State nations remain in conflict with ECOWAS regionally deployed missions since these operations frequently challenge political figures who have been in power for a long time.

Experts have emphasised how ECOWAS interventions create blends of peacekeeping and peace enforcement and regime protection functions. Despite global praise surrounding ECOWAS' 2017 presidential election stand in The Gambia, many intellectuals believe this intervention set yet another example of externally imposed political changes against international law. ECOWAS finds itself with limited capabilities to stop violent extremism outbreaks throughout the Sahel region. The partnership between the African Union, and United Nations and international organisations becomes a prevalent reality despite questions about regional control and sustainable support.

Niger Republic's 2023 Political Crisis

Scholars have extensively studied the 2023 political crisis in Niger Republic after the military coup which removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power. General Abdourahamane Tchiani captured President Bazoum during a July 26, 2023 military coup as he initiated the formation of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP). Multiple analysts state that the coup emerged from governmental power competition combined with public dissatisfaction regarding security management, along with democratic regression in the West African region. The activities of CNSP demonstrate their inability to respect democratic norms through their prosecution of Bazoum under treason charges. A swift response by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) delivered

economic penalties together with an implied military action to enforce constitutional rule (Akinyemi, 2024). Various experts question the success rate of these implemented security methods. The ECOWAS sanctions established new regional norms, but their effectiveness was reversed by inconsistent execution and divergent member support (Aning, 2024).

There are major consequences for both France and the United States because they performed counterterrorism operations from their bases in Niger. When France withdrew, following the coup, the junta government proceeded to develop ties with Russia, which marked a transformation in regional relations. According to Akindoyin (2024b), Russia continues to expand its power in the Sahel by providing military assistance combined with economic benefits to secure strategic positions across the region. Niger faces increased socio-economic difficulties as an effect of both the coup along with foreign sanctions. The World Food Programme, together with the World Bank, has revealed substantial disturbances in external funding, which resulted in both budget reductions and rising poverty levels (Akindoyin, 2024b). High food prices and restricted humanitarian aid delivery have resulted from the combination of border closings and airspace prohibition measures. These developments make the humanitarian crisis worse and especially harm underprivileged segments of the population.

Jihadist violence has grown more intense in areas such as Tillabéri, while the junta leadership failed to keep its security enhancement pledges. Making use of force has proven inadequate for the military government to suppress extremist threats, while diplomatic strategies are absent. Western troop withdrawal creates security challenges because such situations produced empty spaces that the Islamic State group and other militant organisations exploited. Numerous reactions from the domestic population exist regarding the military coup (Bah, 2024). The M62 Movement among civil society groups has backed the military junta along with demands for foreign military force removal, yet various civil society organisations worry about democratic institution deterioration (Bah, 2024). The public demonstrations combine patriotic spirit with anti-colonial protest, while expressing discontent towards the failed past government performance.

Methodology

The research employs qualitative methods to evaluate how the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responded to Niger Republic's 2023 military intervention. A qualitative research design suits this investigation because it provides sufficient depth to study political phenomena and analyse both regional security strategies and institutional responses of ECOWAS when dealing with the Nigerien coup.

The research draws its information from published sources, Official ECOWAS communiqués and press releases, and joint reports of the African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN), which addressed the political crisis in Niger during 2023. Academic research publications, policy briefs, reports from Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, news media coverage, and documents from official ECOWAS statements served as sources for understanding the intervention fully. Government declarations from Niger and member nations of ECOWAS received assessment to understand regional viewpoints and reactions.

Content analysis generated the outcomes from the data evaluation process. The research adopted content analysis to discover consistent themes and empirical patterns related to ECOWAS's decision system, as well as legal provisions and their influence on regional security and territorial integrity.

Discussion of Findings

Exploring the Role of ECOWAS in the 2023 Military Intervention in Niger's Politics

In reaction to the July 2023 military coup in Niger, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) implemented a comprehensive strategy to reinstate constitutional order and prevent any coups in the region. On July 26, 2023, General Abdourahamane Tchiani removed President Mohamed Bazoum from power which led to an emergency summit of ECOWAS on July 30. ECOWAS gave the military government one week to reinstate President Bazoum before threatening economic penalties and military action. ECOWAS continued to formulate new strategies because the junta refused to comply with the issued warnings (Bah, 2024). ECOWAS created a group of strict economic sanctions to increase pressure on the

military government. The economic measures enacted by ECOWAS involved border closures for land and air access and establishing flight restrictions over Niger and blocking monetary exchange operations while placing Niger's assets under financial embargo in the ECOWAS central banking systems. Nigeria reduced power supply to Niger by 70 percent, while being an important member of the Economic Community of West African States (Gawi, 2024). These economic sanctions heavily affected Nigeriens and the economy, yet they failed to force the military junta to surrender power.

The August 10, 2023, ECOWAS' decision granted authorisation to deploy its standby military forces to establish constitutional order in Niger. The member states- Nigeria, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire- committed forces to participate in the mission according to the initial agreement. However, ECOWAS members chose to proceed with diplomatic initiatives instead of launching direct military intervention because the organisation experienced internal clashes and wanted to prevent possible regional instability (Obono, 2024).

The military government presented a transformation plan to civilian rule that would span over three years from August 2023. ECOWAS rejected the proposal from the Nigerien junta by labelling it provocative, while insisting that democratic governance should be restored immediately. The ECOWAS bloc displayed absolute determination for returning President Bazoum to power while reinstating democracy in Niger. In September 2023 Niger joined forces with Burkina Faso and Mali to form the Alliance of Sahel States which established itself as a defence alliance against external meddlesome actions (Obono, 2024). This new partnership strained the prospects of ECOWAS's mission because it indicated the rising influence of alternative blocs in the region.

Most ECOWAS sanctions against Niger were eliminated in February 2024 while political and individual sanctions remain. Despite these political steps, the junta maintained its control over power without let-up, but the main issue of democratic restoration across the area continued. ECOWAS dealt with the 2023 Niger coup through three main elements that included international diplomacy, economic trade embargoes and potential armed force interventions. The regional organisation demonstrated its dedication to democratic principles, but its response showed that political developments

in the region are multifaceted and global influence restricted state's power to bring about transformations in governance's structures.

Assessing the Effectiveness of ECOWAS Intervention Strategy in Addressing the Political Instability During the 2023 Military Intervention in Politics

The July 2023 military coup in Niger, which led to the ouster of President Mohamed Bazoum, created a serious challenge for the Economic Community of West African States regarding the implementation of its intervention policy. ECOWAS used sanctions alongside diplomatic efforts and potential military moves. The performance of these actions to restore constitutional order, together with the resolution of political unrest in the region, continues to spark wide-ranging discussion.

As soon as the coup took place, ECOWAS immediately enforced tough economic restrictions against Niger. ECOWAS implemented several actions as sanctions against Niger by shutting down its borders and blocking commercial transactions while freezing assets and establishing a flight ban for commercial flights. Niger received all-inclusive suspension of membership rights from ECOWAS member states. ECOWAS imposed a threat that included military action while demanding that the junta reinstate President Bazoum within seven days.

ECOWAS encountered serious obstacles while trying to execute its established mandates. The junta in Niger persisted in their defiance by maintaining opposition against restoring the former president (Abdulrahman, 2025). Niger faced opposition against potential military intervention from both its military leaders as well as neighbouring countries. The leaders of both Mali and Burkina Faso declared any attack against Niger would constitute a state of war against their nations too while they existed under military governments. The regional support between military-ruled governments made it difficult for ECOWAS to carry out its objectives and revealed internal challenges facing the bloc (Abdulrahman, 2025). The economic blockade enforced by ECOWAS created unexpected negative effects on Niger's humanitarian situation. The border closure along with frozen financial operations resulted in essential goods shortages which intensified Niger's civilian population agony. The harsh living conditions

caused by the sanctions created doubt about their proportionate nature because they were impacting common people who had no role in the coup more than the military leaders.

Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso established the Alliance of Sahel States during September 2023 to build military cooperation for their combined defence efforts against outside threats as well as to bolster their government regimes through military power. The newly formed partnership between these three countries demonstrated a significant change in regional relationships because it created new cooperative structures separate from ECOWAS (Abdulrahman, 2025). The formation of this coalition acted as a major constraint against ECOWAS regional influence while exposing its capabilities in implementing intervention strategies. The leadership of ECOWAS determined in February 2024 that it was time to reassess their previous methods. The regional organisation recognised both the human cost caused by the sanctions and the stalled progress towards constitutional rule, so it chose to unblock trade borders and financial operations with Niger. The suspension of ECOWAS political involvement with Niger alongside its prohibition from ECOWAS decision processes continued. The sanctions became partially less restrictive because the bloc moved towards dialogue and engagement instead of maintaining punishing measures.

ECOWAS struggled to reach its main goal through intervention in Niger since political control stayed with the junta. During this time, the military junta maintained political control of power without reinstating the dismissed president. ECOWAS failed to achieve military intervention success because its member states lacked both the necessary agreement and sufficient backing. ECOWAS' commitment to principles was demonstrated through sanctions, which produced negative effects on civilians while being unable to make the junta abandon power (Obasi, 2023).

The establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States coupled with Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso exiting ECOWAS in January 2024 led to significant decline of bloc unity and decreased power across the region. The recent situations indicate strong obstacles that ECOWAS encounters when imposing democratic standards and taking appropriate actions to address illegal governmental transitions.

Conclusion

The 2023 military campaign in the Niger Republic in some way tested the determination and authorisation and operational capabilities of ECOWAS as it handles political instability within its subregion. The military coup against President Mohamed Bazoum marked one episode of multiple democratic regressions in West Africa as a whole. ECOWAS reacted immediately based on its regional norms about constitutional order and its strict opposition to illegitimate government changes. The regional body struggled to achieve its intended purpose of democratic protection despite good intentions, since various difficulties reduced its impact. ECOWAS experienced important setbacks through its intervention strategy because member states disagreed about military actions, and some members experienced similar political changes, thus diminishing the organisation's moral standing. ECOWAS struggled to exhibit united political power because its members experienced powerful geopolitical conflicts along with ideological disagreements. The Nigerien junta's defiance, together with sustained citizen backing for the coup hindered external powers from justifying their involvement in the nation. A geopolitical struggle arose when Russia intervened; also, elements linked to Wagner Group exacerbated the crisis, thereby pulling ECOWAS members into global competitions.

The Niger issue has rekindled discourse over the equilibrium between military intervention and diplomatic engagement in addressing political crises. ECOWAS' focus on coercive tactics, while aligned with its protocols, exposed a deficiency in its conflict prevention and resolution strategies—especially in tackling the fundamental socio-political grievances that incite coups. It also illustrated the constraints of regional power amid intricate internal dynamics and global interests.

In all, although ECOWAS's reaction to the 2023 military coup in Niger was praiseworthy for its adherence to democratic principles, it revealed considerable institutional and strategic deficiencies. Henceforth, the regional organisation must enhance its preventive diplomacy, bolster internal unity among member states, and engage in inclusive conflict management tactics that amalgamate both hard and soft power methodologies. ECOWAS can only effectively protect democratic governance and security in West Africa against increasing political instability with a more comprehensive and cohesive framework.

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