The Roles of Nigeria in Democratising Member States of ECOWAS

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Abstract

Nigeria's pivotal role in the democratisation of West Africa through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) illuminates its enduring commitment to regional stability and democratic governance. Against this backdrop, Nigeria is determined to ensure democratic rules over military dictatorship in all countries of West Africa. The article aimed at explaining the role of Nigeria in democratising member states of ECOWAS sub-region. The article employs qualitative research design in data collection with a comprehensive content analysis approach. The results show that Nigeria has actively engaged in diplomatic mediation and conflict resolution while also leveraging coercive measures and peacekeeping efforts to support countries like Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Gambia in their democratic journeys. Furthermore, Nigeria's provision of technical assistance underscores its leadership as a stabilising force within ECOWAS. Collectively, these initiatives not only reflect Nigeria's strategic foreign policy objectives but also highlight its responsibility as a key regional actor dedicated to fostering democracy and peace across West Africa.

Keywords: Democratisation, Diplomacy, Mediation, Peacekeeping, Security

Introduction

Nigeria has made significant contributions to the political, economic, and social development of the West African sub-region, solidifying its position as a dominant player in the area, since gaining its independence in 1960. In her endeavours to promote the West African sub-region, the nation has demonstrated her ability, willingness, and integrity (Sule, 2018). Because of its wealth of natural and human resources, Nigeria has intervened politically, economically, and socially to bring peace back to a number of West African nations. An excellent illustration of this is her participation in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2011. The country has offered support to low-income member states in the ECOWAS sub-region to help them deal with their financial problems. Since ECOWAS was established on May 28, 1975, Nigeria has been an active member (Sule, 2018). In the West African sub-region, the country with the largest population in Africa has far more influence on other members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Abubakar & Hakeem, 2023).

Democracy and civil rule are the cornerstones of accelerating growth and progress, and Nigeria must achieve them in order to assist other nations in the West African sub-region. Infrastructure development, stability, and integration are all outcomes of democratic government in our contemporary political system. Nigeria adamantly held this belief and pledged to spearhead the democratic revolution across the whole West African subregion. The nation has fought to restore democratic government in a number of West African countries in an effort to strengthen democracy and guarantee its survival in the region (Sule, 2018). The military has deployed personnel and equipment, as well as material and logistical assistance, to ensure that a significant amount of funds has been set aside and planned for.

Nigeria is committed to the democratisation of all African nations, with a focus on the West African sub-region. However, over ten years of excessive military intervention in political and administrative affairs has forced most African countries into an ecliptic democratic trial of leadership and governance, in addition to other forms of political instability caused by internal conflicts and violence. Today, most of the world's military takeovers take place over the entire African continent. In recent years, military control has been in place in Sudan, Mali, Chad, Niger, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Gabon (Mohanasakthivel, 2023).

Political instability and military takeovers have both had a significant impact on the West African sub-region, just like they have on the rest of the continent. The activities of terrorists, insurgents, and rebels have provided significant challenges to democratic governance and economic development for the whole West African sub-region. The most recent examples of military interference in politics have been in the Niger Republic, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Mali. March 21, 2012, August 18, 2020, and May 24, 2021, were the dates of three military junta coups in Mali (Mohanasakthivel, 2023).

Similar to this, Guinea experienced a coup on September 5, 2021. Burkina Faso experienced a military coup on January 24, 2022. The democratically elected president of the Niger Republic was overthrown by the military on July 26, 2023. Despite the fact that these military actions were primarily prompted by instability and economic hardship, all of these activities ultimately weakened the sub-region's democratic governance and democratisation process. According to Abubakar and Hakeem (2023), Nigeria is concerned about the need and objective of ensuring that other countries in the West African sub-region embrace democratic forms of governance in order to attain relative peace and growth. However, the article examined how Nigeria contributed to democratising member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), especially Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Gambia. The contributions included diplomatic mediation and coercive measures, peacekeeping and conflict resolutions, and support and technical assistance.

Democratisation

The term "democratisation" became widely used in literature during the worldwide democratic movement of the 1990s, especially in political science. Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Africa all saw a shift in their political philosophies as a result of this movement, which was typically characterised by one-party, military dictatorship, and communist government. Therefore, democratisation is a "relative term for democracy and describes it as a stage of evolution accompanied by a building wave that consistently moves outside the realm of international politics," according to Huntington (1991). This demonstrated that a gradual process and a change in government are necessary for democratisation.

Furthermore, democratisation is referred to as the gradual transition from an autocratic to a democratic government. Democratic transformation is a gradual process, and the state and the populace must show their commitment to a sustainable democracy for it to flourish across society (Anyalebechi, 2022; Alumona, 2010). Diamond (1997) asserts that the third wave of democratisation has altered the balance of political regimes around the world. Democratisation, in this sense, is the process by which countries transition from one form of governance to another, mainly from autocratic to democratic. As a result, it was found that the ideal way to conceptualise democratisation is as a complex, drawn-out, dynamic, and open-ended process. This implies that the process of democratisation is a comprehensive attempt to support amicable transitions in accordance with democratic ideals (Whitehead, 2014; Whitehead, 2009; Whitehead, 2002).

Following this line of thinking, Huntington (1991) went on to argue that democratisation should be discussed in terms of the growth of democratic institutions rather than the overthrow of the authoritarian state. Although these processes can take many different forms, they often start with competitive elections where the main government officials are chosen by the majority of the population. Democratic governments should be chosen and changed using the procedural legitimacy paradigm as well. Smith (2003) asserts that democratic forms of government are the foundation of democratisation because pro-democracy movements thrive in stable political environments where the people and elite compete for political supremacy.

Accordingly, Huntington (1991) maintained that a democracy's procedural legitimacy is a reflection of the people's capacity to elect their own leaders. The rulers lose their legitimacy, lose elections, and are replaced by new leaders if they are unable to carry out their responsibilities. The development of democratisation in this contemporary era has been aided by scholars who have grasped many concepts in defining the widely used political term and contextualising its use in the contemporary democratic form of government. The democratisation literature is full of actual data that connects Huntington's and Bratton's views.

In actuality, Huntington described the development of a democratic government through elections as the result of democratisation. Although elections are essential to democracy and terminating authoritarian regimes, Bratton (1997) took a different tack when it came to democratisation, believing that it involved the growth of competitive political institutions and participation: "The process of democratisation, which begins with political opposition to authoritarian regimes and advances through political fights over liberalisation, requires the emergence of a freely elected government. It ends only when democratic standards are firmly institutionalised and generally embraced by political actors. Therefore, for the national integration of many countries, particularly those in Africa, democratisation is an incomplete process that ultimately reaches the highest level of governance.

To be more precise, democratisation starts when democratic government is established and concludes when authoritarian regimes leave office. The appearance of a new procedural type that might legitimise the elite by enabling citizens to vote signals the conclusion of the transition. Open disputes over the political game's rules are replaced by this. A government can only be established through a free, fair, and competitive election that is held within the framework of civil freedoms, and the result is accepted by all parties. Only then can democratisation—the process of transitioning from a dictatorship to a democracy—be deemed complete. Losing parties' recognition of the validity of the founding elections is crucial since it shows a lack of agreement over the democratic system. Similarly, the method of establishing the regime, rather than the extra demands of the new leaders, is a stronger indicator of a smooth transition to democracy. This study mostly focuses on how transparent and equal the electoral process is, as well as how willing the victors and losers are to be (Sule, 2018). Few African countries have fulfilled their democratic commitments yet.

Bratton (1997) accurately examined the early post-1990 founding elections in African nations, where a wide range of political positions were up for grabs. For example, a multiparty system that included life governance decisions was somewhat acceptable to the head of state. Another factor that contributed to new developments in the African democratisation movement was the strong opposition to one-party authoritarian governments. According to the competitive election process that preceded it, an urban protest movement against the reigning political party was formed in this instance. Leaders rarely stepped up to take on this issue. The contrast between the splintering and concentration of opposition forces is illustrated by contrasting Zambia with the Republic of Congo.

To put it another way, Bratton (1997) stated that the founding election has to be free and fair in order to be considered a venue for competitive elections. As a result, in most African elections, differences based on platforms arose between the incumbent and the opposition over campaigns and voting procedures. Similarly, opposition leaders claimed that voter registration lists were either outdated or intentionally excluded a significant number of eligible citizens, especially young people who were expected to favour changes to the political system.

The legitimacy of a contested election is often witnessed by numerous agents, both foreign and local, who are authorised to evaluate the elections for international standards. Apart from conducting elections, Bratton (1997) pointed out that election outcomes, turnout, and completion are significant advancements for democratisation efforts. The electoral turnout within the wings of the incumbent and opposition parties is one way that this political innovation is seen in African politics. First, only a small number of African countries reported that switching from one-party to multiparty competition was challenging. For example, compared to previous elections under single-party administrations, where one presidential candidate won without a runoff, transition elections in Malawi, Zambia, and even Nigeria yielded significantly more uncertain results. In keeping with this, the multiparty election that resulted in the incumbent's removal was conducted in an open, free, and equitable way. Elections in Africa usually provide the ruling party an edge over opposition parties, but in neo-patrimonial regimes where the head of state monopolises power, these advantages are irreversibly damaged.

Another significant viewpoint in this article was provided by Bratton (1997), who concluded that elite competition and electoral participation combine to evaluate the nature of founding elections from the start of the campaign to the end. The ruling class usually controls the political rivalry process in African political contexts in order to ensure their own triumph. Even when elections succeeded in toppling a long-standing strongman, the new governments quickly adopted the authoritarian and patrimonial practices of their forebears. Because of this, African election winners are often just well-established politicians who chose the right moment to break with tradition. Recent political changes in Africa have drawn criticism for allegedly failing to actively involve every person in the electoral process, beginning with the campaign phase, which is the foundation of the political institution. However, this issue has been obstructed in part by the political acts of the establishment politicians, who aim for power despite their lack of political experience.

Similarly, Adesoji (2017) developed several ways to think about the idea of democratisation. For instance, the transitional method places a strong focus on elite efforts and decisions as well as political processes in explaining the shift from authoritarian to liberal government. This implies that democratic institutions benefit from specific political elite tactics, decisions, and actions. Similarly, as they evolve over time, offering both opportunities and limitations, democratisation is predicated on the connections among the political elite in order to organise for efficient political structures that could support the general success of the people in the domains of power, social, and political (Adesoji, 2006).

The process of establishing a democratic system is known as democratisation, and it needs to have its roots in social movements and civil society actors, according to Jayasuriya (1994). A subset of human activity, civil society organisations were first devoted to meeting political demands that required a wider relationship than family issues. Schlumberger (2007) asserts that democracy and the idea of democratisation are combined to form the political structures that are in place today. In 1980, it was thought that the progress of democratisation was controlled by strategic players rather than structural socioeconomic prerequisites. The

interests, perspectives, strategies, and connections of these people impact the outcome of the transitioning process. Similarly, the process that leads to an open political system is called democratisation.

Acharya (2024) gave a clear description of what democratisation means as a transnational strategy in international regional politics in his exploration of the subject. This paradigm described how, as a result of foreign policy, autocratic governments on each continent gave way to democratic ones (Acharya, 2024). First, democratic transitions can lead to unexpected flashpoints in foreign policy that could break long-standing deadlocks in regional conflicts. This is partly because newly democratic states have made rash attempts to break with the policies of their former autocrats (Acharya, 2003). These ideas have helped to shape the evolution of democratisation.

Second, because democracies allow for more internal discussion and debate on foreign policy goals and pursue a larger range of foreign policy ideas, they may be able to offer alternative solutions to contemporary regional issues. Indeed, there is proof that democracies usually engage in constructive and responsible interactions with their neighbours, including those with whom they may have suffered a disagreement. This contradicts the popular belief that newly formed democracies try to export their revolution, which destabilises their neighbourhood. Third, democratisation has led to greater domestic transparency, which promotes mutual trust and understanding across the region. As a state transitions to democratic government, more information about its assets, national security policies, and financial policies becomes available. In addition to reducing neighbourly mistrust and boosting economic collaboration, this could improve regional security (Acharya, 2003).

Fourth, as democratisation leads to more regularised and transparent interactions between governments, the value of human interaction may decline. Finally, democratisation leads to greater rule of law and transparency inside and between governments (Acharya, 2003). The domestic implementation of the rule of law sometimes leads to demands for rule-based interactions in the regional arena. This might promote more problem-solving in regional groups. According to this perspective, Bratton (2004) said that two crucial thresholds that permit the democratic standards that are common in African countries are the state and democratisation. Similarly, in order to structure political affairs on democratic principles, democratisation establishes civil order among diverse civic groupings. By enabling the political will of the people to accommodate bureaucracy, authority, and legitimacy, this contributes to the effective functioning of the state. Therefore, democratisation and state-building are significant terms in the international agenda since they refer to two conceptually distinct core concepts, namely democracy and state, even if both processes are commonly referenced simultaneously, according to Carbone and Memoli (2016).

Alongside the democratisation thesis, scholars offered urgent explanations in an attempt to arrive at a universal meaning. These altruistic efforts haven't offered protection against the risks associated with running democratic institutions. Therefore, Huntington (1991) identified the fundamental obstacles to democratisation, particularly in the recently established countries that adopted democracy after 1991. These difficulties include the following: (a) The political systems of the 1990s newcomers to democratic government were marked by political inexperience. In some of the third-world countries that were still under autocratic rule at the time, Nigeria was one of the political backsliders. (b) After the third wave of democratisation as a change agent, the political figures who had ruled throughout the 1980s and 1990s authoritarian regimes were subsequently faced with a democratic mindset. The route to democratisation was hampered by the newly elected political leaders who entrenched democracy in accordance with anti-democratic views that year. (c) The emergence and

operation of democratic institutions, including Islam, traditional Confucianism, and anti-democratic movements, would be hampered by a deeply anti-democratic culture that also undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions and prevents society from adopting democratic values. (d) Lastly, those living in extreme poverty and inequality impede the development of democratisation since they are unable to perceive the real advantages of democratic systems.

Another trend, democratisation, signifies a shift away from autocratic governance in the case of Nigeria and characterises the continuous process of political transition. A lasting democracy cannot be achieved solely through elections and the transition from military to civilian rule. Democracy's institutions and culture must be promoted before it can offer justice for everyone, accountability, equity, transparency, and fairness (Diamond, 1992). It takes time to reach "full-fledged democracy" and cannot be done "miraculously." Rather, it necessitates responsible leadership, competent political institutions, respect for the rule of law, justice, equity, accountability, transparency, fair and legal elections, good governance, and public political education.

Democratisation involves more than just adoption; it also involves adjustment to local needs. Although the fundamentals of democracy are universal, there are unfortunately some inherent anomalies when democracy is implemented. Because the conditions that enable democracy in one society may become a barrier in another, it is imperative that each society make the necessary adjustments to reflect the particular circumstances that apply to its citizens. Some people consider the ideas of "zoning" and "rotational presidency" in Nigeria, for instance, to be undemocratic since they do not give all citizens equal opportunities at the same time.

However, considering the country's multi-ethnic composition, zoning and rotating presidency make sure that every ethnic group feels included, especially when it comes to the issue of domination (Amaechi, 2010). Crucially, various people may have different definitions of what harmony, equity, equality, fairness, etc., are. Like peace, democracy cannot be "defined outside the system but based on the assertion of incompatible interests" (Amaechi, 2004). Jagha (1998) points out that disputes in democracies "are not between right and wrong, rather between different interpretations of democratic rights and social priorities."

Most affected are the people who have been trying in vain to force democracy on American and European values. The idea advanced by Rantanakul (1989) that appropriating democratic methods from the West may seem attractive on paper but is ineffectual and unsuitable for a particular region is also supported by this. It is precisely at this moment when history matters. The history of a people, especially Nigerian history, is crucial to achieving democracy. The argument stems from the fact that populations in many developing nations are diverse along racial, national, ethnic, and tribal lines. Many of them lack the shared values and symbols that enable consensus to form. Nigeria, for example, is a nation composed of various ethnic groups, languages, traditions, customs, values, and life goals (Dike, 2001). Nigeria has so far experienced unsuccessful attempts at democracy. The "great diversities" among Nigerians—differences in language, religion, sociocultural life, and educational development levels—were the main causes of the failure of the earlier attempts.

It is important to keep in mind that these distinctions frequently do not reflect problems; rather, it is how we have been attempting to project and protect ethnic interests that has. Despite the fact that all other fundamental democratic institutions and ideals are required for the system to work, poverty may be the least because they have no impact on people's lives if they lack the means of subsistence. This article's central claim is that history is necessary to "extract from past experiences the lessons, warnings, and inspirations that may serve as light

to our feet, to illuminate our path" and to help find viable answers to the issues facing democratisation. In the absence of experience, infancy lasts forever (Barraclough, 1957; Ifemeje, 1988).

Theory of Regional Integration

Prominent theorists in the field of international relations (IR) have framed the study of regionalism and regional integration (Haas, 1964; Hettne, 1991; Mitrany, 1948; Soderbaum & Shaw, 2003). Without a doubt, these academics are excellent and have made significant contributions to theorising regional studies and advancing the field's discussion. There is general agreement among their ideas that regional integration aims to achieve three goals: regional collective security, interdependence, and alliances. To a lesser extent, establishing a regional economic bloc also significantly lowers the likelihood of war and dyadic conflict.

As a result, these theories can forecast how states' inclination to establish tight links and the global system's declining chance of conflict would interact (Onditi, 2020). It is less likely that a continental unified market and political federation will be possible because the African continent is still fragmented in spite of all these cherished forecasts and speculations. IR theories tend to presume that any attempt to do the field justice is intellectually sound only if it is compatible with the ontology of the international political system, which is the fundamental cause of this gap. According to the principle of regional integration, surrounding governments work together and combine their resources to accomplish shared objectives.

Criticism of the Theory
A number of issues are brought forward by critique of the regional integration hypothesis. This integration is state-centric, emphasising the role of states too much while frequently ignoring the impact of non-state players like civil society or multinational enterprises. Despite the influence of internal politics and irrational decision-making, governments consistently operate rationally in pursuing their objectives. Regional integration theory is often criticised for failing to sufficiently address power disparities among member states, which could result in unequal advantages and greater control by more powerful members. Cultural and identity elements, which can be major causes of conflict and impede the process of integration, are frequently ignored by the theory.

In light of this, a critic expresses worries that regional integration may worsen economic disparities among participating nations or favour larger economies over little ones. The idea of beneficial spill over effects is also contested by detractors, who contend that integration in one field may not always result in advancement in other fields and may even have the opposite impact. The hypothesis might not sufficiently take into consideration the influence of global elements, including shifts in the political or economic climate of the world, it was further suggested. It highlights how integration initiatives may have unforeseen repercussions, including escalating regional tensions or conflicts. The critiques, however, draw attention to the intricacy and constraints of regional integration theory and call for a more sophisticated interpretation that takes into account a wider variety of variables and dynamics. Therefore, in contrast to these arguments, the theory is suitable for explaining Nigeria's contributions to the democratisation of ECOWAS member nations.

Strengths of the Theory
In order to evaluate the reasons behind cooperative efforts, regional integration theory offers a framework for comprehending how and why surrounding states cooperate together. This is one of the main reasons why regional integration theory is important. By providing insights into potential obstacles, possibilities, and best practices, the theory aids in the creation of

successful policies for regional integration. In order to build stable ties between neighbouring governments, it also supports conflict avoidance, which entails determining shared interests and encouraging collaboration. By promoting trade, investment, and resource sharing among member states, the notion aids in economic development, which in turn spurs economic growth. The theories assist decision-makers in formulating plans to optimise financial gains.

It also promotes political stability. By recognising the influence of global forces on regional dynamics, it also aids in situating regional cooperation within a larger global framework. The approach enhances social cohesiveness in the region by promoting a feeling of community among member states by acknowledging the significance of shared identity and cultural elements. The idea also directs the creation of institutional and legal frameworks required for efficient regional governance and integration process management. Because it impacts trade agreements, market access, and investment prospects inside the integrated region, this is important for investors and enterprises.

Consequently, the theory serves as the foundation for scholarly investigations, offering researchers frameworks for analysing and interpreting the intricate dynamics of regional partnerships, particularly regarding Nigeria's contributions to the democratisation of ECOWAS member nations. As a result, regional integration theory is an important tool for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike since it helps to guide policies, promote cooperation, and advance stability and development within regions.

Methodology
The study used qualitative design methods that were derived from a review of the literature. With the aid of the thematic approach and the content analysis method, the gathered data was presented and qualitatively examined. Secondary sources, which comprised library materials such as books, magazines, journals, reports, and newspapers, were the main source of the data. The qualitative design methods employed in this study demonstrate a profound commitment to understanding the nuances of the subject at hand. By integrating a thorough literature review, the research draws upon a rich tapestry of existing knowledge, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of themes that emerge from diverse sources. The thematic approach and content analysis serve not only to highlight key insights but also to weave together various perspectives found within library materials such as books, magazines, journals, reports, and newspapers. This multifaceted examination reveals the complexities of the topic, underscoring the importance of qualitative data in capturing the depth and richness of human experience.

Roles of Nigeria in Democratizing Member States of ECOWAS
The illegitimate transfer of power continues to be a blow to West African democracy. Nonetheless, Nigeria has remained a prominent voice in denouncing these coups and calling for the return of constitutional governance. President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria pledged to stop the illegitimate termination of democratic governance in member nations when he was elected Chairman of the Economic Community of West African countries (ECOWAS) on July 9, 2023 (Ayoola, 2023). But two weeks after that pledge, Mohamed Bazoum, the elected president of the Niger Republic, was overthrown and taken hostage by a group of soldiers. Under President Tinubu's leadership, ECOWAS strongly denounced the intervention and threatened to use military force as a last resort to bring the Niger Republic's constitutional order back. The junta has failed to reinstate Mohammed Bazoum as president, and mediation efforts have yet to bring the democratically elected leader back to office. Niger was immediately subject to severe sanctions and suspended from ECOWAS by the West African

bloc. The Niger coup was the most recent in a string of West African military takeovers (Ayoola, 2023).

Following the military takeover of Mali in 2020, Nigeria supported other ECOWAS members in enforcing sanctions against the country. Nigeria was also instrumental in settling the Mali situation, which resulted in the return of civilian governance in 2021. Nigeria also called for the prompt release of the ousted president and denounced the military takeover in Guinea in 2021. A group of ECOWAS officials led by Nigeria also travelled to Guinea to meet with junta leaders and advocate for a return to civilian governance. Nigeria also advocated for the restoration of democracy and denounced the military coup in Burkina Faso in 2022. Along with other members, Nigeria suspended Burkina Faso's membership in the African Union and placed penalties on the country (Ayoola, 2023).

Nigeria's reaction to its democratic credentials is indicative of its contribution to the expansion of democracy in West Africa. It has fought for democracy for a long time; after its return in 1999, it has been under democratic governance continuously for 24 years. In the area, the nation has also been instrumental in assisting Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso with their democratic transitions. However, Nigeria's democratic history has been turbulent, alternating between periods of military dictatorship and democratic transitions. Despite this, the nation has advanced significantly in recent years, and its democracy is now more secure. Nigeria's first successful democratic shift from the ruling party to the opposition party took place in 2015. For democracy in Nigeria and West Africa, this was a significant turning point (Ayoola, 2023). Nonetheless, the arguments explain Nigeria's contributions to the democratisation of West African member states. These included support and technical assistance, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, diplomatic mediation, and coercive tactics.

Diplomatic Mediations and Coercive Measures
One of Nigeria's main diplomatic tools for sub-regional security policy is mediation. The nation's ability to mediate disputes effectively is well known, fostered, and has remained a vital component of ECOWAS' diplomatic toolbox. It should be mentioned that while all Nigerian leaders have participated in mediation in one way or another, President Obasanjo and General Abubakar stood out. At the appropriate periods when each quality was required, Obasanjo has continuously used his well-known political and diplomatic acumen, moral authority, tenacity, patience, soft persuasion, firmness, and flexibility (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

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Nigeria also advocated for the restoration of democracy and denounced the military coup in Burkina Faso in 2022. Along with other members, Nigeria suspended Burkina Faso's membership in the African Union and placed penalties on the country. The most recent coup in Niger occurred in July 2023, and ECOWAS, led by President Tinubu, strongly denounced the intrusion and threatened to use military force as a last resort to restore constitutional order in the Niger Republic (Ayoola, 2023).

Therefore, Mediation is one of Nigeria's primary diplomatic instruments for sub-regional security policy. The country's capacity for successful dispute resolution is widely recognised, encouraged, and has continued to be an essential part of ECOWAS' diplomatic arsenal.

Among other places, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso witnessed the efforts. Nigeria's deliberate use of mediation as a key diplomatic tool clearly demonstrates the efficacy of its sub-regional security policy. Nigeria strengthens its position as a major participant in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and promotes regional stability by supporting effective dispute settlement initiatives. The country's admirable mediation efforts in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali demonstrate its dedication to peace and security and demonstrate how cooperative diplomacy can have a major impact on a region.

Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolutions
Apart from coups, the main conflicts in West Africa have been in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Gambia, and Niger. These conflicts were brought on by the political leadership's rule of impunity, marginalisation, human rights abuses, widespread corruption, and a variety of other antidemocratic behaviours that tended towards individualised autocratic rule that in turn sparked violence and ethnic favouritism that alienated and threatened certain groups in the process (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

Nigeria understood that the full development of democracy in West Africa was essential to sub-regional peace. It has long been known that democracy and security are related. While currently grappling with its own democracy project, the country supports other ECOWAS nations by offering election support and other democratic consolidation necessities to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Niger, and others in order to accomplish the aim of a democratic West Africa. This could help to explain why Nigeria, during Abacha's military dictatorship, was able to make such large investments to bring democracy back to Sierra Leone. Nigeria has been reacting to the democratic crises in West Africa in this manner because its leaders saw the country's admirable role in bringing an end to the subregion's wars and conflicts as a means of reclaiming its power and demonstrating its necessity, which they hoped would convince the international community to lift Nigeria's isolation (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

Nigeria has demonstrated a leadership position in West Africa. Indeed, it is impossible to overstate its contribution to fostering harmony and peace. Nigeria's foreign policy was and still is centred on Africa, despite the numerous critiques and disputes that have arisen as a result of that approach. According to Abdulwasiu and Mudassir (2018), the nation has demonstrated strong support for West African states in a number of areas, including mediation, combating terrorism and transboundary criminal activity, regional security policy, peacekeeping and peace support operations, democratic consolidation, economic integration, and military personnel strategic training. Nigeria has taken part in observer missions as well. With a focus on the necessity of discouraging actions that jeopardise Nigeria's security, peace, and progress, peacekeeping or peace-support missions have evolved into a legitimate tool of foreign policy. However, Nigeria's leading position in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operations in Liberia and later in Sierra Leone stands out among all of these efforts (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

Nigeria's substantial financial, material, and human contributions allowed ECOWAS to accomplish its goals in the two nations. The United Nations formed the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in October 1999 as a peace-enforcement mission following the success of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone.When it comes to West African peacekeeping, Nigeria has been the most heavily burdened. Nigeria was thought to have spent more than 13 billion US dollars on peacekeeping missions in West Africa by 1999 (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

For example, West African leaders found the Côte d'Ivoire crisis especially painful because the nation was thought to be among the most stable in the subregion. For ECOWAS, the crisis was to provide a new type of security problem. Following a fierce power struggle between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Quattara about who is actually an Ivorian, there were hotly contested elections in October 2000. Obasanjo sent Nigerian Alfa fighter planes to stop a military coup d'état in 2002 following a gunfight in Abidjan and other parts of the country, but he was quickly forced to retreat. The country was shortly split in two by a rebellion called Movement Patriotique du Côte d'Ivoire, which was started by angry troops. Nigeria's early participation helped shape ECOWAS strategy on the complex situation by providing buffer soldiers to keep the two warring factions apart (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

Furthermore, Nigeria's longstanding involvement in ECOMOG's regional peacekeeping and conflict management expertise shows how important sub-regional hegemons are to preserving regional security and peace. Although there are concerns regarding Nigeria's dominance, its involvement in enforcement efforts has helped to resolve disputes and bring stability back. Though they are wary of it and also dislike its unilateral military incursions, most West African states generally recognise Nigeria's leadership in regional peacekeeping. This demonstrates how a sub-regional hegemon must be cognisant of smaller member states' concerns in a framework for collective security (Oshita & Alli, 2020). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of ECOWAS in maintaining peace and security was actually undermined by some ECOWAS members, especially the Francophone states, who saw ECOMOG as a tool of Nigerian foreign and security policy. This gave extra-regional actors with strategic interests in West Africa the chance to dissuade some ECOWAS states from joining the Nigeria-led regional peacekeeping force (Oshita & Alli, 2020).

ECOMOG began as a peacekeeping organisation. At Nigeria's demand, its mandate was changed to that of a peace enforcement force as conflicts grew more unresolvable. In that it was obviously the first time such an endeavour had been carried out on the African continent, this was a historical development. It was an ad hoc mechanism, though. Nonetheless, the framework was incorporated into the mechanism due to its effectiveness and usefulness. Article 17 made ECOMOG an intervention force. Additionally, it stipulated that ECOMOG would be composed of "several standby multi-purpose modules (civilian and military) prepared for immediate deployment in their countries of origin." The term "ECOWAS Standby Force" (ESF) refers to this. When deployment becomes necessary, the ESF has undergone ongoing changes to improve its efficacy, mobility, and capability (Oshita & Alli, 2020).

In their official responses, Nigeria and ECOWAS issued a one-week ultimatum to the Nigerien military, warning them that failure to relinquish power might result in sanctions and even a military reaction. According to Judith (2024), the ultimatum made it apparent that a peaceful resolution was the top priority and the better option than using force. The democratically elected administration of President Amadou Toumani Touré was overthrown in March 2012 by a coup carried out by junior Malian army officers led by Capt. Ahmadou Sanogo. ECOWAS slapped a complete embargo on the new military government in Mali right away. The procedure of deploying ECOWAS troops to "protect the unity and territorial integrity of Mali" was decided to be initiated.

Consequently, 3,300 troops were sent to Mali in January 2013 as part of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo contributed troops, while Nigeria was the only country to supply 1,200. The appointment of Maj.-Gen. Shehu Abdulkadir of Nigeria as force commander followed. There would have been a shortage of personnel for the ECOWAS stability force in

Mali if not for the sizeable Nigerian component (Pryce, 2013). The deployment of AFISMA troops in January 2013 marked a significant milestone in the collective efforts of African nations to restore stability in Mali amidst escalating tensions. Contributing members, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo, demonstrated a remarkable commitment to regional solidarity by offering their support. Notably, Nigeria's substantial contribution of 1,200 troops not only underscored its leadership role in the mission but also effectively mitigated potential personnel shortages for the ECOWAS stability force. With a Nigerian force commander at the helm, AFISMA exemplified a collaborative approach to peacekeeping that forged stronger ties among participating countries while addressing urgent humanitarian challenges. This unified response has not only highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in addressing security concerns but also laid a foundation for ongoing efforts toward sustainable peace and stability within Mali and beyond.

Supports and Technical Assistants on Election and Governance
The fact that members of the armed forces of ECOWAS member states receive strategic security training at Nigeria's top military academies, such as the National Defence College (NDC) in Abuja and the Armed Forces Command and Staff School (AFCSS) in Jaji, is likely one of the most enduring testaments to Nigeria's leadership and dedication to sub-regional cooperation on security issues. Based on bilateral agreements, Nigeria has accepted several officers from almost every ECOWAS state into its military colleges throughout the years. According to Abdulwasiu and Mudassir (2018), many of these officers currently hold leadership posts in their respective nations.

Nigeria has provided high-level military training to 83 ECOWAS nations over the years, including Benin (12), Burkina Faso (8), Côte d'Ivoire (2), Ghana (16), Guinea (2), Mali (8), Niger (11), Senegal (6), and Togo (6). ECOWAS decided at the Defence and Security Commission conference in Abidjan, August 14–18, 2002, that one of the three locations for the ECOMOG Standby Force unit's standardised training should be Nigeria's National Defence College in Abuja (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

Nigeria has been able to supply financing and logistics during pivotal periods in the organisation's history of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict management, and resolution (Akindele, 2003). Nigeria supplied more than 70 percent of ECOMOG's forces and 80 percent of the mission's funding (Abubakar, 2009). Agwai (2010) notes that the Nigerian army's significant awards from taking part in some of the PSOs contributed to the country's image as a rising African power and played a significant role in international politics, while Malu (2009) claims that peace is unlikely to have been reached without Nigeria's leadership and participation.

The NDC is responsible for strategic training, while the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre in Accra, Ghana, performed operational training, and Bamako, Mali, conducted tactical training. By sending Nigerian officers to provide military training to its troops in ECOWAS nations like Liberia, Gambia, and others, Nigeria has been able to provide training to these nations through the Nigerian Army Training Assistance (NATAG). Nigeria has been helping Sierra Leone, among other countries, with military training through this initiative. Additionally, Nigeria has been sending specialists in a variety of fields to several ECOWAS nations. In many West African states' armed forces, Nigerian generals have also been assigned to prominent posts, including commanding officers (Abdulwasiu & Mudassir, 2018).

The Nigerian government creates a variety of interventions to mitigate the economic effects of the sanctions in Niger, particularly in the Northwest, which is the most severely affected area. The government opened borders to facilitate quick action and the transfer of property and goods that can help those whose livelihoods have been affected, particularly women heads of households. Similarly, Niger's energy was restored, mitigating the hardship caused by the penalty (Nnamdi, 2023).

Conclusion

Nigeria has, since then, prioritised the democratisation process across all African states, with a concentration on the West African sub-region in particular, in order to further its national interests. This is because the recent military takeovers in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Gambia have complicated democratic governance, development, and political stability throughout the ECOWAS sub-region, leading to an increase in political instability. In spite of these circumstances, Nigeria is committed to promoting democratic administration over military dictatorship in all West African nations. From the gathering of data to its presentation, the paper employed a qualitative research approach, particularly through the work of content analysis.

Nonetheless, the article focused on Nigeria's role in democratising ECOWAS member nations, particularly Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Gambia. Therefore, it becomes clear that Nigeria's democratisation process for members of the Economic Community of West African States involved support and technical assistance, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, diplomatic mediation, and coercive measures. Nigeria's pivotal role in the democratisation efforts within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is underscored by its multifaceted approach to regional stability and governance. Through significant support and technical assistance, Nigeria has empowered member states to strengthen their democratic institutions. Its commitment to peacekeeping and conflict resolution has been instrumental in mitigating tensions and fostering a climate conducive to democratic processes. Moreover, Nigeria's proactive engagement in diplomatic mediation has facilitated dialogue among conflicting parties, promoting peaceful resolutions. While employing coercive measures when necessary, Nigeria has demonstrated a balance between firmness and diplomacy, reinforcing its leadership position within ECOWAS. Ultimately, these combined efforts not only highlight Nigeria's influence but also underscore the importance of collaborative regional action in advancing democracy across West Africa.

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