Prospects and Challenges of Democratisation in Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) Sub-Region

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Abstract

The Economic Community of West Africa States, has become a model in the promotion of regional governance through adoption of various protocols to drive regional economic development and political sustainability. The regional body has demonstrated political commitment and resiliencein the implementation of its programmes, particularly good governance and democracy, despite memberscolonial cleavages. Some of these protocols include mutual assistance, control of small arms and light weapons. The main objective of the study is to examine the prospects and challenges of democratization in the region. Other objective is to interrogate the factors that are responsible for the slide in the democratization agenda. Relevant literature were reviewed. Also, the study adopts the use of secondary data while qualitative method of data analysis was used. State fragility theory was adopted as theoretical framework. Findings from the theory revealed that insecurity, poor state of its economy and resurgence of military coups have constituted threats to the realization of enduring democracy, good governance and electoral integrity within the region. Consequently, the study recommendations include promotion of inclusive economic growth, promotion of rule of law as panaceas to the challenges confronting the region. The study is of the view that exit of three members from the body portends serious security threat, therefore no effort should be spared in collaborating with them to fight insecurity in the region.

Keywords: Regional Governance, Democracy, Electoral Integrity, Insecurity and Rule of Law

Introduction

When the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed in 1975, democracy was not a popular product in the region as many member states, including Nigeria, that was at the forefront of the movement for the formation of the regional body, was under a military regime led by the then General Yakubu Gowon. With the end of cold war couple with the falling of Berlin Wall in 1989, western capitalism assumed the centre stage with democracy as a political system that is built around popular participation. But the objectives of the sixteen (16) member states were built around:

a. economic regional integration;
b. Foster cooperation and development;
c. Creation of a common market single currency;
d. Enhance regional security and stability; and
e. Improve living standards and promote economic growth.

In terms of promoting good governance and regional integration, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) has remained one of the most successful and relevant regional body in Africa. In line with global trend, leadership of the regional body had taken a bold step in reviewing its protocol, particularly in the promotion of democracy, good governance and rule of law. The regional body has extended its protocol to address the issue of terrorism, banditry and other related matters like climate change which has shaped the socio-economy of the region. Other issue that ECOWAS has sought to address include politically induced conflicts.(Adegboye,2023)

The involvement of ECOWAS in the removal of Yahya Jammeh of Gambia from office for his refusal to leave office office after he had lost to Adama Barrow in 2017 general elections is a testimony to good political credentials of ECOWAS in the promotion of democracy within the region. Also, ECOWAS has established election observation team as part of efforts at building stable democracy, and build citizens' confidence in the democratic process. To the outside world, election monitoring is part of collective efforts of Africa leaders in instituting transparency

in the democratic process. It is part of larger efforts of political leadership efforts at taking ownership of the political process. The mandate of election monitors may include management of post election matters. (Bittinger, 2023)

Within member states, ECOWAS has been working assiduously in strengthening democratic institutions, including the promotion of human rights. The body has constituted eminent personality group that include former presidents, who are often on the field to monitor elections in member states. The commitment to good governance and human rights was the hallmark of 1993 revision of its treaty. The new treaty provided for the establishment of early warning mechanisms for prevention, mediation and conflict resolution which was met to drive peace, security and stability of the region. As part of effort to institutionalize good governance, additional protocol was put in place in 2001 as part of the efforts to complement protocol on democracy and good governance. The 1993 revised treaty emphasized the need for "broad participation of citizens in the integration process". In furtherance of its commitment to democratic principles ECOWAS in 1999 strengthens its protocol, particularly Article 58, which addressed peaceful resolution of disputes. The protocol on democracy and good governance states that "every accession to power must be through free, fair and transparent elections". The implication of this protocol is that the regional body abhors any other illegal means of assuming power. The significant of citizens' engagement was built around the important roles of the civil society organisations as a critical partner in the promotion of transparency and accountability in government and electoral process. The recognition accorded to the civil society group (CSO) is in line with the emerging roles of the CSO in the contemporary global system. Civil society group has been regarded as critical partner in the promotion of democracy and good governance. (Adegboye, 2023, Ronceray,etal.2023 & Opoku,2007)

Apart from economic integration, ECOWAS has broadened its focus from the economic gains of its protocol on free movement of goods and persons to the promotion and sustainenance of credible elections and peaceful transition of power in accordance with the provision of its protocol, particularly Articles 4 (on the application of mediation among member states and 17 that relates to Mutual Assistance which seeks to promote peaceful settlement of disputes. And in line with the provisions of Articles 4 and 17 and other related protocol, ECOWAS has

leaned on them to intervene when there is military coup and political leaders attempt to perpetuate themselves in office as it was the case in Senegal under Sally and Lansana Conte in Cote d'Ivoire. The suspension of Mali, Niger Republic and Burkina Fasso by the leadership of ECOWAS was in line with the various protocols. ECOWAS interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire conflicts was in line with the provisions of its protocol on Mutual Assistance. The initial mandate of the regional force, the Economic Community of West Africa States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was peace keeping, but due to the failure of dramatis personae and their supporters to maintain peace, ECOWAS military force had to engage in peace enforcement, even though it was accused take side in the course of the military operations. (Report of ECA, 2020, Adegboye, 2023, Lawal etal.2023)

In 2004, ECOWAS established the ECOWAS standby Force with the mandate to maintain stability by joining force to fight terrorism and restore constitutional order in the event of illegal usurpation of power in any of the member states. Nigeria has been playing central roles in the funding and provision of manpower. For instance, in 2025, the force foiled attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government. In 2025, ECOWAS parliament further strengthen the security architecture of the region with the Regional Defence Part whose mandate include among others: restoration of constitutional order in the event of unconstitutional change of government, breakdown of law and order in any member state and any act that threatens regional stability. This initiative is part of the efforts at reforming ECOWAS in line with the regional political and security challenges. While political reform is part of efforts in the region democratic transitions, most member states like Cote d'Ivoire engaged in political reform in order to perpetuate themselves. This has further worsened democratic credentials of the region (Accord, 2021, African Security Analysis, 2025)

No doubt, ECOWAS has remained one of the most dynamic regional blocs, considering its response to embark on political restructuring to meet contemporary challenges. Despite these reforms, it has been caught in the web of political instability in view of many cases of unconstitutional change of government, couple with the myriad of security challenges due to the activities of

Boko Haram, ISWAP and the parlous state of its member states economy.(Opoku,2007& Lawal etal.2023)

And it is against this background that this study will attempt to examine the prospect of democracy in a region that has recorded many unconstitutional change of government. In some cases the military junta had terminated electoral process as it has been witnessed in Nigeria in 1993 and Guinea Bissau in 2025. The study will also investigate the challenges that have accompanied democratic process in the West Africa sub region.

Statement of the Problem

In response to global trend, ECOWAS as one of most dynamic regional blocs, has taken several measures in reforming its activities. The reforms are informed by socio- economic and political realities within the regions. For instance, the activities of terrorist groups, like Boko Haram banditry and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) within the region has necessitated the establishment regional defence pact, known as ECOWAS Standby Intervention Force, (ESIF), One of the objective behind the establishment of the force is to discourage the unconstitutional removal of democratically elected government in addition to fighting terrorism and banditry. (Accord, 2021, Adegboye, 2023 & lawal etal.2023) To strengthen democratic institutions within the region, additional protocols, such as Early Warning Response and Response Network Mechanism that addresses mediation and conflict management was established in 1993. Additionally, Article 58 which seeks to address the restoration of peace through settlement of disputes. Also, there is protocol relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence. This protocol encourages the use of conciliation and mediation in the resolution of conflicts among member states.(Adegboye,2023)

In its bid to promote good governance, ECOWAS has also adopted supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. It has been collaborating with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). It has also committed itself to election monitoring by engaging former political leaders such as former presidents of Nigeria and Ghana. Adoption of ECOWAS Standby Force has led to the restoration of democratic institutions in Gambia and the Republic of Benin while attempts to restore democratic governance to Mali,

Republic of Niger and Burkina Fasso has backlashed with the suspension and eventual withdrawal of their membership from the regional body.(Bittiger,2023, Lawal, etal.2023)

Inspite of ECOWAS efforts in driving democracy and strengthening democratic institutions in the region, it has continued to record unconstitutional change of government. Elections within the region have not been free nor fair while human rights abuse and the independence of judiciary have not been achieved and in many instances, media and opposition parties have become victims of bad governance. Why has ECOWAS failed to achieve its objectives as contained in its protocols? This is the question this study will attempt to answer.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the prospects and challenges of democratization in ECOWAS sub-region. Other objectives are:

- Investigate the factors that are responsible for the slide in democratization process
- Interrogate the impacts of various protocols on the institutionalization of democracy in ECOWAS sub-region
- To examine the roles of Civil Society Organisations and Non Governmental Organisations in ECOWAS democratization process.

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

a. What are the factors that are responsible for the slide in democratization process?
b. How have the various ECOWAS protocols affected the institutionalization of democracy within the region?
c. What roles have Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations played in the ECOWAS democratization process?

Literature Review

With their different colonial background, the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, presented a shift from the usual unalloyed political loyalty which these countries are known to pay to their former colonies. These political differences and socio-cultural diversities, notwithstanding, the regional body, through the application of its various protocols, has demonstrated dynamism in driving its objectives. The

raison detre for the establishment of the body in 1975, was more for the promotion of economic integration, in the context of promoting commerce and trade among member states. The policy or free movement of goods and persons has led to significant improvement in the volume of trade among member states. Also, it has recorded notable drive in manpower development, as citizens from member states are found in both formal and informal sectors of member states economy. But despite this notable achievement, the region has been punctuated with political instability and this no doubt has impinged on its economic growth and development.

And realizing the centrality of stable polity in the promotion of economic development within member states, the body has taken some steps with collaboration with other stakeholders such as Civil Society Organisations, Non Governmental Organisations (CSOs/NGOs) the Africa Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) These bilateral and multilateral engagements have strengthened ECOWAS in its efforts to promote enduring democracy among member states.

As part of efforts to drive democracy, ECOWAS has severally reviewed its protocols, particularly on regional security, good governance and democracy. For instance, Article 58, relate to employment of the instrument of mediation and conciliation while Article 17 seeks to address the instrumentality of Mutual Assistance in the settlement of disputes among or within member states. This Article has formed the basis for deployment of military to member states for the restoration of constitutional order. It has, under the auspices of the protocols engage member states for peaceful restoration of political issues and other electoral related matters. Because of the collective commitment of ECOWAS members to the promotion of democracy, and good governance, the regional body has been deliberate in its efforts. For instance, in 1991, ECOWAS Declaration of Political Principles which included adoption of peoples' rights and democratization form part of efforts to build roadmap for democracy.(UNECA, 2021)

While substantive efforts have been recorded in the institutionalization of democracy, these efforts have been watered down by security situation in the region. The region is confronted with security challenges such as the activities of

terrorist groups, drug abuse, illegal smuggling of arms, child trafficking among others. These problems have further sunk the efforts of ECOWAS. According to the United Nation Office on Drug and other Related Offences (UNODC) the region host over ten million illegal small arms and light weapons in the region (SALW) with more than 70% of these arms in the hands of non state actors. Illegal Proliferation of illegal arms has further compounded ECOWAS efforts at addressing sum of the politically motivated conflicts. Realizing the incalculable damage the proliferation of small arms and light weapons had inflicted on the socio-economic and political situations in the region, ECOWAS took further development by signing additional protocol in 2006 on the control of small arms and light weapons. The main objective of the protocol is prevent accumulation of small arms and light weapons, to consolidate moratorium on members' importation of small arms and light weapons, promote transparency in the control of small arms and light weapons. Article 3 prohibits the transfer of small arms and light weapons ; it also ban circulation of weapons to the non state actors.(Agbegbedia,2022, Etanibi, 2009,UNECA,2015) Individual member states have also enacted laws for the control of firearms and light weapons. In Nigeria the Act of National Assembly 2021 outlawed individual possession of illegal arms. The law also established a National Centre for the Coordination and Control of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light weapons and other Related Matters.

Despite ECOWAS efforts in promoting good governance and democracy through control of small arms and light weapons, in addition to the efforts of member states, conflicts of different dimensions, such as ethno-religious conflicts, terrorism and electoral have be on the increase. Though electoral violence is not a new development in West African politics, particularly post elections violence. Before the establishment of ECOWAS, Nigeria had recorded pre and post election violence in 1965/1966 , which eventually led to the military coup of 1966, there was post election violence in 1983. But it has been exacerbated by free access to firearms by political thugs and their patrons, who can afford to buy these firearms. Many countries that have witnessed post election violence include Nigeria, Niger Republic, Guinea, Guinea Bissau. The end product of these violence is unconstitutional change of government as it was the case in Nigeria, Gambia Niger Republic and Burkina Fasso. (Olasupo,ed.2003, Agbegbedia,2022 & Boadi, 2021) According to Alemika, proliferation of small arms and light weapons can be

attributed to corruption, economic crises which has aggravated the quest for survival, weak institutions bad governance and weak security architecture.

Across West Africa, citizens' quest for democracy has assumed a form of fanfare, with citizens' desire for inclusive governance. Elections still play central role in the process of assuming power. In the last ten years, many of the sitting presidents in Nigeria, Ghana have conducted elections, even though the integrity of the electoral process was questioned by opposition and international community. With the withdrawal of Niger Republic, Burkina Fasso and Mali, the region body consist of thirteen members with the suspension of Guinea Bissau. Presently, ten of the members are under democratically elected government. Notwithstanding, incumbent presidents are unrelenting in their efforts to sustain themselves in office through vote rigging, suppression and intimidation of opposition parties. There is increasing demand of sitting presidents to perpetuate themselves as it was the case in Gambia and Guinea under Alpha Conde before he was removed from office in 2021. Recent development within the region point to the fact that there is decline in the credibility and acceptability of elections. (Boadi, 2021, Olasupo, 2003)

Civil Society Organisations and Non Governmental Organisations roles in sustaining democracy in developing countries, particularly ECOWAS sub region cannot be underestimated. The appreciation of their role should be understood against the background of these countries colonial heritage. The colonial heritage has foisted on key political players the pursuit of primordial interest which has further polarized the political space. According to the United Nations (UN), Civil Society Organisations, are "prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats". Africa Union (AU) has also emphasized the need to build partnerships with civil society as such partnership will drive peace and security architecture of the continent. Civil Society roles in the institutionalizing democracy dated back to Africa struggles for political independence. Their significance engagement provided training ground for emerging political leaders such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamidi Azikiwe and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. Dr, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. Unrelenting in their efforts, civil society organisations have been involved in the fight against human rights abuse and corruption under military rule. CSOs

role in the return of many ECOWAS member states including Nigeria to democracy cannot be under estimated. (Ehindero,etal 2007)

In a region plagued with political instability, absence of politics of inclusion and corruption. To sustain themselves, political leaders rely more on religious and primordial to promote their political agenda, consequently, the tendency to drive ethnic agenda become the rule rather than the exceptions. ECOWAS has identified CSOs/NGOs as strategic partners in promoting enduring democracy and good governance hence the CSOs has been incorporated as technical partners in the implementation of early warning system.CSOs have become central to election monitoring offering critical support to electoral body and government. Across ECOWAS sub region, CSOs have been collaborating with electoral body and government in promoting good governance, peace building, voters' education with a view to build sustainable and acceptable electoral process. It has ensured the creation of breathing space for opposition parties. This is understandable in a political system where opposition parties are treated as endangered specie and authoritarian rule and disregard for human rights reign supreme. (Opoku,2007, Kpaa &Poroma, 2025,Ehindero etal. 2007)

While CSOs have received accolades for promoting transparency and accountability in governance, they have been accused of playing the role of opposition party in the conduct of their operations. In many instances, they have played the devil advocate for the opposition parties. Also, some CSOs have been accused of lack of accountability in the management of funds donated by foreign partners and in their desire to enjoy paraphernalia of offices, some are bedeviled by internal leadership wranglings due to unwillingness to relinquish their positions .Oftentimes, focus of their report is on the role of electoral umpire, government and the media, little attention is given to the roles of opposition parties, particularly in the instigation of violence. These shortcomings notwithstanding, CSOs and NGOs remain critical collaborators in sustaining democracy and good governance. (Ronceray etal.2023,Boadi, 2021 & Olasupo,2003)

To promote transparency and good governance, ECOWAS has encouraged member states in the deployment of technology. Towards the actualization of the

objective of a fair and acceptable elections, the region set up ECOWAS electoral process known as Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) in 2006. The main objective is to promote improvement in electoral governance. It is also aimed at strengthening capacity and legal frameworks with a view to promoting fair free and credible elections in the regions. In 2008, Further efforts was put in place with the creation of ECOWAS \network of Electoral Commissions. The body has been promoting credible and transparent electoral process. In accordance with supplementary protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, (Articles 12 and 13) as part of preparations towards conducting credible elections, member states are to receive assistance in the areas of capacity building and funding up to the tune of $500,000.ECOWAS Commission, 2023, Motsmai,2010)

Deployment of technology comes with its challenges as it is exposed to vulnerability. While introduction of technology is to enhance transparency, but the issue of network and cyber security threats has placed additional measures that will meet international standard. Apart from its vulnerability, developing countries commit huge sum of money to elections. It further exposes national security as ECOWAS members states do not owe the technology.(Ogbeta &Faruk,2024)

With assistance from the United States Agency for International Development, (USAID) European Union (EU) ECOWAS member states have adopted the deployment of technology as part of efforts to deepen the credibility of the electoral process. Elections in the region is characterized by rigging, ballot snatching among other electoral malpractices. But with the deployment of technology, credibility and citizens' confidence in the electoral process has received a boost. Ghana Electoral Commission introduced Biometric Verification in 2012, while Nigeria electoral process has witnessed significant improvement in the use of digital technology since 2007 with the introduction of smart card reader and biometric accreditation. Furthermore, Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and real time transmission of results to INEC portal (IReV) have been introduced. In Sierra Leone implementation of electronic biometric voter registration began in 2023. ((Ukeje and Olusola, 2023, Olurode, ed. 2010, Ejime,2022). Despite the challenges confronting democratization process in ECOWAS sub region, quest for electoral integrity and transparency in governance

is not a split milk after all because in the past ten years, opposition parties have won elections in Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia.

These policies are put in place as part of efforts to improve electoral transparency and credibility. Yet outcome of elections have witnessed protests and in some cases violence which often resorted to loss of lives and properties. Outcomes of elections are rejected by opposition parties. They accused electoral body of screwing results in favour of ruling party. Security agencies are also accused of aiding and abetting ruling party in the falsification of results, intimidation of members opposition parties. More than the deployment of technology, the level of poverty in the region which has manifested itself in chronic economic upheavals in the regions, army of unemployed youths and out of school children, have become major driver of political violence in the West Africa sub region. No doubt, deployment of technology has not erased electoral malpractices, but it has minimized it. For instance, use of technology has brought to an end the phenomenon of politicians boasting of recording landslide victory.(Oploku,2007, Egwu,2003, Ronceray,2023) According to Boadi (2021), the resurgence of military rule in the region is an attestation to the fact that democracy is sliding away from the region as human rights abuse, political violence and intimidation are common feature of political process in the region.

Another strategic partner in ECOWAS democratization process is the media. Many ECOWAS member states such as Nigeria and Ghana have robust media engagement. The roles of the media in the promotion of democracy and good governance in the regional is historical in the context of media roles before and after independence. The euphoria of that roles are not lost on the media. After independence, structure of ownership has changed and this has significantly affected editorial policies. Media roles are multidimensional, they perform the roles of political education and mobilization. Civil society organisations also engage media in reaching out to the generality of the people. In carrying out these roles, electoral institutions depend on them while politicians see them as unavoidable partners in driving electoral process. In navigating complex political landscape of the region, leadership of ECOWAS has continued to collaborate with the media. Media have been working with ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commission (ECONEC) in the sustained efforts to drive acceptable electoral

process. Towards ensuring credible roles for the media, stakeholders in the electoral process through multilateral and bilateral engagement and the Civil Society Organisations have collaborated in the training of media for capacity building. Equally, the strategic importance of the training and continuous engagement between media and leadership of ECOWAS on the other hand and engagement between the media and ECOWAS member states. Regular engagement is an appreciation of the damage media is capable of wrecking to body polity when their roles are not properly articulated. Objective discharge of its roles will de-escalate political tensions. Media has continued to promote civic engagement, conflict prevention and resolution. Additionally ECOWAS efforts is to combat misinformation and disinformation as a strategy to promote the truth and strengthen democracy within the region.(Narh,2025, Ikuomola, 2025, Ejikeme,2022 Okai, 2014)

As a veritable tool for promoting democracy, media has failed to live up to the expectations of the public. The objective of promoting public goods have been thrown overboard by the media. The overbearing roles of media ownership has affected editorial policy so much that the news they churned out lack objectivity and reliability. Nevertheless, media roles in Africa democracy project remain an enviable and historic in the context of the fight against colonialism.

Theoretical Framework

To properly situate the study in the context of the issues that have been discussed in this paper, the theory of State Fragility will be adopted as theoretical framework. The theory became popular in the 1990s following discussion around security and development. The theory attributed the development in Africa countries to weak institutions, poor governance and lack of human security such as employment, which has further worsened the security situations.

In the context of ECOWAS member states, it is a known fact that they appreciate the depth of their socio-economic and political problems by putting in place policies that are aimed at addressing them, yet these problems remain intractable due to weak institutions, poor state of its economy, political instability as the region is punctuated with politically and ethno-religious induced conflicts, poor

observance of rule of law. These have made implementation of ECOWAS reforms an uphill task.(Adegboye,2023)

Research Method

The study adopts the use of secondary data. The study relies on data obtained from journal articles, books, newspaper, conference and policy papers. The method of data analysis is qualitative using the tool of description.

Research Findings

From the totality of literature review and in line with the research objective, the study revealed the followings:

ECOWAS as a regional organization has demonstrated resilience and commitment to the main objectives of its founding fathers. These objectives such as economic integration, free movement of goods and persons, establishment of common market and monetary cooperation. This commitment has been demonstrated in the cross border trade, movement of citizens within the region and the commitment to expand infrastructural facilities in roads construction and giving of electricity to neighboring country such as Nigeria and Niger and Benin Republic. (Aduloju, 2024)

Despite several challenges such as poor economic situation, high unemployment, activities of terrorist groups like Islam State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram, which has led to socio-economic dislocation and the resurgence of military coup that has led to slide in democracy, the study revealed that ECOWAS has shown commitment to democratization process as it has demonstrated in the review of its protocols that is geared toward responding to global realities of transparency and good governance.(KPaa & Poroma,2025)

Impacts of these protocols such as Articles 17 on Mutual Assistance of Defence and Article 4 on the use of mediation are manifested in ECOWAS operations. There is Article 58 which seeks to promote peaceful settlement of disputes among member states. Also, the use of Early Warning was a major political arrangement that was aimed at nipping potential conflicts in the bud. These protocols have enabled ECOWAS to intervene in the unconstitutional removal of government in Gambia and Republic of Benin. It has also led to the suspension of Niger Republic and Burkina Fasso from the regional body for unconstitutional change of government.

Though these efforts are worth celebrating, but it has not deterred military coups, human rights abuse and intimidation of opposition parties and other forms of electoral malpractices, which has heightened political tensions in the region. Also, deployment of peacekeeping force also known as ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to member states is part of the provisions on mutual assistance. Alarmed by proliferation of small arms and light weapons within region, member states established protocol on arm control.(ASA,2025,Kazahchiang,2025, Adegboye,2023)

One of the strategic partners in the institutionalization of democracy in ECOWAS sub region is the Civil Society Organisations. Civil Society Organisations have collaborated with ECOWAS in capacity building for the promotion of free and fair elections within the region. The inclusion of NGOs and CSOs is part of interventions and in peace building. They have been engaged in response capacity to the issue of human rights abuse and the freedom of the press. There are other civic engagements of CSOs/NGOs in Nigeria such as strengthening mechanism for resolution of pre-election matters, post election conflict management and collaboration with youths, and women in civic engagement. Civil Society Organisations also participate in election monitoring. Reports from CSOs /NGOs have significantly helped electoral bodies in the management of elections. CSOs have worked with Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Through their collaboration, they have facilitated training for journalists and other stakeholders in election management. In Nigeria CSOs are part of Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC) a non partisan body established to ensure transparency and credibility in the electoral process. (Adegboye, 2023, Ukeje &Olusola, 2023, Opoku,2007)

As ambitious as ECOWAS is in its efforts to drive regional agenda, economic development, and political reforms, the body is constrained by paucity of funds. Membership contributions are not enough to meet its numerous programmes and policies such as the protocol on democracy and good governance. To meet its financial obligation, attention is turned to other rich countries in the west and the NGOs who have been supporting the region in capacity building. To drive its democratic agenda, ECOWAS member states have had to rely on funds and

material assistance from USAID, German government among others. These finding is in line with Kpaa and Poroma (2025)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study has shown that inspite of the numerous challenges confronting ECOWAS as a regional body, it has shown commitment and resilience to the promotion of democracy through electoral integrity and it has also showed that ECOWAS is a regional bloc that cannot be ignored. Its responses to global dynamic through adoption of various protocols is a demonstration of the fact that it has prospect in the institutionalization of democracy and good governance. Its continuous engagement with civil society organisations, and other non governmental bodies, including the media, youth, women in peacebuilding is an appreciation of the roles these stakeholders can play in tackling some of the problems, such as terrorism, unemployment, political instability that are confronting the region as a whole.

Based on the findings, the study has proposed the following recommendations:

a. There is need to strengthen security architecture within member states as this will help the regional body in its fight against cross border crimes including terrorism;
b. In view of the resurgence of military coups in the region, some of which were aftermath of elections, member states should continue to invigorate its electoral process with a view to promoting transparency and integrity of elections across the region;
c. The parlour state of its economy has contributed to the region political instability, consequently, there is the need to show more commitment in its economic agenda such as regional integration and infrastructural development; and
d. Since political stability is central to economic growth and poverty alleviation, the region needs to encourage member states to embark on political reforms that will engender inclusivity, rule of law and human rights.
e. Suspension of Mali, Burkina Fasso and Niger Republic and their eventual withdrawal of their membership from the regional body potent serious risks in view of the activities of terrorist groups in the Sahel region where these countries belong. Therefore, no effort should be spared in working with them to strengthen the security architecture of the region.

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