

## The role of Nigeria in the regional integration process in west Africa (1975 - 2023): Case study of Ecowas

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### Abstract

This paper examines Nigeria's role in the regional integration process in West Africa through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 1975 to 2023. Nigeria's significant economic, political, and military influence in the region has positioned it as a key player in ECOWAS. This study explores Nigeria's contributions, challenges, and the impact of its policies on regional integration. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical and contemporary data, this paper provides insights into Nigeria's leadership and its implications for regional stability and development. The findings from the study revealed Nigeria's pivotal role in the regional integration process in West Africa through ECOWAS. Nigeria's economic strength, political leadership, and security contributions have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of ECOWAS. The country's efforts in promoting economic integration, mediating conflicts, and supporting peacekeeping missions have significantly contributed to regional stability and development. However, the analysis also highlights several challenges that have impacted Nigeria's role. Economic vulnerabilities, domestic political instability, and regional rivalries have occasionally hindered Nigeria's ability to lead effectively. Addressing these challenges is crucial for Nigeria to sustain its leadership role and for ECOWAS to achieve its integration objectives.

**Keywords:** Regional Integration; West Africa; Africa; Nigeria; Ecowas; Development

### 1. Introduction

Integration boosts efficiency. States cooperate on international studies. EU, AU, and UN integration is frequent. Institutions and laws help regions cooperate. 2014. ECOWAS, UEM, Arctic Council. According to DeLombaerde & Van Langenhove (2007), international territorial systems are merging. Van Langenhove (2007) suggests trade integration, private sector development, infrastructure planning, strong public sector institutions and governance, and social marginalization elimination for economic progress and regional integration.

African regionalism boosts economic, political, and social advancement. Established 1975 for ECOWAS economic integration. Nigeria, ECOWAS' founder and biggest economy, has led the growth (Edozie, 2017). Nigerian resources stall ECOWAS. West African politics hinder integration (Oputu, 2006). West African politicians impede integration. Nigeria's impact on ECOWAS politics is unclear. Geographically, society, culture, economics, and politics must merge for full integration. West African economies depend on exports since they can't handle basic products. Trade with wealthier countries hurts regional cooperation. We must grasp these concerns to evaluate and solve West African regional integration.

This study focused on Nigeria's political and economic role in ECOWAS, West African regional integration, integration ambitions, subregional integration obstacles, and remedies. The study adopted quantitative and qualitative studies.

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### 1.1 Regional Integration

Integration is goal. Trade barriers are gradually lowered to create an FTZ, single market, economic union, and political union. It aims worldwide dominance (Kurk, 1977).

Political and economic integration are separated by Nweke (1986). Economic integration reduces trade barriers to harmonize policy and minimize conflicts. Revisionist foreign policy integrates economically and politically (Lolette Kritzinger-van Niekerk, 2005).

Asante works with neighbors (Sesay and Amadu, 2011). Regional integration comprises continental (e.g., African Economic Community, AEC) and regional economic integration arrangements such joint markets, free trade zones, and harmonization programs. The ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement requires States to share resources and commodities and overcome political, geographical, economic, and social hurdles to regional integration (ECOWAS, 2012:63).

Regional integration links sovereign nations with common social, cultural, or historical values regardless of proximity. States empower regional groupings to achieve economic, social, political, and security cooperation. Africa regional integration encompasses 55 nations promoting peace, growth, and unity.

### 1.2 The Process of Integration

The process of regional integration involves joining together different economies into large economic areas for the purpose of free trade while at the same time removing all discriminatory barriers between them. This in turn creates the necessity for some degree of cooperation and coordination of policies between them (Anadi, 2005:25). According to Hill (2011), several levels of economic integration are possible in ‘theory’ from least integrated to most integrate. They are a free trade area; a customs union; a common market; an economic union; and a full political union.

**Table 1** Schematic Representation of Regional Integration Schemes ADAPTED FROM ANADI KACHIMA, MACDONALD, Ph.D Dissertation. 2015. University of Zurich

Scheme	Free intra scheme trade	Common trade policy	Free factor mobility	Common monetary & fiscal policy	One government
Free trade area	yes	no	no	no	no
Customs Union	yes	yes	no	no	no
Common Market	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Economic Union	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Political Union	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

### 1.3 Conditions Essential for Integration

Successful regional integration hinges on several key pre-conditions, both political and economic, as well as factors identified by scholars over time.

As far as politics is concerned, these relate to the existence of:

- Domestic peace/security in countries; and
- Political and civic commitment and mutual trust among countries. With regard to economics, there is a need for-
- A minimum threshold of macro-economic stability and good financial management in countries (price stability, realistic real exchange rates, etc.); and
- Sufficiently broad national reforms to open markets (lolettekritzinger-van niekerk, 2005).

Adeniran (1983) identified factors that help units integrated in integration. These include:

- Expectation of joint rewards
- Capabilities of participating units.
- The compatibility of their values

- Economic growth
- Unbroken links of social, communications and transactions.
- Mobility of people and the expansion or broadening of the political elite.
- The ability of the decision makers within the units to be predictable and predict others.
- The willingness to respond to each other's appeals and expectations.

Karl Deutsch's analysis further identifies conditions essential for the success of integrated communities:

- Values and expectations
- Capabilities and communication process.
- Mobility of persons
- Multiplicity and balance of transaction
- Mutual predictability of behavior (Pfaltzgraff, 1968)

Olaniyan (1986) identified several key elements necessary for successful integration, focusing on four primary components: Structural factors, Mass support, Political will, and Political support, with the addition of the importance of a hegemon. The success of the integration process depends on the strength or weakness of these elements.

- **Structural Factors:** Successful integration requires certain structural characteristics among the integrating states to provide a favorable background for their efforts. Large disparities among states and differences in economic development—caused by internal and external factors such as colonial heritage, government policy, and foreign investment—can undermine the integration process.
- **Mass Support:** This refers to the people's positive attitude towards other member countries. According to Deutsch, mass support is essential for successful interstate interaction, fostering "a sense of community" characterized by mutual sympathies and loyalties. The greater the positive attitude among the people of member countries, the better the chances for lasting unity.
- **Political Will:** Political will stems from dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and the expectation of benefits from the community. The strength of political will depends on the benefits a group anticipates, which is crucial for moving towards a union.
- **Political Support:** Economic integration requires the backing of powerful social groups, particularly when they perceive that integration aligns with their interests and ideas.
- **Hegemonic Presence:** According to hegemonic stability theory, a hegemon provides order similar to a central government in the international system by reducing anarchy, deterring aggression, promoting free trade, and providing a stable currency. Hegemons can help resolve or manage conflicts among smaller states and promote regional or global economic growth (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011).

#### **1.4 Benefits of Regional Integration**

According to Olubomehin and Kawonishe (2014), integration is no longer a simple question of propriety but an inevitable strategy of survival and development. States participate in regional integration for social, economic and political reasons.

Politically, a country may participate in a regional scheme in order to bolster its military prowess, augment its political stature, and deter aggression from hostile neighbors (Rourke, 1995). Economically integration enables the optimal allocation of scarce resources and accelerates economic growth. Successful regional integration is likely to improve competition, reduces transaction costs, allows economies of scale and attracts foreign direct investment.

Regional economic cooperation and integration can also make it possible for us to collectively build integrative infrastructure in transport, communications and energy which would otherwise be too costly for individual, small and fragmented African countries to undertake (Obasanjo, 2004: cited in to Olubomehin and Kawonishe, 2014). Example is the West African Gas Pipeline.

#### **1.5 Regional Integration in West Africa: Formation of ECOWAS**

ECOWAS was established on May 28, 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos by fifteen West African countries, including Nigeria. The main objectives of ECOWAS included fostering economic cooperation and development, promoting peace and security, and facilitating free movement of goods and people within the region (ECOWAS, 1975).

From the inception of ECOWAS, Nigeria emerged as a leading force due to its economic strength, population size, and political influence. Nigeria's contributions were instrumental in the establishment of ECOWAS institutions, including the ECOWAS Secretariat (now the ECOWAS Commission) in Abuja, Nigeria's capital (Adetula, 2014).

### 1.6 Structure of ECOWAS

The 1993 revised ECOWAS treaty, particularly Chapter 3, outlines the institutions of the community, their compositions, and functions. Article 6 lists the main institutions of ECOWAS as follows:

- The Authority of Heads of State and Government (AHSG)
- The Council of Ministers
- The Community Parliament
- The Economic and Social Council
- The Community Court of Justice
- The Executive Secretariat
- The Fund for Cooperation, Compensation and Development
- Specialized Technical Commissions
- Any other institutions established by the Authority (ECOWAS Revised Treaty 1993:6).

ECOWAS has a hierarchical governance structure comprising three branches: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial.

The Executive branch is headed by the President of the ECOWAS Commission, appointed by the Authority for a non-renewable four-year term. The President is supported by a Vice President and seven Commissioners, each responsible for:

- Administration and Finance
- Agricultural and Water Resources
- Human Development and Gender
- Infrastructure
- Macroeconomic Policy
- Political Affairs, Peace, and Security
- Trade, Customs, and Free Movement (ECOWAS Annual Report 2008).

The Legislative branch consists of the Community Parliament, led by the Speaker of Parliament. The administrative functions of the Parliament are managed by the Secretary General.

The Judicial branch is represented by the Community Court of Justice, headed by its President. The court ensures the interpretation and application of community laws, protocols, and conventions. Administrative functions of the court are managed by the Court Registrar, assisted by other professionals (ECOWAS Annual Report 2008).

ECOWAS also includes various functional agencies:

- ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID)
- West African Health Organization
- ECOWAS Gender Development Centre
- ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre (EYSDC)
- West African Power Pool (WAPP)
- West African Monetary Agency

ECOWAS has several technical committees to address specific areas:

- Food and Agriculture
- Industry, Science, and Technology
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Transport, Communications, and Tourism
- Trade, Customs, Taxation, Statistics, Money, and Payments
- Political, Judicial, and Legal Affairs, Regional Security, and Immigration
- Human Resource Information, Social and Cultural Affairs

- Administrative and Finance

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## 2. Nigeria's Contributions Regional Integration in West Africa: ECOWAS

- **Economic Contributions:** Nigeria's economic dominance in West Africa has been a cornerstone of its influence within ECOWAS. As the largest economy in the region, Nigeria has significantly contributed to the ECOWAS Fund for Cooperation, Compensation, and Development (Adetula, 2014). Nigerian financial institutions have also played a critical role in regional development projects, enhancing infrastructure and trade within member states (Edozie, 2017).
- **Political and Diplomatic Leadership:** Nigeria has consistently provided political and diplomatic leadership within ECOWAS. It has been at the forefront of mediating conflicts and promoting democratic governance in member states. Notably, Nigeria played a key role in resolving the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s through the deployment of the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), an ECOWAS peacekeeping force (Adebajo, 2020).
- **Security and Peacekeeping:** Nigeria's commitment to regional security has been demonstrated through its active participation in peacekeeping missions under the auspices of ECOWAS. Nigeria has contributed troops, resources, and leadership to various peacekeeping operations, including interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, more recently, Mali (Adekeye, 2020). Nigeria's military strength and experience have been vital in maintaining stability in the region.

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## 3. Challenges and Limitations

- **Economic Challenges:** Despite its economic strength, Nigeria faces significant economic challenges that have impacted its role within ECOWAS. Fluctuations in global oil prices, internal economic mismanagement, and corruption have hindered Nigeria's ability to consistently support ECOWAS initiatives financially (Ogbonnaya, 2019).
- **Political Instability:** Nigeria's domestic political instability has also posed challenges to its leadership role in ECOWAS. Periods of military rule, electoral violence, and internal conflicts have diverted attention and resources away from regional integration efforts (Akinboye, 2013).
- **Regional Rivalries:** Nigeria's dominance within ECOWAS has occasionally led to tensions with other member states. Rivalries and competition for leadership roles have sometimes undermined collective decision-making and cooperation within the organization (Sesay, 2014).

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## 4. Nigeria's role in improving regional integration through Ecowas in west Africa

There are differing opinions on whether ECOWAS has successfully achieved integration, particularly through Nigeria's efforts as a leading member. Online media scholar Karim Okanla (2019) argued that ECOWAS has failed to harmonize member countries' macroeconomic policies and promote the private sector as a driving force for economic integration. He also noted that divergent taxation policies among member states hinder progress, and stronger intra-ECOWAS trade could enhance regional resilience, but little has been done to achieve this.

Despite these shortcomings, editor Vincent Foly considered ECOWAS the most successful regional organization in Africa, citing achievements in free movement of people and goods and a customs union agreement. ECOWAS's specialized agencies are well-funded through a common import levy. At the 56th ordinary session on December 21, 2019, in Abuja, Nigeria, the president highlighted the region's economic growth of 3.3% in 2019 and the resilience of ECOWAS member states despite security challenges.

Given the varied perspectives, it is important to acknowledge Nigeria's efforts to improve integration in West Africa through ECOWAS, supported by numerous literary works.

### 4.1 The Formation of ECOMOG and Nigeria's Military Support

The first Liberian civil war, from 1989 to 1997, claimed 200,000 lives. Chris Kwaja (2017) noted that the lack of strong international response, particularly from the UN and Western countries, forced ECOWAS to address the crisis with a regional solution through ECOMOG. ECOWAS established ECOMOG as a peace enforcement force when the global community showed little interest in Liberia. This initiative marked the first peacekeeping and peace enforcement mission by a regional economic body (Galadima, 2006; Golwa, 2009).

In August 1990, ECOMOG, comprising forces from Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, became a key source of security and stability in Liberia (Aning, 1994). The mandate of ECOMOG included:

- Creating a 30-kilometer safe zone around Monrovia, Liberia
- Enforcing ceasefires among factions,
- Reporting violations to ECOWAS,
- Separating warring factions with buffer zones, and
- Disarming and encamping factions for peaceful resolution (Chris Kwaja, 2017).

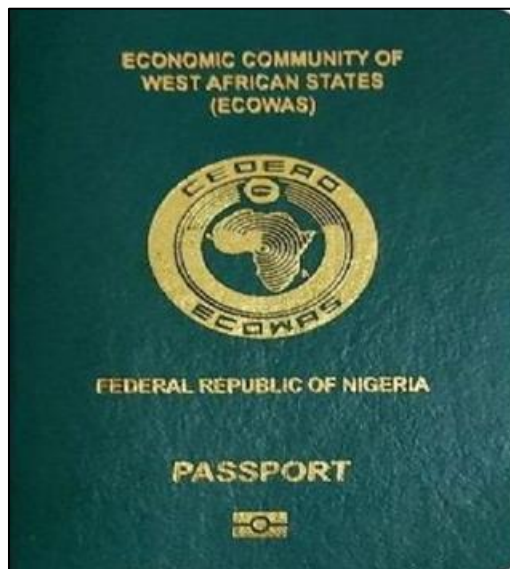
ECOMOG's efforts led to a ceasefire and subsequent peace agreement, ending the first Liberian civil war, with significant contributions from Nigeria. This regional initiative by Nigeria and other ECOWAS anglophone states was pivotal for West African integration, representing the first regional response to a complex emergency (Chris Kwaja, 2017). It was also the first instance of the UN deploying a military observer mission to support an already present regional force (Adebajo, 2020). ECOMOG's success in Liberia made it a model for conflict management in West Africa and beyond, later being used in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire (Chris Kwaja, 2017).

## 4.2 The Cooperation of Nigeria in Adopting a Regional Identity

In order to boost the process of integration in West Africa, it is important to undertake measures that would support the gradual adoption of a regional identity. Just as the European Union (EU) undertook several measures to improve the process of integration in Europe by means of regional identification (E.g the adoption of the Euro currency by some member states), ECOWAS has also undertaken some measures in order to achieve the same result. Along with other member states, Nigeria has made effort to cooperate with these measures at national and international level and there is information that supports this assertion.

### 4.2.1 The Adoption of ECOWAS Passport

The ECOWAS passport is a common passport document for several countries in West Africa. Member states of ECOWAS have implemented the common design for the passport. It was created to facilitate the intra-regional travel of member states' citizens for periods of unlimited duration. The passport can be used within the sub region and is also recognized for international travel (Wikipedia, 2022).



Source: [nigeriaembassymadrid.org](http://nigeriaembassymadrid.org)

**Figure 1** Nigerian ECOWAS Passport

According to Keesing Reference Systems, the first ECOWAS passport was issued in December 2007. It was also by this time that Nigeria was issued it's own as well. This passport aided in strengthening the unity and integration of the region as citizens of various member states of ECOWAS could travel around West Africa easily with each of them having an identical passport at hand.

#### 4.2.2 *The Use of WASSCE as a Means of Academic Evaluation*

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is a legally established examination board tasked with determining, conducting, and certifying examinations in the English-speaking West African countries. This examination, known as the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), has been in place since 1952, serving Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia. WAEC has significantly contributed to education in these countries through the exams it coordinates and the certificates it issues. Additionally, WAEC established an endowment fund to support education through lectures and financial aid for students in need. The WASSCE remains one of the most recognized exams in West Africa (Wikipedia, 2022).

The legislative assemblies of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia approved the West African Examinations Council through Ordinance No. 40 in December 1951 (WAECNigeria, 2004). Liberia followed suit in 1974 during an annual meeting in Lagos, Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2022). Although WAEC was not established by ECOWAS and operates only in anglophone West Africa, it has contributed to regional integration by providing a uniform evaluation and certification system, fostering regional identity among students. Notably, the countries served by WAEC (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia) are now anglophone member states of ECOWAS.

#### 4.2.3 *The Proposed Introduction of the ECO Currency in West Africa*

The Eco is the proposed common currency for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Initially, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) states were to introduce the currency, which would later merge with the CFA franc used by the French-speaking West African countries in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). This merger aims to grant UEMOA states full fiscal and monetary independence from France. Alternatively, UEMOA proposed reforming the CFA franc into the Eco first, extending it to all ECOWAS states (Wikipedia, 2022).

On June 29, 2019, ECOWAS leaders formally adopted the name "Eco" for their single currency project, initially planned for introduction in 2020 (allAfrica.com, 2019). On December 21, 2019, ECOWAS leaders met in Abuja to discuss the Eco's implementation, following a meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors (Premium Times, 2019).

As of 2023, the Eco has not yet been adopted. However, its eventual adoption would significantly enhance West African integration, as all ECOWAS member states would use the same currency, boosting the regional economy and promoting a unified regional identity.

#### 4.2.4 *The Construction of a Trans–West African Coastal Highway*

The Trans–West African Coastal Highway (TAH 7) is a project aimed at linking 12 West African coastal nations, from Mauritania to Nigeria, with feeder roads to landlocked Mali and Burkina Faso (Madamombe, 2006). The highway's eastern end is in Lagos, Nigeria, while its western end is considered to be either Nouakchott, Mauritania, or Dakar, Senegal, depending on the organization. Alternative names for the highway include:

- Nouakchott–Lagos Highway
- Lagos–Nouakchott Highway
- Dakar–Lagos Highway
- Lagos–Dakar Highway
- Trans-African Highway 7 (TAH7) in the Trans-African Highway Network (Wikipedia, 2022).

The highway is an ECOWAS and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) project, funded by the African Development Bank. It is part of the International Road Federation's priority list of nine highways for a Trans-Africa Highway network (Onyeka, 2006).

Nigeria plays a key role in this project, with Lagos being a major connecting point. The highway is crucial for West African integration, facilitating the free movement of goods and services across the region.

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## 5. Theoretical framework

Neofunctionalism, a mid-20th-century regional integration paradigm, underpins this research. Ernst B. Haas devised neofunctionalism to describe European integration, which has now been extended to West Africa.

Neofunctionalism holds that several processes foster regional integration:

- Integration in one area might lead to integration in other sectors (Functional Spillover). Economic integration necessitates political and security collaboration.
- Political Spillover: States and supranational organizations encourage integration by moving loyalties and activity to regional levels.
- Elite Socialization: National elites' participation in regional institutions fosters a regional viewpoint and identity, encouraging integration.

Neofunctionalist analysis of Nigeria's involvement in ECOWAS shows how its economic, political, and security contributions have promoted regional integration.

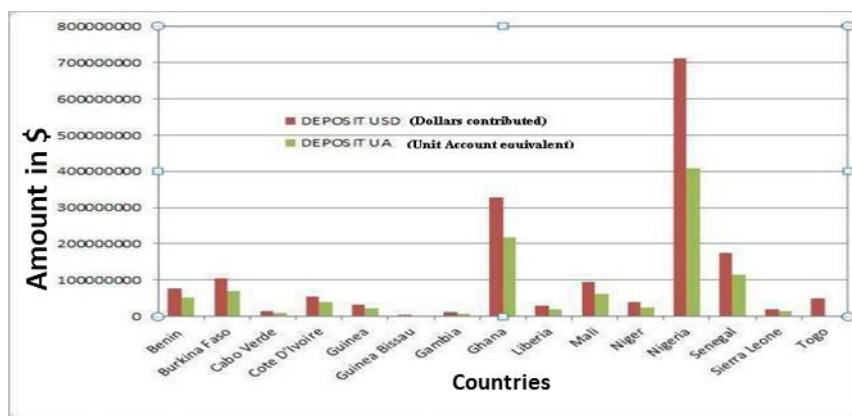
Nigeria's economic leadership and contributions to the ECOWAS Fund have contributed to infrastructure development and commercial liberalization. Political collaboration and security arrangements are needed to sustain stability and seamless economic integration (Ukaoha, 2017).

Nigeria's engagement in ECOWAS' political and diplomatic activities has boosted regional governance frameworks. Political Spillover: Nigeria's mediation of crises and support for democratic transitions in other member nations demonstrate regionalization of politics (Oluwadare, 2018). Elite Socialization: Nigerian elites' engagement in ECOWAS institutions has fostered a regional perspective that values shared interests. The integration project has survived national hurdles thanks to Nigerian and other West African elites' regional identification (Adetula, 2014).

Neofunctionalism is useful for this research since it helps evaluate Nigeria's complex position in ECOWAS. This research may show Nigeria's regional integration contributions by understanding how economic, political, and security functions interact and support each other. Neofunctionalism also emphasizes elite socialization and political will, which Nigeria needs to overcome regional leadership issues.

### 5.1 Nigeria's Contributions to ECOWAS

Nigeria has supported ECOWAS for years. Figure 2 shows the fifteen ECOWAS members' financial contributions. USD deposits show each ECOWAS member's contribution. Nigeria invested \$710,497,352 from 2003 to 2015, similar to 480,355,205 AU of West Africa and over 13 member states. UA deposits are Unit Account funds. Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Niger, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Togo, Guinea, Senegal, and Sierra Leone contributed \$697.947 million. The Extra-Ordinary Session of ECOWAS parliament has the report. West Africa uses Unit Accounts to value currencies. Nigeria led the organization's sustainability in 2018 (Chukwudiebere). Senegal and Ghana followed.

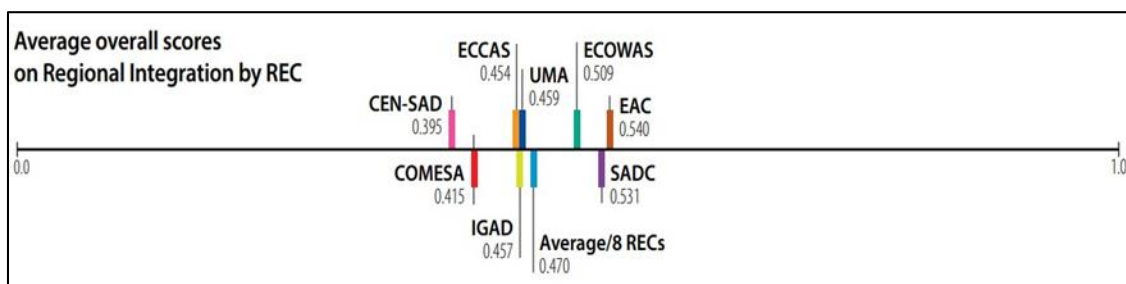


Source: Chukwudiebere (2018).

Figure 2 Contributions of Member States of ECOWAS (2018) in Ibrahim and Ahmad 2020



## 5.2 Nigeria's contributions to the regional integration Process through ECOWAS



Source: Adopted from ARII 2016, p. 15).

**Figure 3** Overall Regional Integration performance by RECs, ARII 2016 Report

The average performance of the eight RECs was 0.470, as seen in Figure 3. With a score of 0.540, the EAC was rated as the highest performing area; SADC came in second with 0.531, ECOWAS third with 0.509, UMA fourth with 0.459, IGAD fifth with 0.457, ECCAS fourth with 0.454, COMESA fifth with 0.415, and CEN-SAD sixth with 0.393 (ARII, 2016, p. 15). This showed that among the eight RECs, the ECOWAS, to which Nigeria is the head, ranked third. Table 1 displays Nigeria's scores and position among the 15 ECOWAS member states.

**Table 2** Nigeria's Regional Integration Scores & Ranking in ECOWAS, 2016 & 2019 Reports

(2016 Score & Ranking)				(2019 Score & Ranking)			
Country	Score	Rank	Category	Country	Score	Rank	Category
Cote d'Ivoire	0.675	1	High Perf.	Cote d'Ivoire	0.667	1	High Perf.
Togo	0.671	2	High Perf.	Burkina Faso	0.561	2	High Perf.
Senegal	0.628	3	High Perf.	Senegal	0.516	3	High Perf.
Niger	0.556	4	Average Perf.	Togo	0.504	4	High Perf.
Benin	0.548	5	Average Perf.	Nigeria	0.464	5	Average Perf.
Ghana	0.546	6	Average Perf.	Mali	0.454	6	Average Perf.
Burkina Faso	0.537	7	Average Perf.	Ghana	0.434	7	Average Perf.
Mali	0.525	8	Average Perf.	Benin	0.391	8	Average Perf.
Nigeria	0.501	9	Average Perf.	Guinea	0.389	9	Average Perf.
Guinea Bissau	0.500	10	Average Perf.	Gambia	0.386	10	Average Perf.
Gambia	0.447	11	Low Perf.	Cape Verde	0.363	11	Low Perf.
Cabo Verde	0.439	12	Low Perf.	Niger	0.321	12	Low Perf.
Sierra Leone	0.404	13	Low Perf.	Sierra Leone	0.316	13	Low Perf.
Liberia	0.357	14	Low Perf.	Guinea Bissau	0.314	14	Low Perf.
Guinea	0.301	15	Low Perf.	Liberia	0.298	15	Low Perf.
Source: ARII Report (2016, p. 44)				Source: ARII Report (2019, p. 36).			

In the 2016 ARII report, the average score for ECOWAS was 0.509. Nigeria scored 0.501, ranking 9th out of the 15 ECOWAS countries, failing to qualify as one of the top performers despite being the sub-region's hegemonic power. Furthermore, Nigeria ranked 6th out of 7 on the list of average performers.

In the 2019 report, the average score for ECOWAS decreased to 0.464. Nigeria did not make the top four performers, ranking 5th overall in the sub-region and first among the six average performers. Despite moving from 9th position in

2016 to 5th in 2019, Nigeria's score declined from 0.501 to 0.464, indicating not an improvement but rather that other countries performed poorly as well.

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## 6. Discussion of Findings

### 6.1 Nigeria Played an Active Role in ECOWAS

- **Nigeria's Commitment to ECOWAS:** Nigeria has shown strong dedication to regional integration through active participation in ECOWAS initiatives and institutions. As a founding member, Nigeria played a key role in establishing the ECOWAS treaty and adopting various protocols and agreements to promote economic and political integration (Ajayib & Mustapha, 2011).
- **Political Leadership and Mediation:** Nigeria has been instrumental in mediating conflicts within West Africa, highlighting its commitment to peace and stability. This includes Nigeria's role in resolving the Liberian civil war with the deployment of ECOMOG in the 1990s and mediation efforts in the Sierra Leonean conflict. These actions underscore Nigeria's use of military and diplomatic capabilities for regional benefit (Ajayi & Mustapha, 2011).
- **Promotion of Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Nigeria has significantly advanced trade and economic cooperation within ECOWAS by implementing policies to facilitate regional trade. Efforts include removing trade barriers, harmonizing customs procedures, and adopting the Common External Tariff (CET), which have spurred intra-regional trade and enhanced economic integration (Adewale & Soyinka, 2018).
- **Regional Security and Counter-terrorism:** Nigeria has proactively addressed security challenges in West Africa, leading regional responses to threats like terrorism and transnational crime. Nigeria's role in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat Boko Haram demonstrates its commitment to regional security (Ajayi & Mustapha, 2011).

### 6.2 Nigeria has Improved the State of Integration through ECOWAS in West Africa

- **Enhanced Regional Trade and Economic Integration:** Nigeria's involvement in ECOWAS has boosted cooperation and economic integration. The ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and the ECOWAS Common Investment Market (ECIM) have driven substantial growth in intra-regional trade, with Nigeria's large market and efforts to eliminate trade barriers playing a crucial role (Adewale & Soyinka, 2018).
- **Infrastructure Development:** Nigeria has supported infrastructure projects to improve regional connectivity, such as the Trans-West African Coastal Highway and the Trans-Saharan Highway, enhancing trade and transportation. Investments in energy infrastructure like the West African Power Pool (WAPP) have also addressed electricity challenges and promoted economic development (Olowu & Williams, 2019).
- **Harmonization of Policies and Standards:** Nigeria has worked on harmonizing policies and standards within ECOWAS to foster cooperation. Collaborations in sectors like agriculture, health, education, and finance have established common frameworks and regulations, facilitating the free movement of goods, services, and people, thus promoting regional integration (Fashoyin, 2017).
- **Capacity Building and Human Development:** Nigeria has significantly contributed to capacity building and human development in ECOWAS. Support for educational exchange programs, scholarships, and vocational training has enhanced human capital. Nigerian educational institutions hosting students from other ECOWAS states have fostered cultural exchange and strengthened regional ties (Ajayi & Mustapha, 2011).

Nigeria's substantial efforts and investments in human and material resources underscore its crucial role in the integration of the West African region. The success of many regional initiatives hinges on Nigeria's participation, demonstrating its pivotal influence in ECOWAS.

### 6.3 Challenges to Nigeria's Leadership Role in the Integration of West African States

Nigeria's engagement in West Africa presents both opportunities and challenges. Despite its successes, Nigeria faces significant issues:

- **Domestic Opposition:** Nigeria's foreign policy faces strong domestic opposition due to failures in addressing internal security challenges like robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism (Alli, 2012).
- **Need for Democratic Strengthening:** Nigeria must support its democratic values, rule of law, and political stability to enhance its foreign policy effectiveness (Elaigwu, 2004).

- **Historical Challenges:** Nigeria struggles with legacy issues from its military past, including corruption, lack of transparency, and policy inconsistency. Public apathy further undermines leadership effectiveness (APRM-CRR 2008).
- **Security Issues:** Nigeria contends with undemocratic governments, transborder crimes, terrorism, and migration issues, exacerbated by its commitment to the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement (Akinterinwa, 2011).
- **Economic Vulnerabilities:** Reliance on oil and gas makes Nigeria's economy vulnerable to attacks on oil infrastructure and global competition for resources, particularly from China and the West (Akinterinwa, 2011).
- **Regional Dynamics:** Nigeria's regional leadership role, including the creation and support of ECOMOG, requires significant financial and logistical commitment, and it faces challenges from external powers and neighboring states' vulnerabilities.

#### **6.4 The Democratic Deficits, Coups and Internal Governance issues in West Africa, and its Implications for ECOWAS Core Principles and Regional Integration**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded with the core principles of promoting democracy, good governance, and regional integration. However, the prevalence of democratic deficits and military coups in several member states and the current #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria has posed significant challenges to these principles.

For instances, Mali has experienced multiple coups, with the most recent in August 2020, when President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was ousted. The coup was driven by widespread discontent over corruption, economic mismanagement, and the government's handling of an Islamist insurgency. This instability has hampered Mali's democratic processes and its ability to contribute to regional integration (Harsch, 2020). In September 2021, Guinea's President Alpha Condé was overthrown by the military after he amended the constitution to secure a third term in office, sparking widespread protests. The coup highlighted the fragility of Guinea's democratic institutions and the challenges of maintaining constitutional order (Koné, 2021). Burkina Faso has faced repeated political turmoil, with a coup in January 2022 overthrowing President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. On 26 July 2023, a coup d'état occurred in Niger when the country's presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum, and Presidential Guard commander General Abdourahamane Tchiani proclaimed himself the leader of a new military junta, shortly after confirming the coup a success. The coup was justified by the military as a response to the government's failure to effectively address jihadist violence and insecurity. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have cemented their split from ECOWAS and formed their own Alliance of Sahel States which somewhat serves as a set back to the existing integration in the region. This reflects the broader issue of governance deficits and the challenges of maintaining democratic stability in the face of security threats (BBC News, 2022).

The implications of these internal governance issues extend to Nigeria's regional leadership and the broader integration process in West Africa. Nigeria's struggle with transparency, accountability, and policy implementation hampers its influence within ECOWAS, making it difficult to spearhead regional initiatives or act as a stabilizing force. The monocultural economy, heavily reliant on hydrocarbons, faces additional risks from militant attacks and oil theft, further straining Nigeria's resources and attention. Consequently, Nigeria's internal challenges weaken its ability to contribute effectively to regional economic and political stability.

#### **6.5 Implications for Nigeria's Regional Leadership**

- **Erosion of Credibility:** Nigeria's internal governance challenges, including the inability to ensure political stability and good governance, erode its credibility as a regional leader. Other ECOWAS member states may question Nigeria's commitment to the principles it promotes.
- **Resource Allocation:** Addressing internal issues consumes significant resources and attention, which could otherwise be directed towards regional initiatives. This diversion of resources limits Nigeria's capacity to lead effectively in ECOWAS.
- **Political Stability:** Effective leadership in ECOWAS requires political stability and democratic integrity. Nigeria's struggle with internal unrest and governance deficits hampers its ability to set a positive example and lead regional efforts effectively.
- **Public Perception:** The perception of Nigeria's leadership is crucial. Widespread protests like #EndBadGovernance indicate a unhappy populace, which can influence the broader regional perception of Nigeria's leadership and its ability to promote democracy and good governance in West Africa.

Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS remains crucial, but addressing these challenges is vital for effective regional integration and stability.

## 6.6 Summary of Findings

ECOWAS regional integration depends on Nigeria, according to this research. Nigeria transformed ECOWAS with its economic might, political leadership, and security. Economic integration, conflict mediation, and peacekeeping have boosted regional stability and prosperity. The research highlights Nigeria's role-affecting issues. Nigeria's leadership has been restricted by economic weakness, local political instability, and regional competition.

Democracy, good governance, and regional integration are ECOWAS goals. These aspirations have been seriously harmed by democratic failures and military coups in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. Mali's numerous coups, including the most recent in August 2020, show deep-seated governance flaws, while Guinea's 2021 coup, driven by constitutional manipulation for prolonged presidential terms, and Burkina Faso's 2022 coup, precipitated by security failings, show regional instability. These measures undermine regional solidarity, ECOWAS's values, and political stability, jeopardizing economic integration and human rights.

Nigeria, a major ECOWAS player, has internal governance issues that hamper regional integration. Corruption, electoral fraud, and bad governance outrage people in #EndBadGovernance protests. These internal challenges hurt Nigeria's ECOWAS advocacy. The nation's regional leadership is hampered by internal security issues including robbery and terrorism, political instability, and inadequate governance. These challenges must be solved for Nigeria to lead and ECOWAS to integrate.

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## 7. Conclusion

Nigeria has played a major role in West African regional integration via ECOWAS. Its economic, political, and military contributions formed ECOWAS and encouraged regional integration. The data shows that Nigeria has actively participated in ECOWAS programs including trade facilitation, peacekeeping, and infrastructure development. Nigeria's initiatives have also improved ECOWAS cooperation and integration, promoting social development, political stability, and economic growth. Remember that there are still issues to address, such as deeper integration in certain localities and addressing economic inequalities. The current democratic inadequacies, coups, and internal governance challenges in West Africa, notably Nigeria, hinder ECOWAS's aims of democracy, good governance, and integration. Nigeria and ECOWAS must enhance democratic institutions, promote good governance, and improve political stability to address these issues.

Nigeria must work with other ECOWAS members to maximize advantages for all stakeholders and promote regional integration. Nigeria's regional integration will be vital for West Africa's stability and growth as ECOWAS grows. The researcher believes Nigeria's status as a regional leader should not overshadow its own challenges and overlook its people's socioeconomic and welfare requirements. Only joint efforts can help ECOWAS create a stable, democratic, and integrated West Africa.

### *Recommendations*

Research offers these measures to strengthen Nigeria's standing in ECOWAS' West African regional integration:

- ECOWAS should improve policy implementation, member state engagement, and decision-making to enhance its institutional framework.
- Prioritize Economic Integration: Nigeria and other ECOWAS nations should reduce trade obstacles, harmonize laws, and promote intraregional investment and trade.
- Improving Internal Governance, Peace, and Security: Nigeria should actively engage in peacekeeping and work with other member states to solve regional security issues for stable integration and growth. Nigeria must rebuild its internal government to reduce corruption, improve security, and ensure political stability. Its reputation and leadership would improve.
- Promoting Democracy and Regional Diplomacy: Nigeria should actively address democratic flaws in other ECOWAS countries. Resolving conflicts, encouraging peaceful power transitions, and collaborating with other member states to protect democratic values and institutions for free and fair elections, the rule of law, transparency, and accountability.
- Encourage People-to-People contacts and public participation: Nigeria and other ECOWAS members should foster cultural exchanges, education, tourism, and civic involvement to improve understanding and integration. Nigeria might lead by promoting inclusive governance and participation in decision-making.

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