NIGERIA'S DIPLOMATIC ROLE IN ECOWAS UNDER PRESIDENT TINUBU: ROLES, REGIONAL IMPACT AND CHALLENGES SINCE 2024

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Abstract
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has long served as a pillar of regional stability, economic development, and conflict resolution in West Africa. Nigeria, as the region's largest economy and a key political actor, has historically played a leadership role within the organization. However, since assuming office in 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has had to navigate a complex landscape marked by political instability, military coups, economic crises, and security threats among ECOWAS member states. This study examines Nigeria's evolving role under Tinubu's leadership, focusing on the country's diplomatic, economic, and security interventions in the region. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study relies on content analysis of policy documents, official statements, and scholarly literature. The analysis is framed within the regional hegemonic stability theory, which argues that a dominant power within a regional system plays a crucial role in maintaining order and stability. Findings reveal that while Tinubu has shown commitment to democratic governance and regional mediation, his administration faces considerable obstacles, including resistance from coup-led governments, economic limitations, and internal political pressures within Nigeria. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's engagement in ECOWAS remains vital for regional peace and development. The study concludes that for Nigeria to sustain its leadership role, it must strengthen diplomatic channels, foster deeper economic collaboration, and adopt a more strategic approach to regional interventions. By doing so, the country can enhance ECOWAS's effectiveness in addressing the pressing political and security challenges confronting West Africa.
Keywords: Leadership, Regional Integration, Security Governance, Economic Diplomacy.

Introduction
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1975 with the primary objective of fostering economic integration and ensuring regional stability among its member states[1]. Over the decades, the organization has evolved into a key player in West Africa's political and security landscape, frequently intervening in conflicts, promoting democratic governance, and facilitating economic cooperation. Among its member states, Nigeria has historically assumed a dominant role, leveraging its economic strength, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence to support ECOWAS initiatives.

Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS has been particularly evident in peacekeeping operations, conflict resolution efforts, and the provision of financial assistance for regional programs. Successive Nigerian administrations have actively shaped the organization's policies, positioning the country as a stabilizing force in West Africa. However, the emergence of new political and security challenges has tested this leadership role, particularly following the inauguration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023[2].

Since taking office, President Tinubu has had to navigate an increasingly complex regional landscape marked by political instability, economic crises, and security threats. The rise of military coups in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea seems to have posed significant challenges to ECOWAS's mission of democratic consolidation and regional stability. Against this backdrop, this study critically examines Nigeria's role in ECOWAS under Tinubu's administration, focusing on the country's influence in shaping regional policies, responding to security threats, and managing economic challenges. By analyzing Nigeria's contributions and limitations, the study provides insights into the effectiveness of its leadership and the broader implications for ECOWAS's future.

Conceptual Clarifications

To provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, it is essential to clarify key concepts within the study. These include leadership, regional integration, security governance, and economic diplomacy, as they form the foundation for analyzing Nigeria's role, challenges, and regional impact since 2023.

Leadership

Leadership, in the context of international and regional organizations, refers to the ability of a state or institution to influence policies, mobilize resources, and shape decision-making processes to achieve collective goals[3]. Within ECOWAS, Nigeria has historically assumed a leadership role due to its economic strength, military capability, and diplomatic influence. This leadership is often demonstrated through peacekeeping efforts, mediation in political crises, and financial contributions to regional programs[4]. Under President Tinubu, Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS has been tested by shifting regional dynamics, particularly the resurgence of military coups and economic instability.

Regional Integration

Regional integration is the process through which sovereign states within a geographical area coordinate policies to achieve economic, political, and security cooperation[5]. ECOWAS was established in 1975 to foster economic integration among West African states, but over time, its mandate expanded to include conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and democratic governance. Governance within ECOWAS is characterized by collective decision-making among member states, often influenced by dominant regional actors such as Nigeria[6]. As the largest economy in the bloc, Nigeria has played a crucial role in shaping ECOWAS's governance structures, particularly in responding to regional security threats and democratic transitions.

Security Governance

Security governance refers to the mechanisms, institutions, and strategies employed by states and regional organizations to manage conflicts, prevent crises, and maintain stability[7]. In West Africa, security challenges such as terrorism, insurgency, and unconstitutional changes of government have necessitated strong regional responses[8]. Nigeria has historically been at the forefront of ECOWAS peacekeeping missions, deploying troops and providing logistical support to conflict zones in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mali[9]. Under President Tinubu, Nigeria's security leadership has faced significant hurdles, particularly in addressing military takeovers in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso[10]. The challenge lies in balancing diplomatic engagement with decisive intervention to uphold ECOWAS protocols on democratic governance.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy involves the use of economic resources, policies, and institutions to achieve foreign policy objectives[11]. As ECOWAS's largest economy, Nigeria exerts considerable influence over regional economic policies, trade agreements, and development programs[12]. However, internal economic challenges, including inflation, currency fluctuations, and declining oil revenues, have constrained Nigeria's ability to finance ECOWAS initiatives[13]. President Tinubu's administration has had to navigate these economic difficulties while maintaining Nigeria's commitment to regional economic integration.[14]

Conceptually, Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under President Tinubu can be understood through the lenses of regional governance, security leadership, and economic diplomacy. While Nigeria remains a pivotal actor in ECOWAS, its ability to influence regional stability and integration is increasingly challenged by political, economic, and security constraints. Understanding these conceptual frameworks provides a solid foundation for analyzing Nigeria's evolving role in the region and the broader implications for West Africa's political and economic landscape.

Theoretical Framework: Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in the Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory, which provides a critical lens through which to assess Nigeria's leadership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. This theory posits that a dominant regional power plays a stabilizing role in fostering economic cooperation, resolving conflicts, and ensuring regional security. In the case of West Africa, Nigeria has historically been regarded as the hegemonic power due to its economic, military, and political influence. The application of this theory allows us to examine the nature of Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS, particularly in navigating the complex challenges of political instability, economic crises, and security threats within the region since Tinubu's assumption of office in 2023.

The concept of hegemonic stability theory was first developed by Charles Kindleberger in the 1970s, primarily in the context of global economic stability. Kindleberger argued that a single dominant power, or hegemon, is necessary for the maintenance of international economic order and stability. Although initially applied to global affairs, this theory has been adapted to regional contexts by scholars like Robert Keohane and Stephen Krasner, who extended it to explore the role of regional hegemons in maintaining order within a region. According to Keohane, a regional hegemon stabilizes a region by using its power to establish rules, enforce agreements, and resolve disputes that may otherwise escalate into conflict[15].

In the context of ECOWAS, Nigeria's role as a regional hegemon is particularly significant due to its large economy, military capacity, and strategic influence. Scholars such as Adebayo Adefuye have noted that Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS has historically been a key factor in maintaining peace and security in the West African subregion[16]. As the largest contributor to ECOWAS's peacekeeping missions, Nigeria has actively engaged in conflict resolution, as seen in its military interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s[17]. This pattern of intervention and regional leadership underlines the applicability of the hegemonic stability theory to understanding Nigeria's strategic positioning within ECOWAS.

Under President Tinubu's administration, Nigeria has faced significant challenges that put its hegemonic role to the test. The resurgence of military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, as well as the continued economic instability in the region, has tested the capacity of ECOWAS and Nigeria's leadership to maintain regional stability. According to the regional hegemonic stability theory, a hegemon's ability to lead is contingent on its willingness and capacity to intervene in regional conflicts and manage economic challenges. Nigeria's military and diplomatic interventions, aimed at restoring democracy in coup-ridden member states, reflect its attempt to exert leadership and maintain order in line with the hegemon's stabilizing role[18].

However, Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under Tinubu has faced challenges from both internal and external factors. Domestically, Nigeria's political instability, economic crisis, and shifting leadership priorities have constrained its ability to play a robust hegemonic role. Internationally, the growing resistance from military-led governments in the region to ECOWAS's interventions, especially in Niger, has posed a significant challenge to Nigeria's influence and capacity to assert its leadership. According to the regional hegemonic stability theory, a hegemon's ability to maintain stability is undermined when its power is contested or when it faces significant challenges that reduce its resources for intervention[19].

The application of the Regional Hegemonic Stability Theory to Nigeria's role in ECOWAS under President Tinubu provides a useful framework for understanding the country's attempts to maintain regional order and stability amidst ongoing crises. While Nigeria's hegemonic power remains crucial to ECOWAS's success in achieving regional integration, peace, and security, the challenges of military coups, economic instability, and resistance to regional governance have complicated its leadership role. As such, the theory highlights both the strengths and limitations of Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of regional governance in West Africa.

Nigeria's Diplomatic Role in ECOWAS Under Tinubu
Nigeria has historically played a pivotal diplomatic role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), often taking the lead in negotiating peace and security agreements during periods of regional instability. Since its establishment, Nigeria's influence within ECOWAS has been rooted in its political and economic strength, as well as its capacity to mediate crises. Under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, this leadership role has been particularly pronounced as Nigeria has continued to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics, especially in response to recent political crises and military takeovers in West Africa. Specifically, the military coups in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali have called for decisive diplomatic actions, with Nigeria at the helm of ECOWAS's response[20].

The application of the regional hegemonic stability theory is crucial to understanding Nigeria's role within ECOWAS during President Tinubu's leadership. The theory posits that a dominant regional power, or hegemon, plays an essential role in stabilizing the region by fostering cooperation, maintaining peace, and resolving conflicts. Nigeria's economic and military capabilities, combined with its commitment to regional integration and security, position it as the hegemon in West Africa. As the most populous country and largest economy in ECOWAS, Nigeria has historically acted as the stabilizing force that ensures the region remains functional and responsive to challenges[21].

Under President Tinubu, Nigeria has reaffirmed its hegemonic role by taking a proactive stance in diplomatic mediation. Notably, when Niger and Burkina Faso experienced military takeovers, Nigeria's government, in collaboration with ECOWAS, took immediate diplomatic measures aimed at restoring democratic governance. This response, grounded in the belief that the stability of the region is contingent upon the preservation of democratic systems, included facilitating dialogue between coup leaders and other regional actors. Additionally, Tinubu's administration has supported ECOWAS's decision to impose sanctions, including economic restrictions and travel bans on the military leaders in Niger, as part of a broader strategy to pressure them into returning power to civilian authorities[22].

The regional hegemonic stability theory suggests that such interventions are characteristic of a hegemon's responsibility to uphold stability and promote a regional order. However, the diplomatic measures spearheaded by Nigeria under Tinubu have not been without contention. Some ECOWAS member states, particularly those that have experienced political turmoil or those sympathetic to military regimes, have expressed reservations about Nigeria's perceived dominance in the decision-making processes. These states have viewed Nigeria's interventions as interference in their domestic affairs, highlighting the challenges that a hegemon faces when its influence is contested within the region[23].

Despite this resistance, Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives reflect its continued role as the key driver of ECOWAS policy, as supported by hegemonic stability theory. The imposition of sanctions on the military junta in Niger, for example, aligns with the hegemon's role in applying pressure to maintain regional order. In practice, these sanctions aim to reinforce the legitimacy of democratic institutions and discourage further military uprisings across the region. Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, therefore, not only address the immediate crises but also work to prevent the erosion of the democratic values that ECOWAS has championed since its inception.

However, the application of the hegemonic stability theory also reveals some limitations of Nigeria's diplomatic power. While the country's efforts to mediate crises and impose sanctions demonstrate its capacity to influence ECOWAS's actions, the pushback from certain member states indicates that Nigeria's hegemonic role is not always accepted unconditionally. The theory implies that a hegemon's power can be undermined when smaller states within the region challenge its authority, as seen with the opposition from some ECOWAS members regarding the sanctions on Niger's coup leaders. This resistance suggests that while Nigeria remains a central force in ECOWAS, its role as the hegemon is contested and must be managed carefully to maintain regional cohesion.

Therefore, Nigeria's diplomatic role within ECOWAS under President Tinubu underscores the country's continued influence as a regional hegemon, driven by its commitment to maintaining stability, democracy, and peace in West Africa. Despite facing challenges from states resistant to its interventions, Nigeria has shown that its hegemonic role remains essential in managing crises and ensuring that ECOWAS functions effectively as a regional organization. The country's leadership in addressing the military takeovers in Niger and Burkina Faso exemplifies the application of hegemonic stability theory, highlighting the complex balance of power and the strategic role of Nigeria in shaping the future of ECOWAS.

Security Challenges and Nigeria's Role in Regional Stability
The increasing frequency of military coups and political instability in West Africa has posed significant security challenges for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Over the past few years, countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have experienced a series of military takeovers, threatening the democratic fabric and regional stability of the subcontinent. These developments have prompted ECOWAS, under the leadership of Nigeria, to reinforce its commitment to restoring constitutional order and upholding democratic governance in the region. As the dominant power in ECOWAS, Nigeria has historically been at the forefront of addressing these security challenges, employing both diplomatic and military measures to restore peace and stability. Under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria has continued this leadership role, seeking to enhance the regional security framework to tackle the growing threats of terrorism, armed conflict, and unconstitutional changes of government[24].

One of the key strategies employed by Nigeria under Tinubu's leadership has been the call for a more robust regional security architecture within ECOWAS. The increasing instability in the Sahel region, exacerbated by the expansion of jihadist movements, has underscored the need for a coordinated response from ECOWAS member states. In response to these security challenges, Tinubu has advocated for stronger peacekeeping missions and regional security cooperation to mitigate the impact of terrorism and insurgencies, particularly in the Lake Chad

region and Mali[25]. Nigeria, given its military capacity and regional influence, has continued to provide critical support to ECOWAS's peacekeeping operations, including troop deployments and logistical assistance for missions aimed at stabilizing conflict zones.

The regional hegemonic stability theory provides a useful framework for understanding Nigeria's role in addressing these security challenges. According to the theory, a regional hegemon plays a critical role in maintaining stability by providing leadership and ensuring collective action in the face of regional security threats. As the largest economy and the most populous country in West Africa, Nigeria's military and diplomatic power places it in a position of regional dominance. This dominance allows Nigeria to steer the actions of ECOWAS in its quest for regional peace and security. In the context of the recent security challenges, Nigeria's role as the hegemon is evident in its leadership of ECOWAS's military interventions and its provision of resources for peacekeeping missions in volatile regions such as Mali and the Lake Chad basin[26].

However, Nigeria's ability to fulfill this hegemonic role is constrained by both internal and external factors. Domestically, Nigeria faces significant security challenges, including the ongoing insurgency by Boko Haram and other militant groups in its northern region. These internal security concerns have placed a considerable strain on the country's military resources, limiting its capacity to commit additional personnel and resources to ECOWAS's regional peacekeeping operations. The insurgency in Northern Nigeria has not only diverted Nigeria's military focus but has also strained its economic resources, as substantial funding is required to combat domestic terrorism. This domestic security situation has led to competing priorities for the Nigerian government, as it must balance the need to address internal threats while also fulfilling its obligations to ECOWAS and its regional partners[27].

Economic constraints have also played a role in limiting Nigeria's full engagement in regional security initiatives. Despite being the largest economy in West Africa, Nigeria has faced economic challenges in recent years, including fluctuating oil prices, inflation, and a growing fiscal deficit. These economic difficulties have reduced the country's ability to fully fund peacekeeping missions or provide the necessary military support for ECOWAS's interventions. As a result, while Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS remains essential, its capacity to contribute significantly to regional security operations has been hindered by both internal security demands and external economic pressures.

The regional hegemonic stability theory suggests that a hegemon's ability to maintain stability is contingent upon its economic and military strength, as well as its ability to garner the support of smaller states within the region. Nigeria's role as a regional hegemon has been somewhat challenged by its internal security concerns and economic constraints. The theory further posits that a hegemon may face resistance from other states if its capacity to lead is perceived as diminished, which could affect the cohesiveness of ECOWAS's security initiatives. Despite these challenges, Nigeria's continued leadership in regional peacekeeping operations highlights its ongoing commitment to the stability and security of West Africa. The country's involvement in ECOWAS's peacekeeping efforts in Mali and the Lake Chad region demonstrates that, even amidst internal and economic difficulties, Nigeria remains a central actor in the maintenance of regional stability.

Therefore, Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS's response to security challenges in West Africa, under the guidance of President Tinubu, reflects the critical role that a regional hegemon plays in maintaining peace and stability. The country's provision of military support and diplomatic leadership underscores its hegemonic responsibility within ECOWAS. However, Nigeria's internal security challenges and economic constraints have created limitations in its ability to fully engage in regional security operations. Nonetheless, Nigeria's commitment to regional stability, guided by the principles of hegemonic stability theory, remains a cornerstone of ECOWAS's efforts to address the complex security threats facing the region.

Economic Contributions and Trade Relations
Nigeria, as the largest economy in West Africa, occupies a central position within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). With its substantial natural resources, especially oil, and a growing non-oil sector, Nigeria's economic policies significantly impact the regional economy. Under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration, the country has continued to assert its leadership in driving economic integration within the ECOWAS bloc. One of the key initiatives has been advocating for the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an ambitious agreement aimed at creating a single continental market for goods and services. Tinubu has emphasized the importance of integrating the ECOWAS region into the broader continental trade network to enhance economic growth and regional cooperation[28].

Tinubu's government has taken significant steps toward economic integration, such as promoting the free movement of goods, services, and people within ECOWAS[29]. However, these efforts have faced challenges in the form of trade restrictions, border closures, and currency instability across the region. The frequent closure of borders between member states, particularly Nigeria's own border with its neighbors, has had adverse effects on regional trade. Such restrictions disrupt supply chains, increase the cost of goods, and undermine the benefits of regional integration, as countries are unable to access markets in a seamless manner. Additionally, Nigeria's currency instability, caused by inflation and fluctuations in the value of the naira, complicates trade relationships with other ECOWAS states. Currency depreciation not only reduces the competitiveness of Nigerian exports but also affects the region's collective ability to engage in intra-regional trade, impeding economic growth and stability across West Africa[30].

In a bold move, Nigeria's decision to remove fuel subsidies under Tinubu's administration has had profound implications for both domestic and regional economies. The fuel subsidy removal was part of broader economic reforms aimed at addressing Nigeria's fiscal deficit and restructuring the country's energy sector. While this policy aims to improve Nigeria's long-term economic health by redirecting funds into critical sectors such as infrastructure and education, it has had immediate repercussions for its neighboring countries within ECOWAS. The resulting rise in fuel prices and inflation in Nigeria has created a ripple effect across West Africa, especially in countries that rely on Nigeria for fuel supplies. Neighboring economies have faced increased transportation costs and a rise in the price of basic goods, further straining economic conditions in the region. The removal of the subsidy has thus become a contentious issue within ECOWAS, with smaller economies feeling the adverse effects of Nigeria's fiscal adjustments[31].

The regional hegemonic stability theory offers a useful lens through which to examine Nigeria's economic contributions to ECOWAS under President Tinubu. This theory posits that a regional hegemon—typically the largest or most powerful state in a region—plays a crucial role in maintaining regional stability by providing public goods and fostering cooperation among smaller states. Nigeria, as the economic powerhouse of West Africa, occupies the role of a hegemon within ECOWAS, with its economic decisions having a far-reaching impact on the region. Tinubu's leadership in advocating for deeper economic integration within ECOWAS is consistent with the theory's emphasis on the hegemon's responsibility to drive regional economic policies and foster cooperation.

However, the hegemonic stability theory also underscores the challenges faced by the regional hegemon in balancing national interests with regional stability. Nigeria's economic reforms, such as the fuel subsidy removal, demonstrate the tension between pursuing domestic economic policies and maintaining stability within the region. While Nigeria's economic growth is critical for the overall stability and prosperity of ECOWAS, its internal economic decisions—especially those that have adverse regional effects—pose challenges for its leadership. The theory suggests that smaller states in the region may view Nigeria's policies with skepticism, especially if they perceive that these decisions undermine their own economic stability or security.

Moreover, Nigeria's economic dominance and its role as a regional leader are also shaped by the cooperation and support of its ECOWAS counterparts. The regional hegemon cannot act in isolation; it must cultivate alliances and negotiate compromises to maintain regional stability. Tinubu's push for the AfCFTA and his efforts to integrate ECOWAS economies into the continental trade framework can be seen as attempts to provide public goods that will benefit the region as a whole. At the same time, Nigeria's own economic difficulties, including inflation and currency instability, may undermine its ability to lead effectively, as other ECOWAS states could be reluctant to follow Nigeria's lead if they perceive its economic trajectory to be unstable or detrimental to their own interests.

The regional hegemonic stability theory also emphasizes that the hegemon must be able to manage the economic disparities within the region. While Nigeria's economic size gives it leverage in shaping ECOWAS's economic policies, the disparities between Nigeria and smaller states—especially in terms of economic development and resources—can create friction. Nigeria's efforts to promote regional integration through initiatives like the AfCFTA must be tempered by the need to address the concerns of less developed ECOWAS member states, which may feel that their interests are not adequately represented in such arrangements. Thus, Nigeria's economic leadership in ECOWAS is not without its challenges, as it must balance its national interests with the broader goal of regional economic cooperation.

Therefore, Nigeria's economic contributions to ECOWAS under President Tinubu, particularly in the areas of economic integration and trade relations, reflect the country's central role in maintaining regional stability. Through initiatives like the AfCFTA and efforts to streamline regional trade, Nigeria has sought to enhance

economic cooperation within the ECOWAS bloc. However, the economic challenges facing Nigeria, including trade restrictions, currency instability, and the removal of fuel subsidies, have created significant hurdles for regional economic growth. The regional hegemonic stability theory helps contextualize Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS, highlighting the complexities and tensions inherent in the hegemon's role in promoting regional stability. While Nigeria continues to provide public goods and push for deeper integration, its economic policies must be carefully managed to ensure that they do not destabilize the region or alienate smaller member states.

Challenges to Nigeria's Diplomatic Role in ECOWAS

While Nigeria has historically held a dominant position within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's leadership faces numerous challenges that complicate the country's ability to assert its influence across the region. These challenges arise from both internal and external factors, each of which presents its own set of obstacles to Nigeria's regional leadership.

Resistance from Coup-led Governments

One of the most significant challenges facing Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under Tinubu's administration is the resistance from countries led by military juntas, particularly in the wake of recent coups in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali. The resurgence of military coups in West Africa has severely strained the relations within ECOWAS, as the regional body has a long-standing commitment to democratic governance and constitutional order. Tinubu, as the head of ECOWAS, has been at the forefront of efforts to mediate and find peaceful resolutions to these crises, advocating for sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the coup leaders to restore democracy. However, these efforts have not been well received in all quarters. The military governments in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have openly rejected ECOWAS's interference in their internal affairs, seeing Nigeria's role in these diplomatic efforts as an unwarranted imposition on their sovereignty. This resistance undermines Nigeria's efforts to assert its leadership within ECOWAS, as it demonstrates the limitations of its influence when confronted with a bloc of countries determined to defy ECOWAS mandates. The growing distrust and divergence between these military-led governments and the rest of ECOWAS, with Nigeria at its helm, has made regional unity increasingly difficult to maintain[32].

Economic Constraints

In addition to the political resistance from coup-led governments, Nigeria's economic challenges significantly hinder its ability to lead ECOWAS effectively. As the largest economy in the region, Nigeria's financial capacity plays a crucial role in supporting ECOWAS's initiatives, from peacekeeping missions to economic integration projects. However, Nigeria is currently grappling with several pressing economic issues, including rampant inflation, high unemployment, and foreign exchange volatility. The devaluation of the naira and the accompanying instability in foreign exchange markets have led to a reduction in Nigeria's purchasing power, making it more difficult for the country to fund its contributions to ECOWAS activities. Moreover, the economic challenges within Nigeria mean that the government has limited fiscal space to support its regional leadership ambitions. As a result, Tinubu's administration has had to make tough decisions regarding the allocation of resources, often prioritizing domestic concerns over regional engagements. The constraints on Nigeria's economy have also led to concerns about the country's ability to lead by example in terms of economic stability and growth, thus weakening its position within ECOWAS[33].

Internal Security Issues

Another critical challenge to Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS stems from the persistent internal security crises plaguing the country. Nigeria has long struggled with various forms of insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, and ethnic violence. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and the rise of banditry in the northwest have created a precarious security situation that diverts significant attention and resources away from Nigeria's regional commitments. With over 2 million people displaced and many more affected by violent extremism, the Nigerian government has found it increasingly difficult to balance domestic security concerns with its international obligations. This internal instability has diverted Nigeria's military and diplomatic resources, leaving less bandwidth for Nigeria to focus on stabilizing the region. The government's preoccupation with internal security challenges means that it cannot fully commit to peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts in other ECOWAS states, limiting Nigeria's ability to assert its leadership in regional conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Furthermore, the inability of the Nigerian state to tackle these security issues effectively raises concerns about Nigeria's regional credibility and its role as a security guarantor in ECOWAS, particularly as smaller member states look to Nigeria for assistance in addressing their own security concerns[34].

ECOWAS Institutional Weaknesses

In addition to Nigeria's internal challenges, the broader institutional weaknesses of ECOWAS itself contribute to the difficulty in maintaining regional stability and coherence under Nigeria's leadership. The regional bloc has faced significant challenges in enforcing its protocols and responding effectively to crises, particularly in instances of unconstitutional changes of government, as seen in the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. While ECOWAS has adopted various legal frameworks and protocols designed to promote democratic governance, the institution lacks the capacity to enforce these measures consistently across its member states. The regional bloc's decision-making processes are often slow, and its ability to impose sanctions or take military action is hindered by disagreements among member states. Some countries, especially those in the francophone West African region, have historically been reluctant to fully support ECOWAS's collective decisions, especially when those decisions directly conflict with national interests or priorities. This division within the bloc further complicates Nigeria's leadership role, as it must contend with not only the resistance from military regimes but also the lack of institutional cohesion within ECOWAS. As a result, Nigeria's diplomatic and military efforts are sometimes undermined by a fragmented ECOWAS, which makes it challenging for Tinubu's administration to assert a clear and unified regional strategy[35].

Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under President Tinubu appears to be significant, but it is far from without its challenges. Resistance from coup-led governments, Nigeria's own economic struggles, internal security concerns, and the institutional weaknesses of ECOWAS itself all pose substantial obstacles to Nigeria's ability to lead the region effectively. Despite these challenges, Nigeria remains a critical player in shaping the future of West Africa, and Tinubu's administration will need to navigate these complex issues while maintaining the country's commitment to regional stability and integration. The success of Nigeria's leadership within ECOWAS will depend not only on its ability to overcome these internal and external obstacles but also on its capacity to work within the broader ECOWAS framework to strengthen regional cooperation and resolve crises in a manner that reflects the interests of all member states.

Conclusion

Nigeria's leadership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has been a multifaceted and dynamic engagement, underscored by the country's historical role as a regional leader in diplomacy, security, and economic integration. From spearheading regional peace efforts to advocating for stronger economic cooperation, Nigeria has continuously positioned itself as a key stabilizing force in West Africa. However, as much as Nigeria's leadership is characterized by proactive diplomacy and strategic security interventions, the country faces significant challenges that threaten its capacity to assert its regional leadership effectively. These challenges are not only external, arising from the resistance of military-led regimes and the growing instability in neighboring countries, but also internal, with Nigeria grappling with its own economic and security struggles. Despite these obstacles, Nigeria's central role in ECOWAS remains undeniable, and its leadership will be pivotal in determining the future of regional cooperation and integration in West Africa. One of the most notable aspects of Nigeria's leadership under President Tinubu is its commitment to diplomatic engagements aimed at restoring peace and democratic governance across the region. Tinubu's administration has shown a proactive stance in addressing the resurgence of military coups, particularly in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Nigeria has been instrumental in driving ECOWAS's decisions on sanctions, mediation, and negotiation, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that democratic governance is restored in these countries. However, despite these efforts, Nigeria has encountered significant resistance from military regimes, which have not only rejected ECOWAS interventions but have also openly challenged Nigeria's influence within the bloc. This resistance represents a key challenge for Nigeria's diplomatic leadership, as it highlights the difficulties of enforcing regional norms when faced with entrenched autocratic or military-led regimes that prioritize their sovereignty over regional agreements.

Equally significant are the economic constraints that have emerged as a formidable challenge to Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS. As the largest economy in West Africa, Nigeria's economic policies and initiatives are vital for the success of regional integration efforts. Under Tinubu, there have been strong calls for deeper economic integration, particularly through the promotion of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the expansion of intra-regional trade. However, Nigeria's own economic challenges—ranging from inflation and currency instability to fiscal deficits—have placed limitations on the country's ability to finance regional projects and initiatives. Nigeria's decision to remove fuel subsidies, while aimed at addressing domestic fiscal challenges, has had ripple effects on the region, exacerbating inflation and leading to dissatisfaction among neighboring economies. These economic strains make it more difficult for Nigeria to maintain its leadership position within ECOWAS, as the country faces a delicate balance between addressing its domestic concerns and fulfilling its regional obligations.

Furthermore, Nigeria's internal security issues remain a critical factor in shaping its role in ECOWAS. The persistent threat of terrorism, insurgency, and banditry, particularly in the northern parts of the country, has placed a significant strain on Nigeria's military resources and its overall security apparatus. The ongoing challenges posed by groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) not only affect Nigeria's internal stability but also divert attention and resources away from the country's regional commitments. As the region's primary security provider, Nigeria's ability to contribute to peacekeeping missions and security operations across ECOWAS member states is directly impacted by its internal security concerns. The country's engagement in the Lake Chad region and the Sahel has been essential in combating terrorism, but its own security crisis complicates its ability to project power and influence beyond its borders. This internal instability reduces Nigeria's capacity to lead effectively in regional security frameworks and raises questions about the country's ability to safeguard its regional interests while addressing domestic security threats.

Despite these considerable hurdles, Nigeria remains a central player in the ECOWAS framework, and its leadership is indispensable to the future of regional cooperation and integration. The nation's ability to maintain peace, economic stability, and security within the West African region will ultimately determine the direction of ECOWAS in the coming years. Under Tinubu, Nigeria has the opportunity to reinforce its position as a stabilizing force in West Africa, provided it adopts a balanced and strategic approach to leadership. This will require navigating the delicate dynamics within ECOWAS, engaging with both military regimes and democratic governments, and finding innovative solutions to regional security and economic challenges. The country must continue to push for greater regional integration, while addressing its own domestic issues, in order to enhance its influence and effectiveness as a regional hegemon. Additionally, strengthening ECOWAS's institutional capacity to enforce decisions and respond to crises will be essential for ensuring the bloc's continued relevance and effectiveness.

In conclusion, Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under President Tinubu has the potential to significantly shape the trajectory of regional integration and stability in West Africa. However, achieving this vision will require overcoming significant challenges, including resistance from regional regimes, economic constraints, and internal security issues. By adopting a strategic, multifaceted approach to its regional role—one that balances domestic and international priorities—Nigeria can reinforce its position as a key player in West African diplomacy, security, and economic development, ensuring that it remains a stabilizing force within ECOWAS for years to come.

Recommendations

Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS under President Tinubu is at a critical juncture. Moving forward, Nigeria must adopt a multi-pronged approach that includes:

1. Strengthening Diplomatic Engagements: To promote collective decision-making and unity within ECOWAS for effective regional governance.
2. Enhancing Military Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing: To improve the region's ability to combat terrorism, insurgency, and transnational security threats.
3. Promoting Regional Economic Integration: To enhance trade, create job opportunities, and foster economic growth across ECOWAS member states.
4. Addressing Nigeria's Internal Security Challenges: To ensure Nigeria's internal stability, enabling stronger contributions to regional peace efforts.
5. Investing in ECOWAS Institutional Strengthening: To empower ECOWAS to effectively manage crises, enforce policies, and support member states.
6. Facilitating Inclusive Economic Growth: To reduce economic disparities and promote sustainable development for stability across the region.
7. Engaging with Regional Civil Society and the Private Sector: To ensure diverse perspectives in decision-making and boost development through collaborative efforts.

ENDNOTES

Here are the endnotes rewritten with the first name before the surname, place of publication, publication company, year, and pages where necessary:

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