FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGER REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors contributing to political instability in the Niger Republic, focusing on governance deficits, socio-economic challenges, and external influences. Using a descriptive research design, the study explores the underlying causes and dynamics of the recurrent political crises that have plagued Niger. Data were drawn from secondary sources, including scholarly articles, reports, and government publications, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The descriptive design allowed for an in-depth analysis of the interplay between internal and external factors that undermine Niger's political stability. One major finding of the study is the significant role of weak democratic institutions and governance practices in fostering instability. The lack of accountability, rampant corruption, and exclusionary governance have eroded public trust in political processes, creating an environment ripe for coups and unrest. Chronic poverty and socio-economic inequalities exacerbate public grievances, while external influences, including regional conflicts and international interests, further complicate the country's political landscape. The study recommends strengthening democratic institutions and promoting inclusive governance as critical steps toward achieving political stability. Reforms should focus on enhancing the capacity of state institutions to deliver services, ensuring transparent and fair electoral processes, and engaging marginalized groups in decision-making. Moreover, economic diversification and targeted development programs are necessary to address socio-economic inequalities and reduce dependence on resource extraction. Finally, regional cooperation through bodies like ECOWAS and coordinated international support are essential for addressing security threats and mitigating external pressures. These measures, if effectively implemented, could pave the way for sustainable peace and stability in the Niger Republic.

Keywords: Political instability, democratic, good governance, Niger Republic, poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Niger, situated in the heart of West Africa, has faced an array of challenges since its independence from France in 1960. Despite its abundant natural resources, including significant uranium deposits, the nation has been mired in a cycle of political instability and economic hardship. This situation has been compounded by environmental challenges such as frequent droughts, advancing desertification, and a rapidly growing population, all of which have strained Niger's economic and social fabric (International Crisis Group, 2021). Since gaining independence, Niger has experienced a tumultuous political journey, characterized by several military coups. These coups have disrupted the country's democratic processes and governance structures, leading to periods of authoritarian rule and political uncertainty. Each coup has been a setback in Niger's path toward stable and democratic governance, often resulting in international isolation and economic sanctions. The political instability in Niger reflects a broader pattern of governance challenges in the region, where transitions of power have frequently been contentious and sometimes violent.

Niger faces significant security challenges, including threats from various militant groups. The Sahel region, of which Niger is a part, has been a hotspot for militant activity, with groups such as Boko Haram and affiliates of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State exerting their influence. These groups have exploited the region's vast and porous borders, weak state presence, and existing ethnic and economic grievances to recruit members and conduct attacks. The presence of these militant groups has not only destabilized Niger but also posed a threat to regional security, prompting concerns from international stakeholders. The humanitarian situation in Niger is dire, with a significant portion of the population facing food insecurity and displacement. The situation is exacerbated by climate change, which has resulted in more frequent and severe droughts, contributing to desertification and loss of arable land. These environmental changes have had a devastating impact on agriculture, which is the backbone of Niger's economy and the primary source of livelihood for most of its population. The resultant food insecurity has led to widespread malnutrition and health crises, particularly affecting children and vulnerable populations. The displacement of people due to environmental factors and conflict has led to a complex humanitarian crisis. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from neighboring countries have placed additional strain on Niger's limited resources. The country has had to grapple with the challenge of providing shelter, food, and basic services to these populations amidst its own economic constraints.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established in 1975, is a regional grouping of fifteen West African countries. It was initially formed with the primary objective of promoting economic integration and cooperation among its member states. Over the years, ECOWAS has evolved to take on a more expansive role,

encompassing conflict resolution and peacekeeping in addition to its economic agenda (ECOWAS Commission, 2021). The shift in ECOWAS's focus towards peace and security issues emerged in response to the various conflicts and political instabilities that have plagued West African states over the decades. The organization recognized that regional peace and stability are prerequisites for economic development and integration (Bach, 2016). ECOWAS has actively engaged in mediation efforts in Niger, particularly during times of political crisis and transition. For example, following the military coup in 2010, ECOWAS was instrumental in facilitating the return to democratic governance in Niger. This involved diplomatic efforts, negotiations with the military junta, and support for the organization of free and fair elections. ECOWAS's intervention in such political crises underscores its commitment to upholding democratic norms and governance in the region (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2018).

In response to the growing threat of terrorism and militancy in the Sahel region, ECOWAS has sought to strengthen its security architecture and coordinate efforts among its member states. This has included initiatives to enhance intelligence sharing, border security, and joint military operations. However, these efforts have been met with challenges due to varying capabilities and resource constraints among member states, as well as the complex and transnational nature of the security threats in the region (Onuoha, 2021). ECOWAS has also been involved in providing humanitarian assistance in Niger. This has been particularly critical in response to food crises caused by droughts and conflicts. ECOWAS's initiatives have focused on providing emergency food aid, supporting displaced populations, and facilitating access to basic services. Additionally, the organization has implemented development programs aimed at addressing some of the root causes of instability and insecurity in Niger, such as poverty and underdevelopment (ECOWAS Commission, 2021).

Despite its efforts, ECOWAS faces significant challenges in effectively addressing the crisis in Niger. These include political divergences among its member states, which can impede a unified regional response. Resource constraints are another major issue, limiting the organization's ability to sustain long-term peacekeeping and development initiatives. Furthermore, the transnational nature of security threats, particularly terrorism and cross-border crime, presents a complex challenge that requires coordinated action beyond national borders (Adebajo, 2020). The role of ECOWAS in addressing the crisis in Niger and the broader West African region continues to evolve. The effectiveness of ECOWAS in dealing with these challenges will depend on enhanced cooperation and coordination among member states, increased mobilization of resources, and the ability to adapt to the changing dynamics of the crisis. This requires a holistic approach that addresses not only the immediate security and humanitarian needs but also the underlying socio-economic and governance issues contributing to instability (Olonisakin, 2021).

The crisis in Niger is a multi-dimensional challenge that encompasses political, security, and humanitarian aspects. ECOWAS, as a regional body, has played a significant role in addressing various facets of this crisis through mediation, security coordination, and humanitarian efforts. However, the organization's impact is constrained by several challenges, including political divergences, resource limitations, and the complexity of transnational security threats. The future effectiveness of ECOWAS in managing the crisis in Niger will be crucial in shaping the stability and development trajectory of the West African region.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objectives of the study is to carefully examine the role of ECOWAS in addressing the Niger Republic crisis.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- examine the factors leading to political instability and security threats in Niger Republic.
- evaluate ECOWAS's response and effectiveness in crisis management.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of this study.

- What are the primary factors contributing to political instability and security threats in the Niger Republic?
- How effective has ECOWAS been in responding to and managing the political and security crises in Niger?

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical Context of Political Turbulence in Niger

The Republic of Niger, since its independence in 1960, has faced a complex history of political instability characterized by military coups, authoritarian rule, and sporadic attempts at democratization. Understanding the historical context of this political turbulence is essential for comprehending the challenges and dynamics that shape contemporary Nigerien politics. Niger, a former French colony, gained independence on August 3, 1960. The colonial era, marked by French administrative control and exploitation, left Niger with weak political institutions and a centralized governance structure, which later influenced post-independence political dynamics (Adebajo, 2020). The movement for independence in Niger

was part of a broader wave of anti-colonial sentiment across Africa. However, unlike some African nations, Niger's transition to independence was relatively peaceful, with minimal nationalist agitation (Kabia, 2021).

Niger's first president, Hamani Diori, ruled from 1960 until his overthrow in 1974. His tenure was characterized by a one-party state and an emphasis on maintaining close ties with France. However, his regime was criticized for corruption and inadequate responses to famine and economic challenges (Olonisakin, 2021). In 1974, a military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché toppled Diori's government, marking the beginning of a prolonged period of military rule. Kountché's regime, although credited with some level of stability, was authoritarian and suppressed political freedoms (Adibe, 2020). Following Kountché's death in 1987, his successors continued military rule, with General Ali Saibou becoming the president. In the late 1980s, internal and external pressures pushed Saibou to initiate political reforms (Adebajo, 2020).

The early 1990s saw a significant political shift in Niger, with the National Conference of 1991, which established a transitional government and paved the way for multiparty democracy. Mahamane Ousmane became the first democratically elected president in 1993 (Kabia, 2021). The 2000s were marked by several coups, reflecting deep-rooted political instability. Notably, in 1999, Major Daouda Malam Wanké overthrew President Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara. Subsequently, in 2010, another military coup led by Salou Djibo overthrew President Mamadou Tandja (Olonisakin, 2021). Despite attempts at establishing democracy, Niger's political landscape has been fraught with challenges, including electoral disputes, military interference, and governance issues (Adibe, 2020). As of recent years, Niger has made efforts towards democratic consolidation, though challenges persist. The election of President Mohamed Bazoum in 2021, despite controversies, was seen as a step towards democratic deepening (Adebajo, 2020). International actors, including ECOWAS and the African Union, have played roles in mediating political crises in Niger. Their involvement has been crucial in facilitating transitions and advocating for democratic norms (Kabia, 2021).

The historical context of political turbulence in Niger is a tale of a continuous struggle for stable governance amidst challenges of military coups, authoritarian rule, and efforts towards democratization. While recent developments suggest progress towards democratic governance, the legacy of instability continues to influence Niger's political landscape. The country's future political trajectory will be pivotal in determining its role and stability in the West African region.

Role of ECOWAS in Regional Integration and Cooperation

ECOWAS since its establishment in 1975, has played a critical role in fostering regional integration and cooperation in West Africa. The organization's efforts span across economic, political, and security dimensions, significantly impacting the region's stability and development. The role of ECOWAS in enhancing regional integration and cooperation, analyzing its achievements, challenges, and the implications for its member states is outlined below.

Economic Integration

i. Creating a Single Market: ECOWAS's primary goal has been to create a single, large trading bloc to facilitate economic growth among member states. This involves the removal of trade barriers, harmonization of customs duties, and creation of a free trade area and customs union (Adibe, 2020).

ii. Monetary Union Efforts: A significant step towards economic integration is the plan for a single currency, the Eco. This initiative aims to enhance trade efficiency and economic stability in the region, although its implementation has faced delays (Kabia, 2021).

- Infrastructure Development: ECOWAS has prioritized regional infrastructure projects, including road networks, energy pipelines, and telecommunication systems, essential for facilitating trade and mobility in the region (Olonisakin, 2021).

Political Integration and Cooperation

i. Democratic Governance and Human Rights: ECOWAS has been instrumental in promoting democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law among its member states. The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance is a testament to its commitment to upholding democratic principles (Adebajo, 2022).

ii. Conflict Resolution and Mediation: The organization has actively engaged in resolving political crises in the region, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau, showcasing its role in political mediation (Adibe, 2020).

Security Cooperation

iii. Addressing Regional Security Threats: ECOWAS has established mechanisms to address security threats, including terrorism and insurgency. The ECOWAS Security Architecture is a framework developed to enhance collective security in the region (Kabia, 2021).

iv. Peacekeeping Operations: The ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has been a critical component of its peacekeeping efforts. ECOMOG's operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone highlight ECOWAS's commitment to maintaining regional peace (Olonisakin, 2021).

Challenges in Regional Integration

I. Economic Disparities and Policy Divergence: The varying levels of economic development and policy differences among member states pose challenges to achieving full economic integration (Adebajo, 2022).

ii. Political Will and Implementation Gaps: The effectiveness of ECOWAS in achieving its objectives often hinges on the political will of member states to adhere to and implement the agreed-upon policies and protocols (Adibe, 2020).

iii. Resource Limitations and External Dependence: Limited resources and dependence on external funding have also impacted ECOWAS's ability to implement its initiatives effectively (Kabia, 2021).

Implications for Regional Development

i. Boosting Intra-regional Trade: ECOWAS's efforts in creating a single market have implications for increasing intra-regional trade, which is crucial for economic growth and poverty reduction in West Africa (Olonisakin, 2021).

ii. Enhancing Political Stability: The organization's role in political mediation has implications for enhancing political stability in the region, which is essential for attracting investment and promoting development (Adebajo, 2022).

iii. Improving Security and Safety: ECOWAS's security initiatives contribute to a safer and more secure region, which is vital for sustainable development and the well-being of its populations (Adibe, 2020).

ECOWAS has significantly influenced regional integration and cooperation in West Africa. Its initiatives in economic integration, political cooperation, and security have played a pivotal role in shaping the region's landscape. While challenges persist, ECOWAS's efforts are crucial for the overall stability, development, and integration of the West African region. The future of ECOWAS will depend on its ability to adapt to emerging challenges and to harness the collective potential of its member states for the greater good of the region.

Economic Impacts of Political Turbulence in Niger

A. Economic Stagnation and Mismanagement

The frequent governmental changes and military coups in Niger, particularly since independence, have significantly contributed to economic stagnation and mismanagement in the country. Each new regime, often with differing priorities and policies, has resulted in a lack of continuity in economic planning and governance.

- Discontinuity in Economic Policies: Successive governments in Niger, especially during military regimes, have frequently overturned or significantly altered the economic policies of their predecessors. This discontinuity has led to an unstable economic environment, deterring both domestic and foreign investors who seek predictability and stability (Sow, 2021; Mordi and Aboribo, 2018).

- Misallocation of Resources: Military regimes and unstable civilian governments have been plagued by the misallocation of resources. Often, economic decisions have been driven by immediate political needs rather than long-term economic strategies, leading to inefficiencies and corruption (Diallo, 2021; Mordi and Aboribo, 2018).

- Impact on Key Sectors: Agriculture and mining, being crucial sectors in Niger's economy, have suffered due to policy inconsistencies. Fluctuating investment in these sectors, coupled with poor management, has hindered their growth and contribution to national development (Traoré, 2020; Aboribo, 2018).

- Foreign Investment Deterrent: The political instability in Niger has acted as a deterrent to foreign investment. Investors are often wary of committing capital in an environment where policies could change abruptly with a change in government (Sow, 2021; Mordi and Aboribo, 2018).

B. Impact on Development and Aid

Niger's political instability has also had profound implications for its development trajectory, particularly in its ability to attract and effectively utilize international aid and development assistance.

i. Challenges in Attracting Aid: Political instability and frequent governmental changes have made international donors hesitant to commit substantial aid to Niger. Concerns over governance, corruption, and the capacity to effectively utilize aid have impacted the flow of assistance (Keita, 2020).

ii. Effective Utilization of Aid: Even when aid is received, the frequent changes in government have led to challenges in its effective utilization. With each new regime, priorities may shift, leading to a reallocation or mismanagement of aid funds, thus impeding development projects (Coulibaly, 2020).

iii. Conditionalities and Compliance: International aid often comes with conditionalities related to governance, human rights, and economic reforms. Niger's unstable political landscape has made it challenging to consistently meet these conditions, further complicating the receipt and utilization of aid (Maiga, 2021).

iv. Dependence on Aid: The country's reliance on international aid has been a double-edged sword. While it provides necessary resources for development, it also creates a dependency that can be precarious in times of political instability, affecting long-term sustainable development (Keita, 2020).

The economic impacts of political turbulence in Niger are multifaceted, affecting everything from policy continuity to foreign investment and the effective utilization of international aid. The path to economic stability and growth in Niger is intricately linked to the establishment of a stable and consistent political environment, which is essential for fostering economic development and attracting sustained international assistance.

Social Impacts of Political Instability in Niger

A. Human Rights Violations

The history of military regimes and authoritarian governments in Niger has been marked by significant human rights violations. The repeated cycles of political instability have led to various forms of state-sponsored repression and abuses.

i. Suppression of Freedom of Speech and Expression: One of the most notable human rights violations under military and authoritarian regimes in Niger has been the suppression of freedom of speech. Governments have frequently censored media, restricted public demonstrations, and controlled the dissemination of information to maintain power and suppress opposition (Ndiaye, 2022).

ii. Political Oppression and Arbitrary Arrests: Political opposition figures, journalists, activists, and even ordinary citizens have often faced harassment, arbitrary arrests, and detention without trial. These practices have not only violated basic human rights but also created an atmosphere of fear and repression (Diallo, 2022).

- Impact on Civil Society and Political Activism: The repressive environment has significantly stifled civil society and political activism. Non-governmental organizations and activists working on human rights issues have been particularly targeted, hampering efforts to advocate for democratic reforms and social justice (Barry, 2021).

B. Impact on Education and Health

The political instability in Niger has also adversely impacted crucial social sectors such as education and healthcare. Frequent changes in governments and policy shifts have led to inconsistency in strategies and inadequate funding in these sectors.

i. Disruptions in Educational Policies and Funding: Education in Niger has suffered due to inconsistent policies and inadequate investment. Frequent changes in leadership have led to shifts in educational priorities, disrupting the implementation of long-term educational strategies and reforms (Coulibaly, 2021).

ii. Challenges in Healthcare Delivery and Funding: The health sector in Niger has faced similar challenges, with political instability leading to irregular funding and policy shifts. This has affected the delivery of healthcare services, particularly in rural and underserved areas, exacerbating existing health challenges (Maiga, 2022).

iii. Impact on Educational and Health Outcomes: The cumulative effect of these challenges has been reflected in poor educational and health outcomes. Niger has struggled with high illiteracy rates, low school enrollment, and poor health indicators, including high child mortality and low life expectancy (Traoré, 2021).

iv. Brain Drain in Education and Healthcare: The instability and consequent challenges in these sectors have also contributed to a brain drain, with many educated and skilled professionals in education and healthcare leaving the country in search of better opportunities and working conditions (Keita, 2022).

The social impacts of political instability in Niger have been profound, affecting human rights and key social sectors like education and healthcare. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort towards political stability, respect for human rights, and consistent and adequate investment in social services. The future development of Niger depends significantly on how these social challenges are addressed in the context of its political environment.

Political Impacts of Governmental Changes and Coups in Niger

A. Democratic Setbacks

The cycle of coups in Niger has significantly hindered the nation's progress toward stable democracy. These coups, by disrupting civilian rule, have repeatedly set back Niger's democratic development.

i. Hindrance to Democratic Institutions: Military takeovers have repeatedly dissolved or suspended democratic institutions such as parliaments and independent judiciaries. This constant disruption has made it challenging to establish and maintain stable democratic institutions, essential for good governance (Barry, 2022).

ii. Erosion of Democratic Culture: The frequent military interventions have eroded the culture of democracy. They have undermined the rule of law and the democratic principle that governments should be changed through elections rather than force (Keita, 2021).

iii. Impact on Civil Liberties and Political Participation: Military regimes have often restricted civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and political participation. This has inhibited the development of a robust civil society, which is crucial for a thriving democracy (Maiga, 2022).

B. Political Fragmentation and Polarization

The frequent governmental changes in Niger have led to significant political fragmentation and polarization. This fragmentation often occurs along ethnic and regional lines, further complicating the political landscape.

i. Emergence of Numerous Political Parties and Factions: The political instability in Niger has led to the proliferation of a multitude of political parties and factions. These parties often represent specific ethnic or regional interests, rather than national agendas, leading to a fragmented political scene (Diop, 2022).

ii. Ethnic and Regional Polarization: Political polarization in Niger is often driven by ethnic and regional affiliations. This polarization can lead to tensions and conflicts, as different groups vie for power and representation (Barry, 2022).

iii. Challenges in Coalition Building and Governance: The political fragmentation has made it difficult to form stable governments. Coalitions, when formed, are often fragile and prone to internal disagreements, impeding effective governance (Ndiaye, 2023).

iv. Impediment to Policy Continuity and National Development: The lack of political stability and continuity has hindered the implementation of consistent policies, adversely affecting national development. Frequent changes in government disrupt long-term planning and policy implementation (Coulibaly, 2021).

The political impacts of the repeated governmental changes and coups in Niger have profoundly affected the nation's trajectory toward democracy and stable governance. The democratic setbacks and political fragmentation have not only hindered the establishment of stable democratic institutions but also contributed to a polarized and fragmented political environment. As Niger continues to navigate its complex political landscape, building a resilient democratic system and addressing political fragmentation will be crucial for its future stability and development.

Security Impacts of Governmental Changes and Coups in Niger

A. Rise of Militancy and Terrorism

The political instability in Niger, marked by frequent coups and regime changes, has significantly contributed to the rise of militancy and terrorism, particularly in its border regions.

i. Creation of a Vacuum for Militant Groups: The instability and weak governance have created a power vacuum in certain regions of Niger. Militant and terrorist groups, including those linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, have exploited this vacuum, especially in areas bordering Mali and Nigeria. These groups often capitalize on the absence of strong state control to establish footholds (Gueye, 2020).

ii. Increased Cross-Border Terrorism: Niger's porous borders have facilitated the movement of militants and terrorists across the region. The spill-over of conflicts from neighboring countries like Mali and Nigeria has exacerbated the security situation in Niger (Diop, 2021).

iii. Recruitment and Radicalization: The socio-economic challenges and political disenfranchisement experienced in parts of Niger have made some populations vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by extremist groups. These groups often exploit grievances against the state to gain support (Barry, 2022).

B. Challenges in Maintaining Law and Order

The repeated governmental upheavals have had a debilitating effect on state institutions, including the security forces, thereby impacting the government's capacity to enforce law and order.

i. Weakened State Institutions: Frequent coups and changes in government have led to the weakening of state institutions, including the security apparatus. This weakening is characterized by a lack of consistent leadership, inadequate training, and insufficient resources (Sow, 2021).

ii. Inability to Effectively Counter Security Threats: The diminished capacity of security forces has hindered the government's ability to effectively counter security threats posed by militants and terrorist groups. This inability is often due to limited operational capabilities and poor coordination among security agencies (Keita, 2021).

Iii Impact on Civilian Safety and Cohesion: The challenges in maintaining law and order have had direct implications for civilian safety and social cohesion. Incidents of violence, terrorism, and banditry have not only led to loss of lives but also displaced populations and heightened intercommned tensions (Coulibaly, 2021).

V Reliance on External Military Support: Due to these internal challenges, Niger has increasingly relied on external military support from countries such as France and the United States, and regional bodies like ECOWAS, to combat terrorism and secure its borders (Maiga, 2022). The security impacts of Niger's political instability are far-reaching, contributing to the rise of militancy and terrorism and posing significant challenges in maintaining law and order. Addressing these security concerns requires a multi-faceted approach, including strengthening state institutions, improving the capacity of security forces, and fostering regional and international cooperation to counter security threats.

ECOWAS's Role in Political Mediation and Democratization Efforts

ECOWAS is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1975 to promote economic integration, political stability, and social development among its member states in West Africa (ECOWAS, 2022). Over the years, ECOWAS has played a significant role in political mediation and democratization efforts within the region. Political mediation involves the intervention of a neutral third party in resolving conflicts and disputes between parties. ECOWAS has actively engaged in political mediation in various West African countries to prevent and resolve conflicts. One notable example is the Liberian civil war in the 1990s. ECOWAS deployed its military force, ECOMOG, and engaged in diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict between different factions and ultimately played a crucial role in ending the war and facilitating the democratic transition in Liberia (Olonisakin, 2008).

ECOWAS's mediation efforts often involve a combination of diplomatic negotiations, peacekeeping operations, and conflict resolution mechanisms. These interventions have been instrumental in preventing the escalation of conflicts and promoting peace and stability in the region.

Democratization is a key aspect of ECOWAS's agenda. The organization has been actively involved in promoting democratic governance and the rule of law in West African countries. ECOWAS has developed several mechanisms and initiatives to support democratization efforts, including electoral observation missions, capacity-building programs, and the establishment of democratic institutions.

- Electoral Observation Missions: ECOWAS regularly deploys electoral observation missions to member states during elections. These missions monitor the electoral process to ensure fairness, transparency, and adherence to democratic principles. By providing credible assessments of elections, ECOWAS contributes to the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and encourages free and fair elections.

- Capacity-Building Programs: ECOWAS has implemented various capacity-building programs to strengthen the institutional capacities of member states in areas such as election management, human rights, and good governance. These programs aim to enhance the ability of countries to conduct democratic processes effectively and sustainably.

- Establishment of Democratic Institutions: ECOWAS has supported the establishment and functioning of democratic institutions, including electoral commissions and national human rights institutions, in member states. These institutions play a vital role in upholding democratic norms and ensuring the protection of human rights (Sahel & Aning, 2013).

- ECOWAS has achieved significant successes in political mediation and democratization efforts in West Africa.

- Resolution of Conflicts: ECOWAS's intervention in conflicts such as the Liberian civil war, Sierra Leone civil war, and the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire contributed to the resolution of these conflicts and the restoration of peace.

- Promotion of Democratic Transitions: ECOWAS has facilitated peaceful transitions of power through elections in several member states, including Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. These transitions have demonstrated the organization's commitment to democratic governance.

- Enhanced Regional Stability: The active role of ECOWAS in conflict prevention and resolution has contributed to greater regional stability, making West Africa a more peaceful and secure region.

- Democratic Norms and Standards: ECOWAS's efforts to promote democratic norms and standards have led to improvements in electoral processes, human rights protection, and the overall quality of governance in the region.

- While ECOWAS has made significant progress in political mediation and democratization, it also faces various challenges in its efforts.

- Resource Constraints: ECOWAS often faces resource constraints in deploying peacekeeping missions and implementing capacity-building programs. Limited financial and human resources can hinder the effectiveness of its interventions.

- Sovereignty Concerns: Some member states may be hesitant to fully embrace ECOWAS's involvement in their internal affairs, citing concerns about sovereignty. Balancing the need for intervention with respect for state sovereignty can be a delicate task.

- Institutional Capacity: ECOWAS itself faces challenges related to its institutional capacity. Ensuring that the organization has the expertise and resources needed to carry out its missions effectively is an ongoing struggle.

- Political Will: The success of ECOWAS's interventions often depends on the political will of member states and their leaders. In cases where political leaders are resistant to democratic reforms, ECOWAS's efforts may be met with resistance (Pellerin, 2019).

The impact of ECOWAS's efforts in political mediation and democratization in West Africa can be observed in several ways.

i. Peace and Stability: ECOWAS's interventions have contributed to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, leading to greater peace and stability in the region. This has created an environment conducive to economic development and prosperity.

ii. Democratic Governance: ECOWAS has played a crucial role in promoting democratic governance in West Africa. Member states that have benefited from ECOWAS's support have seen improvements in electoral processes, the protection of human rights, and the functioning of democratic institutions.

iii. Regional Integration: The stability and democratization facilitated by ECOWAS have promoted regional integration and cooperation. Member states are more willing to work together on economic and political issues when there is a foundation of peace and stability.

iv. International Reputation: ECOWAS has gained international recognition for its efforts in political mediation and democratization. The organization's successes have enhanced its reputation as a regional leader in conflict prevention and resolution (UNOWAS, 2022).

ECOWAS's role in political mediation and democratization efforts in West Africa is paramount. Through its interventions in conflicts, support for democratic governance, and commitment to upholding regional stability, ECOWAS has made significant strides in advancing peace and democracy in the region. Despite facing challenges such as resource constraints and sovereignty concerns, the organization's impact is undeniable. ECOWAS continues to be a key player in shaping the political landscape of West Africa, and its efforts are critical in ensuring a peaceful and democratic future for the region.

Theoretical framework

Liberal Peace-building Theory

Liberal peace-building theory, attributed to the principles of liberal internationalism, finds its theoretical roots in the works of classical liberal thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, particularly his 1795 essay Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch. However, its contemporary articulation in peace and conflict studies is often associated with scholars like Michael W. Doyle (1983) and Roland Paris (2004). Doyle's work on the democratic peace theory highlighted the connection between liberal democracies and the reduction of interstate conflicts, while Paris expanded these ideas into the realm of post-conflict peace-building, emphasizing the role of democratic governance, market liberalization, and institutional development in fostering sustainable peace (Paris, 2004).

Liberal peace-building theory underpins many international interventions, positing that democratization, rule of law, human rights, and economic liberalization are critical for peace. It argues that societies governed by democratic principles and integrated into global market systems are less likely to experience violence and instability. Despite its widespread influence, critics like Richmond (2011) have questioned its universal applicability, noting its tendency to impose Western ideals on diverse cultural and political contexts, which can lead to resistance or unintended consequences.

Applying this theory to ECOWAS's role in the Niger crisis provides insights into the organization's strategy. Following the coup that ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, ECOWAS took steps aligned with liberal peace-building principles, including sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, and threats of military intervention, all aimed at restoring constitutional order. These actions reflect the theory's emphasis on protecting democracy to ensure peace and stability. ECOWAS's approach underscores the belief that restoring democratic governance in Niger would create a foundation for addressing broader socio-political and economic challenges.

However, the application of liberal peace-building to the Niger crisis also reveals its limitations. While ECOWAS focuses on reinstating democracy, critics argue that this approach overlooks deeper systemic issues such as corruption, inequality, and governance deficits, contributing to political instability. Richmond's critique of liberal peace-building as overly prescriptive resonates in this context, as ECOWAS's emphasis on external solutions may fail to engage local stakeholders or address the underlying causes of the coup.

5. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive research design that relies on historical data collection and uses secondary sources. The historical method is a crucial approach in research, offering an efficient and valuable way to gather information without conducting primary research firsthand (Bryman, 2012). This method involves analyzing data already collected by others, such as government reports, academic publications, media articles, and organizational records (O'Leary, 2017). It offers several advantages over primary data collection, including cost-effectiveness, reduced time constraints, and access to a vast body of pre-existing information that might be difficult or expensive to collect directly (Denscombe, 2010). The sources of secondary data used include documents from academic publications, media articles, and organizational records. These documents were carefully studied and analyzed. The analysis was carefully done by reviewing a collection of relevant documents, including ECOWAS policy documents and reports, Niger government documents and statements, reports and publications from civil society organizations, media articles and reports on the Niger crisis, and academic papers and research on ECOWAS and conflict resolution. The data gotten from the documents was analyzed using a qualitative technique known as thematic analysis. The researcher thoroughly read and re-read the extracted data to gain a deep understanding of the content and identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. Based on the analysis, the following major findings were observed:

- Political instability in Niger Republic is significantly influenced by weak democratic institutions and governance deficits. The inability to uphold the rule of law, lack of accountability, and widespread corruption undermine trust in governmental processes, creating an environment conducive to coups and authoritarian tendencies. The frequent power struggles reflect a fragile state incapable of providing stable leadership or implementing inclusive policies, thereby fueling discontent among the populace.

- Chronic poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic disparities are central to Niger's political instability. Despite being rich in resources like uranium, mismanagement, and external dependence have perpetuated economic stagnation. Large segments of the population face dire living conditions, which exacerbate grievances and create fertile ground for political unrest and the rise of radical groups. These economic challenges weaken the social contract between the state and its citizens.

- Niger's geopolitical position in the Sahel region exposes it to external influences and transnational security threats, including terrorism and illicit trafficking. The spillover of conflicts from neighboring countries, coupled with interference by foreign powers pursuing strategic interests, destabilizes the country. This external pressure often complicates domestic governance, as reliance on international military and economic support compromises state sovereignty and priorities.

6. CONCLUSION

Weak democratic institutions and governance practices have eroded public trust, fostering a cycle of coups and political unrest. Economic hardship, marked by widespread poverty and inequality, further exacerbates discontent, creating fertile ground for instability. Additionally, Niger's geopolitical position in the Sahel region exposes it to external pressures, including terrorism and international interference, which complicate efforts to achieve lasting stability. While these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. The findings emphasize the need for a multi-faceted approach to address the root causes of instability. Strengthening democratic processes, fostering inclusive governance, and implementing equitable socio-economic policies are essential for rebuilding the state-society relationship. Moreover, regional and international cooperation is critical in mitigating security threats and aligning external interventions with Niger's developmental priorities. By addressing these interconnected issues, the Niger Republic can chart a path toward sustainable peace and political stability, benefiting not only its citizens but also the broader West African region.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

- The Niger government should prioritize reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure transparent electoral processes, and promote inclusive governance. Capacity-building initiatives for state institutions and mechanisms to enhance public accountability can restore trust and mitigate political instability. Engaging civil society organizations and local leaders in governance can also create a sense of shared responsibility and inclusiveness.

- Addressing economic hardships requires diversification beyond resource extraction. Policies to foster agricultural productivity, invest in education, and promote entrepreneurship can reduce unemployment and poverty. Development programs should focus on marginalized regions to bridge socio-economic gaps, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and reducing grievances that fuel instability.

- Niger must work closely with regional bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union to address transnational security threats and reduce external interference. Strengthening border control and intelligence-sharing mechanisms can curb terrorism and trafficking. Additionally, efforts should be made to negotiate with international actors to align foreign assistance with Niger's long-term stability and development objectives, rather than short-term strategic gains.

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