

# The G5 Sahel and ECOWAS Regional Stability: Issues and Prospects

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**Abstract:** *The G5 Sahel, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, was established to address growing security threats, particularly terrorism, within the region. However, persistent conflicts, political instability, and economic underdevelopment continue to challenge its effectiveness, raising concerns for broader ECOWAS regional stability. This study explores the economic, security, and geopolitical dimensions of the G5 Sahel's role in enhancing stability within the ECOWAS framework. Using a qualitative research approach, data were obtained through expert interviews and an extensive review of secondary sources, including reports from international organizations, policy briefs, and conflict databases. Findings indicate that economic deprivation, resource mismanagement, and weak governance structures are critical drivers of instability, exacerbating terrorism and organized crime. Additionally, the recent withdrawals of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the G5 Sahel highlight internal fractures and shifting geopolitical alignments, further complicating regional security efforts. The study concludes that strengthening collaborative security frameworks, promoting economic integration, and fostering democratic governance are essential for stabilizing the region. It recommends a comprehensive approach that combines military strategies with socioeconomic development initiatives, alongside stronger political will and regional cooperation through ECOWAS.*

**Keywords:** G5 Sahel, ECOWAS, regional stability, security cooperation, economic development

## Introduction

In the human society, interactions of states in the global interstate systems and interrelations of countries often give rise to regional level integration and the formation of regional blocs. A regional bloc often seeks the well-being of one and all related or contiguous nations of the bloc. It usually formed with an overarching objective of promoting the individual and collective socio-economic, political, and developmental and security well-being of member states. To this end, the dynamics of regional geopolitical and economic interplays and interrelations make events in one nation or more nations of key relevance to one another. This underscores the imperatives of peaceful co-existence, within, between and amongst the individual and collective member states of a regional bloc for enhanced broader regional stability. Regional stability entails a situation in which states within a geographical area or region experience a state of harmony and peace, with minimal or no conflicts and enhancing cooperation among themselves. It is often considered an essential harbinger of broader or larger sub-continental, continental and/or global peace. Regional stability is key to improved security and prosperity within a region.

In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is regional bloc to address the security and development needs of its members. For instance, crisis in East Timor during 2006-2012 threatened the nation's stability and by extension, regional stability as cross-border crimes and the deaths of refugees increased (Jones, 2020). Malaysia as a member of the ASEAN bloc sent a military contingent of 275 troops for Peace Support Operations (PSO) to East Timor under Operation ASTUTE (Leach, 2016; Connaughton, 2017; Bhalla, 2019). The contingent helped in quelling political unrests and aided peace building which enabled the return of 207,000 East Timorese refugees with drastic reduction cross-border human trafficking which hitherto exploited the crisis (Anthony & Emmers, 2022). Also, in Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional bloc that pursues the developmental and security well-being of the SADC member states. For instance, in Mozambique a jihadist conflict since 2017 displaced 800,000 persons, causing a chaotic refugee situations and arm smuggling, threatening regional stability in Southern Africa (Stark, 2022). In 2021, South Africa as a member of the Southern Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) sent in 1,495 troops for peace building (Reuters, 2021; Reliefweb, 2022). The SAMIM sacked the jihadists, recovered lost territories and aided the return of some displaced persons. Hence, regional blocs peace building interventions by the ASEAN and SADC in East Timor and Mozambique enhanced regional stability in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa.

In West Africa, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional bloc that also seeks the developmental well-being of its members. For example, the Gambia's democracy was disrupted in 2017 when the then president, Yahya Jammeh refused to hand over to president-elect Adama Barrow. The ensuing political unrests turned 45,00 Gambians into refugees and also threaten regional stability (Baloch, 2017). This led to the need regional bloc intervention for peace building in the Gambia. The conflict gave rise to the ECOWAS Military Intervention in the Gambian (ECOMIG), with the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), being a military contingent among 5 other militaries (Jobe, 2017). The ECOMIG aided political stabilisation in the Gambia and fostered a broader

return of relative stability in the region.

Also, within the ECOWAS, there is the 5 Sahel or the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) as a regional bloc established to address security and development challenges in the Sahel region of West Africa. The G5 Sahel was formed on 16 February 2014, during a summit in Nouakchott, Mauritania, comprising 5 member countries. These include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The G5 Sahel aims to strengthen collaboration among these member nations to combat terrorism, organised crime and other security threats, while promoting respective economic development (Camara, 2020; Conkar, 2020; Dag, F. 2023). By so doing, the G5 Sahel also seeks to promote broader Sahel sub-regional stability for enhanced ECOWAS regional stability. The formation of the G5 Sahel seemed viable for fostering the well-being of its members. However, there are issues that the alliance need to address to enable it have good prospects for enhanced ECOWAS regional stability. These issues include security dynamics, geopolitical intricacies and developmental needs in the G5 Sahel. The ability of the G5 Sahel to resolve all related issues are fundamental to its prospects of enhancing ECOWAS regional stability.

## Review of Related Literature

### Conceptual Clarification

**The Five Sahel:** Dieng (2021) describes the 5 Sahel or G5 Sahel, or Group of Five for the Sahel as a regional intergovernmental organisation (IGO) established in 2014, comprising 5 member countries, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Its primary aim is to promote cooperation among these nations in addressing security challenges, particularly terrorism and organised crimes, while also fostering economic development and stability within the region. The G5 Sahel provides an institutional framework for collaboration on various issues including military coordination, development and political policies and humanitarian assistance.

**Regional Stability:** According to Khani (2018), regional stability connotes the condition in which a specific geographic area experiences minimal, little or no conflict, political turmoil and social unrest. It is characterised by effective governance, economic development and the absence of violent extremism, insurrection or civil strife. The notion is crucial because regional stability often serves as a foundation for broader continental or global peace and security. When regions are stable, they can contribute positively to international relations, trade and cooperation.

**Relationship between the Five Sahel and ECOWAS regional stability:** The ability of the G5 Sahel, comprising 5 Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. to promote cooperation among these nations and address their security challenges, particularly terrorism and organised crimes, while also fostering economic development would enhance ECOWAS regional stability. Conversely, the inability of the G5 Sahel to promote cooperation would result rising conflicts, political turmoil and social unrest as well as violent extremism and insurrection or civil strife, thereby undermining ECOWAS regional stability. Thus, a direct relationship between G5 Sahel and ECOWAS regional stability.

### Literature on the subject matter

The review of some related studies comprises thematic relevant studies on covering security dynamics, geopolitical intricacies and developmental needs in the G5 Sahel. Rupesinghe (2018) in his study titled, "The joint force of the G5 Sahel: An appropriate response to combat terrorism?" adopted descriptive research. It revealed that the G5 Sahel was formed in 2014 as a response to escalating threats from jihadist groups. These included the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the affiliates of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) among others. This was because the Sahel region witnessed rising violent extremism, exacerbated by socio-economic grievances and weak governance structures. In line with Rupesinghe (2018), Camara (2020) and Ndiaye (2020) noted that in efforts to curb the region's common rising threats devised and evolved G5 Sahel Joint Force (G5SJF) security initiative. The G5SJF was launched to conduct military operations against terrorist groups and enhance regional cooperation among member states. Despite some successes in joint operations, challenges remain due to inadequate funding, lack of equipment and differing national priorities among member states. Also, interstate relations within the G5 Sahel are complicated by historical interstate rivalries and ethnic tensions between member states. For instance, relations between Mali and Burkina Faso have been strained due to border insecurity issues. Such interstate tensions undermine collective security efforts in the Sahel region. However, the interstate tensions have security implications for ECOWAS regional stability not address by Rupesinghe (2018), Camara (2020) and Ndiaye (2020).

Syed Md (2024) in his study on "Navigating the Shifting Sands of West Africa: Evolving Security and Geopolitical Dynamics vis-a-vis Options for the United Nations" adopted exploratory research. The study revealed that security threats in the Sahel areas contiguous to the G5 Sahel state have significant external influences. The Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda affiliates in Niger are all of external origins, while external political influences have been considered to be root causes or chiefly contributory to conflicts in region. This was also noted in Baldaro (2020) on, "The Sahel as an unintended region: Competing regionalisms and insecurity dynamics. In *The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism*" and Mehta (2023) on, "The Sahel as a Geopolitical Laboratory: Long-Term Instability as a Result of Great Power Rivalry." The Syed Md (2024) cites that France has historically played a significant role in Sahelian security through Operation Barkhane. However, growing anti-French sentiment and politics among local populations

complicates France's relationship with these countries as its colonies. Additionally, other international actors like the United States and Russia are increasingly interested in influencing political dynamics in the region. The need to prioritise national interests over collaborative efforts is a geopolitical dichotomy that undermines joint initiatives aimed at stabilising the region. There also the need to establish the interface of geopolitical intricacies of the G5 with ECOWAS regional security.

Ammari and Benrezzouq (2023) in their study on "Conflictuality in the G5 Sahel region: The Role of Economic Factors and Regional Resilience", used empirical research. The study noted that poverty and underdevelopment are significant economic factors contributing to conflict in the Sahel region contiguous to the G5 Sahel. The study asserted that the region is one of the poorest in the world, with high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people. This has led to a sense of frustration and disillusionment among the population, making them more susceptible to radicalisation and recruitment by extremist groups. As also noted by Hima et al., 2019 as well as Cold-Ravnkilde and Ba (2022), the region is characterised by significant disparities in wealth and income, with a small elite holding a disproportionate amount of wealth, resulting in sharp economic inequality. This forces feelings of marginalisation and exclusion among certain groups, which fuel resentment and conflict. Furthermore, poor natural resource management, characterised by broad mismanagement of natural resources is also an economic factor contributing to in the G5 Sahel region. Ultimately, resource-based conflict is rife in the region despite favourable natural resource endowment including gold, uranium and oil others due resource exploitation characterised by corruption, nepotism and lack of transparency. The economic factors of conflicts in g5 Sahel are also fundamentally developmental needs far reaching implications for ECOWAS regional security.

### Overview of the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS Regional Stability

The G5 Sahel was created in response to escalating security threats from jihadist groups operating across the region, including AQIM and Boko Haram as well as ISIS affiliates. In 2014, the organisation adopted its founding convention, establishing a formal structure for cooperation. The military coordination aspect is managed by the Chiefs of Staff from each member country (El Khou, 2019; Ndiaye, 2020; Onal & Oumar, 2021; Fee, 2022). Also, since 2014 France initiated Operation Barkhane, deploying about 3,000 troops across the G5 Sahel member states to support counterterrorism efforts. This operation aimed to stabilise the region amidst growing violence and insecurity. In 2017, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approved the deployment of a G5 Sahel counterterrorism task force consisting of around 10,000 soldiers. This initiative received backing from various international partners, including Germany and the European Union (El Khou, 2019; Ndiaye, 2020; Onal & Oumar, 2021; Fee, 2022). However, despite these efforts, insecurity persisted due to the intensity and volatility of the threats. This makes security dynamics regarding the individual member states and the 5G Sahel bloc as an entity in the region a major concern for enahcne ECOWAS regional security.

The political landscape in the Sahel shifted dramatically and drastically since the formation of the G5 Sahel bloc, characterised by withdrawal of member states from either G5 Sahel or the ECOWAS. For instance, on 15 May 2022, Mali announced its withdrawal from all G5 Sahel bodies amid tensions regarding its leadership role following two coups d'état in 2020 and 2021 (Elischer, 2019; Godo, 2021; Carbone & Casola, 2022; Doring, 2023; Mehta, 2023). Also, following military coups in Burkina Faso in September 2022 and Niger in July 2023, both countries declared their withdrawal from the alliance on 2 December 2023. They cited failures in achieving objectives and claimed that the alliance served foreign interests over local needs. The conflict of interests involving the G5 Sahel as an entity and those of its respective members were often opposed to eternal interests, mainly the West (Elischer, 2019; Godo, 2021; Carbone & Casola, 2022; Doring, 2023; Mehta, 2023). The complex internal and external political interfaces make geopolitical intricacies a concern in the G5 Sahel for enhanced ECOWAS regional stability.

The G5 Sahel was formed as a proactive measure against rising insecurity in West Africa but has faced impediments due to internal political dynamics among its members. The withdrawals of some members show shifts in governance, reflecting broader geopolitical trends affecting regional stability (Hima et al., 2019; Cold-Ravnkilde & Ba, 2022). Every member that withdrew from the G5 Sahel membership also cited unmet domestic economic and developmental needs linked to neo-colonialism. Thus, developmental needs are a concern in the G5 Sahel for enhanced ECOWAS regional stability.

### Critical Issues Affecting Regional Stability in the Sahel and ECOWAS

The issues in the G5 Sahel for enhanced ECOWAS regional stability include security dynamics, geopolitical intricacies and developmental needs. The issues according to Doring (2023) and Mehta (2023)) are:

**Security Dynamics:** The G5 Sahel, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, faces a complex security landscape characterised by multifaceted threats such as terrorism, resource-based violence and intercommunal violence among others. These dynamics pose significant drawbacks to the member states and also to regional stability within the ECOWAS. Hence, understanding the related security dynamics is crucial for formulating effective strategies to enhance regional stability. The G5 Sahel region needs to defeat or significantly degrade the AQIM, Boko Haram, ISIS and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) to ensure its internal security among respective member and enhance ECOWAS regional security (Baldaro, 2020; Idahosa et al., 2023). The proliferation of armed violent groups has led to increased attacks on military and civilian targets, exacerbating humanitarian crises

and displacing millions. The porous borders between these countries facilitate the movement of militants and arms, complicating efforts at national and regional security. The interconnected nature of security issues include terrorism due to the rise of jihadist groups, destabilising local governance structures and undermining state authority. This also includes organised crimes, such drug trafficking and human smuggling with arms trade thriving in this environment. Also ethnic conflicts, arising from historical grievances among ethnic communities often manifest as violence, which extremist groups exploit to further their agendas (Baldaro, 2020; Idahosa et al., 2023). These interconnected security issues create a vicious cycle that hampers effective governance and development efforts. Thus, security dynamics are a major issue the needs to be resolved to enable the G5 Sahel enhance ECOWAS regional stability.

**Geopolitical Intricacies:** Governance issues are prevalent in many G5 Sahel nations, characterised by weak institutions, corruption and political instability, hindering effective internal political leadership. Also, political events, actions and decision in one G5 Sahel nation often have some form of immediate or remote repercussions with ripple effects that affects ECOWAS regional stability. Furthermore, exogenous political interplays by foreign actors such as France and China among others with explicit or implicit interests also shape the features and functionalities of the G5 Sahel nations (Dieng et al., 2020; Sandnes, 2023a, b&c). Recent coups in Mali and Burkina Faso have further exacerbated conflict situations among the G5 Sahel nations. In the course of 2023, Mali exited the G5 Sahel bloc followed by those of Burkina Faso and Niger. Subsequently, Chad and Mauritania announced plans for dissolution of the G5 Sahel bloc. This is because only Chad and Mauritania remain as members after the others withdrew due to political upheaval within their respective member states governed by military regimes (Dieng et al., 2020; Sandnes, 2023a, b&c). These geopolitical intricacies make the future of G5 Sahel appears uncertain, while posing threats to ECOWAS regional stability.

**Developmental Needs:** Developmental needs of the 5 Sahel are a 2-prong concern from the perspectives of the individual states and from the perspective of the G5 Sahel bloc as a collective entity. These cut across a range of needs such as Economic development. This is because, economic growth is critical for alleviating poverty and improving living standards of the populace. The G5 Sahel countries have some of the lowest per capita incomes globally, exacerbated by high population growth rates. Hence, there is a pressing need for investment in infrastructure, such as roads, energy supply and communication systems, to facilitate trade and economic activities (Conkar, 2020; Dieng, 2021). Another core developmental need in the G5 Sahel is food security and resilience. This is because, food insecurity remains a significant challenge due to climate change impacts, conflict and poor agricultural practices among other drawbacks. Developing resilient agricultural systems that can withstand climatic shocks is vital. This includes investing in irrigation systems, promoting sustainable farming techniques and enhancing access to markets for local farmers, while improving the security of farmers and driving farming mechanisation (Conkar, 2020; Dieng, 2021). Also, education and human capital development needs are a part of the developmental needs of the G5 Sahel. With a median age of about 16 years across the G5 Sahel countries, investing in education is crucial for harnessing the potential of youth populations. Improving access to quality education will empower individuals and also contribute to long-term economic growth by creating a skilled workforce capable of driving innovation (Conkar, 2020; Dieng, 2021). Other areas of developmental needs in the G5 Sahel are health services improvement and institutional capacity building as well as infrastructure development. The resolution of these developmental needs is key in enabling the G5 Sahel to enhance ECOWAS regional stability.

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing an exploratory approach to analyze the role of the G5 Sahel in enhancing ECOWAS regional stability. Given the complexity of security, economic, and political challenges in the region, the research is primarily descriptive and analytical, drawing insights from expert opinions and secondary data. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including security analysts, policymakers, and academics specializing in West African regional security. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, via telephone, and through virtual platforms to ensure a broad range of perspectives. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with civil society representatives, journalists, and governance experts to provide grassroots insights on regional instability and economic vulnerabilities. Secondary data were extensively reviewed from peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports from ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Crisis Group. Conflict and security data were sourced from organizations like the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). News articles and policy briefs were also analyzed to capture real-time developments and shifts in regional alliances.

The study employed qualitative data analysis techniques, including thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in interview responses and policy documents. Content analysis was used to examine official statements and policy frameworks, while discourse analysis assessed political narratives influencing regional stability. While no primary quantitative survey was conducted, secondary statistical data from sources like the World Bank, UNDP, and conflict monitoring agencies were analyzed descriptively to contextualize economic and security trends. Ethical considerations were prioritized by ensuring informed consent from all interviewees and maintaining anonymity where necessary. Sensitive data were handled with strict confidentiality, and secondary



sources were cross-referenced for accuracy and reliability. One key limitation of this study is the lack of direct field surveys, which could have provided more empirical validation of findings. Additionally, security constraints restricted fieldwork in conflict-prone areas, limiting firsthand observation. Nonetheless, the reliance on expert interviews and robust secondary data ensures a comprehensive and reliable analysis of the G5 Sahel's role in ECOWAS regional stability.

### **Prospects for the Five Sahel Enhancing ECOWAS Regional Stability**

There are some prospects for G5 Sahel enhancing ECOWAS regional stability. These prospects are the strengthening of collaborative security frameworks, promoting of economic integration and development initiatives as well as fostering of democratic governance and civil society engagement.

**Strengthening of Collaborative Security Frameworks:** One of the most pressing issues in the Sahel is the rise of terrorism and organised crime. The G5 Sahel countries can enhance ECOWAS regional stability by developing a robust collaborative security framework that includes intelligence sharing, joint military operations and coordinated counter-terrorism strategies. By pooling resources and expertise, these nations can be more effective in combating jihadist groups that threaten both local and regional security. This collaboration could also involve engaging with international partners with Sahelian interests to provide training and support for national armies while ensuring that human rights standards are upheld (Egbewatt Arrey, 2023; Sandnes, 2023a, b&c). Thus, strengthening of collaborative security frameworks is a prospect for G5 Sahel enhancing ECOWAS regional stability.

**Promoting of Economic Integration and Development Initiatives:** Economic instability often fuels conflict and insecurity in the Sahel. The G5 Sahel countries often seek to prioritise economic integration initiatives that align with ECOWAS's goals of promoting trade across West Africa. By investing in infrastructure projects such as transportation networks and agricultural development programs among others, these nations can create jobs and improve living conditions for their populations. Enhanced economic cooperation will reduce poverty and also foster interdependence among member states, making conflicts less likely (Kwasi et al., 2019; Venturi, 2022; Ammari & Benrezzouq, 2023). Thus, promoting of economic integration and development initiatives are a prospect for G5 Sahel enhancing ECOWAS regional stability.

**Fostering of Democratic Governance and Civil Society Engagement:** The legitimacy of governments in the Sahel has been undermined by military coups and authoritarian rule. To enhance regional stability within ECOWAS, it is crucial for the G5 Sahel countries to commit to democratic governance practices that include free elections, respect for human rights, and active engagement with civil society organisations. Encouraging citizen participation in governance processes will help build trust between governments and their populations while reducing grievances that can lead to unrest or coups. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability will strengthen institutions necessary for sustainable peace (Diallo, 2022; Ronceray et al., 2023). Thus, fostering of democratic governance and civil society engagement is a prospect for G5 Sahel enhancing ECOWAS regional stability.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examined G5 Sahel and ECOWAS regional stability. Overall, there is the need to enhance regional stability in the Sahel and by extension, the ECOWAS. This requires the collaborative efforts of the G5 Sahel countries, including Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania which ought to be within the ambit of the regional bloc framework of the ECOWAS. This is both a pressing necessity and a complex challenge. The persistent threats posed by violent extremist organisations, coupled with political instability and humanitarian crises, underscore the urgency for a cohesive and strategic approach to security and governance in the region. The establishment of joint security mechanisms among these nations, such as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), reflects a significant step towards addressing shared security concerns. However, for these initiatives to be effective, it is recommended that they must be supported by robust political will from member states and backed by ECOWAS's commitment to restoring constitutional order and promoting democratic governance.

Furthermore, accelerated efforts in addressing underlying socio-economic issues, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education, is crucial for mitigating the conditions that foster extremism. Hence, this paper also recommends that the ECOWAS should prioritise development initiatives that empower local communities and enhance resilience against radicalisation. Also, international support plays an essential role in this endeavor. Hence, the involvement of external partners should focus on capacity building for regional forces while respecting the sovereignty of Sahelian nations. A balanced approach that combines military assistance with development aid will be vital in fostering long-term stability. Ultimately, ECOWAS should strengthen the facilitation of dialogue among member states and ensure coordinated responses to crises so as to achieve lasting peace in the Sahel and in the ECOWAS as a whole. Lastly, the ECOWAS should foster collaboration among its members and address both immediate security threats and long-term developmental challenges, to enhance regional stability in this critical part of West Africa.

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