

NIGERIA'S HEGEMONIC ROLE IN ECOWAS: FOREIGN POLICY, REGIONAL STABILITY AND THE LIMITS OF LEADERSHIP

Shuaibu Shittu Isyaku

Department of Political Science, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State

Corresponding Author's email: ssisyaku@ibbu.edu.ng



(TETF/DESS/UNI/SOKOTO/ARJ/01)

Abstract

Nigeria's claim to hegemonic leadership within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) rests on formidable material foundations a GDP constituting approximately 75% of the regional aggregate, a military with an unmatched record of regional intervention, and a founding role in the community dating to 1975. Yet this study demonstrates that material preponderance alone is insufficient to sustain effective regional leadership. Examining Nigeria's ECOWAS engagement between 2000 and 2023 through content analysis of foreign policy documents, secondary data from the ECOWAS Secretariat and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, and elite interviews with former ministers and diplomats, the study finds that Nigeria is a hegemon in structural retreat: financial contribution compliance rates fell from 100% in 2006 to 57.8% in 2021; proportional troop contributions to ECOWAS operations declined from over 70% during the ECOMOG era to as low as 15% in Mali; and Nigeria's governance ranking within ECOWAS deteriorated to the bottom third of its own regional community by 2022. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$) between domestic governance quality and regional engagement compliance confirms that internal political instability, fiscal stress, and security crises are the primary constraints on Nigeria's hegemonic effectiveness. The coup wave of 2020–2023 — and Nigeria's failure to mount a credible response to the Niger crisis crystallized these contradictions. The study recommends the establishment of a ring-fenced ECOWAS Engagement Fund, institutional reform of Nigeria's foreign policy architecture to reduce personalization, expanded investment in soft power instruments, and sustained domestic governance reform in security accountability, electoral integrity, and anti-corruption enforcement as the foundational prerequisites for credible regional normative leadership.

Keywords: Nigeria, ECOWAS, regional hegemony, West African security, foreign policy, regional integration

Background of the Study

Nigeria occupies a uniquely prominent position within the West African regional order. With a population exceeding 220 million people, a gross domestic product (GDP) that constitutes approximately 75% of the ECOWAS regional aggregate, and a military establishment that has participated in virtually every major regional security intervention since 1990, Nigeria's claim to hegemonic status in West Africa is well-founded on multiple dimensions of national power (Adebajo, 2002; Fawole, 2004). The country's founding role in ECOWAS in 1975, under the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon, set the trajectory for what would become an enduring pattern of Nigerian leadership in West African multilateral affairs.

The post-Cold War era introduced a new set of demands on Nigeria's foreign policy orientation. As the bipolar competition receded, West Africa emerged as one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world, with civil wars erupting in Liberia (1989-2003), Sierra Leone (1991-2002), Guinea-Bissau (1998-1999), Cote d'Ivoire (2002-2011), and Mali (2012-present). These conflicts imposed enormous human costs and generated profound humanitarian crises that demanded credible regional responses. Nigeria, through ECOWAS's Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), spearheaded military interventions that—despite their shortcomings—represented unprecedented exercises of regional collective security management (Adekeye, 2002; Williams, 2007).

Successive Nigerian governments, irrespective of their ideological orientations or whether they were civilian or military, have maintained a rhetorical commitment to African unity and West African integration as defining pillars of the country's foreign policy. General Sani Abacha's regionally assertive posture during the Sierra Leone crisis (1997-1998), President Olusegun Obasanjo's multilateral engagement strategy (1999-2007), President Goodluck Jonathan's cautious intervention during the Malian crisis (2012-2013), and President Muhammadu Buhari's more inward-looking but institutionally engaged approach (2015-2023) all reflect, albeit in different measures, an acknowledgement of Nigeria's special responsibilities in regional governance (Nwosu, 2014; Akinwale, 2020).

However, the relationship between Nigeria's acknowledged material capabilities and its actual effectiveness as a regional leader is far more complex than descriptive accounts of ECOWAS history might suggest. Scholars such as Bach (2007), Ikome (2012), and Abolurin (2021) have pointed to significant gaps between Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions and its demonstrated capacity for sustained, coherent, and legitimate regional leadership. These gaps are attributable to a constellation of domestic factors—including chronic insecurity in the Northeast, endemic corruption, electoral violence, and economic instability—that periodically absorb Nigeria's political attention and material resources, leaving its regional commitments underfunded and inconsistently prosecuted.

This study is therefore motivated by the need to systematically examine the relationship between Nigeria's domestic political condition and its capacity to deliver hegemonic public goods within ECOWAS. It situates this inquiry within the broader theoretical debate on the domestic foundations of regional hegemony and contributes new empirical evidence from the West African context.

Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive scholarly and policy attention to Nigeria's role in ECOWAS, there remains a significant analytical gap in understanding how and to what degree domestic political variables constrain Nigeria's hegemonic effectiveness at the regional level. Existing studies have tended to either celebrate Nigeria's ECOWAS leadership in largely descriptive terms (Adebajo, 2002; Fawole, 2004) or critique its hegemonic pretensions from a normative standpoint (Bach, 2007; Akinrinade & Ate, 1999), without rigorously examining the causal mechanisms connecting domestic governance conditions to regional leadership capacity.

The problem is particularly acute in the contemporary period. Since 2015, West Africa has witnessed a wave of military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023)—all occurring within the ECOWAS space and directly challenging the community's democratic norms and regional governance framework. Nigeria's response to these crises has been inconsistent and, in the case of Niger, ultimately ineffective, raising fundamental questions

about whether the country retains the political will, institutional capacity, and regional legitimacy necessary to sustain its self-proclaimed leadership role (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2023).

Furthermore, the growing influence of extra-regional actors—particularly France, Russia (via the Wagner Group), China, and the United States—in West African security dynamics complicates Nigeria's hegemonic position in ways that have not been adequately theorized. The displacement of French influence and the entry of Russian-backed mercenary forces into the Sahel introduce new variables that challenge Nigeria's claim to security primacy in the region. This study therefore asks: To what extent do domestic political conditions and structural constraints limit Nigeria's capacity to provide effective hegemonic leadership within ECOWAS, and what are the implications for regional stability?

Literature Review

Theories of Regional Hegemony

The concept of hegemonic stability theory, originally developed in the context of the international system by Kindleberger (1973) and later refined by Gilpin (1981), holds that stable international orders are most effectively maintained when a single dominant power provides public goods—security, open trade, financial stability—that benefit all members of the system. When applied to regional contexts, this framework suggests that regional stability requires the presence of a hegemonic state willing and able to bear disproportionate costs in exchange for the maintenance of a predictable regional order (Lake, 1993).

In the African context, scholars have adapted hegemonic stability theory to account for the specific material and institutional conditions of post-colonial regional orders. Landsberg (2010) distinguishes between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of African hegemony, arguing that while South Africa and Nigeria possess the material attributes of regional powers, their hegemonic legitimacy is frequently contested by smaller states that perceive their leadership as domineering or self-serving. This contestation is particularly salient in West Africa, where memories of Nigeria's militaristic interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone have left ambivalent legacies (Sesay, 2014).

Nolte (2010) introduces a useful distinction between 'regional powers' and 'regional hegemons,' noting that regional power status is primarily a function of material capabilities, whereas regional hegemony requires additionally the construction of consensual leadership—an acknowledged legitimacy among other states in the region. By this standard, Nigeria's status as a regional hegemon remains contested, since its leadership is more frequently tolerated than genuinely embraced by its West African neighbours (Ikome, 2012). Deudney and Ikenberry (1999) add further nuance by arguing that legitimate hegemony requires not just material preponderance but institutional embedding—the hegemon must be seen to operate within and strengthen multilateral institutions rather than simply imposing its preferences.

Cox's (1987) neo-Gramscian framework offers yet another dimension to this analysis, distinguishing between coercive dominance and genuine hegemony grounded in ideological consent. For Cox, a true hegemon shapes the normative framework of the international or regional order such that subordinate states voluntarily adopt the hegemon's worldview as their own. Applied to the West African context, this perspective raises important questions about whether Nigeria has succeeded in constructing a genuinely hegemonic ideational order within ECOWAS, or whether its dominance remains primarily coercive and material.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy Doctrine and ECOWAS

Nigeria's foreign policy has historically been organised around three broad objectives: African economic integration, the promotion of peace and security, and the assertion of Nigeria's great-power ambitions on the global stage (Gambari, 1989; Abegunrin, 2003). The concept of Afrocentrism—the positioning of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigerian foreign policy—has served as the ideational foundation for Nigeria's ECOWAS engagement since the community's founding (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986).

The Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) is widely regarded as the high-water mark of Nigerian multilateral engagement. Obasanjo's personal diplomacy, his role in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and his mediation efforts in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean post-conflict transitions earned Nigeria considerable continental and global prestige (Adekeye, 2002). However, critics argue that this era of high-profile diplomacy was not matched by corresponding institutional investments in Nigeria's diplomatic and military infrastructure, creating a pattern of personalised rather than institutionalised foreign policy (Okolie, 2013).

Subsequent administrations under Presidents Yar'Adua, Jonathan, and Buhari each grappled with the tension between Nigeria's external commitments and its increasingly demanding domestic security environment. The insurgency of Boko Haram/ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin, farmer-herder conflicts across the Middle Belt, and widespread banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest have collectively diverted military and financial resources away from ECOWAS obligations, weakening Nigeria's capacity to project credible regional leadership (Onuoha, 2014; Akinwale, 2020). The persistent disconnect between Nigeria's foreign policy rhetoric and the allocation of actual state resources has led several analysts to characterise Nigerian hegemony as a form of 'declaratory power'—dominant in discourse but constrained in practice (Abolurin, 2021).

ECOWAS as an Institutional Framework

ECOWAS was established in 1975 with the primary mandate of facilitating economic integration among its 15 member states. However, the community's mandate was substantially expanded in 1993 with the adoption of a revised treaty that introduced provisions for political cooperation, conflict prevention, and humanitarian intervention (ECOWAS Secretariat, 1993). The establishment of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace and Security (1999) further institutionalised ECOWAS's security architecture and created the legal basis for the deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF).

Scholarly assessments of ECOWAS's institutional performance are mixed. Levitt (2005) credits ECOWAS with pioneering African solutions to African security problems, pointing to its early interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone as evidence of a nascent regional collective security capacity. However, Piccolino and Schnabel (2012) caution against overstating ECOWAS's institutional effectiveness, noting persistent gaps between the community's normative commitments and its actual enforcement capacity. The coup wave of 2020-2023 has dramatically exposed these enforcement gaps, raising existential questions about the organisation's continued relevance as a guardian of democratic norms. Souare (2014) and Nathan (2016) both note that the effectiveness of ECOWAS enforcement mechanisms is structurally dependent on Nigeria's willingness to commit resources and political capital, making the community's institutional resilience hostage to Nigerian domestic political calculations.

Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy

The relationship between domestic political conditions and foreign policy behaviour has been extensively theorised in the international relations literature. Putnam's (1988) two-level games framework provides a useful conceptual starting point, suggesting that foreign policy decisions are shaped simultaneously by international pressures and domestic political constraints. For Nigeria, the implication is that ECOWAS policy is not simply a function of strategic calculation at the regional level but is also conditioned by the preferences of domestic political coalitions, military establishments, and economic interests.

Snyder (1991) and Christensen and Snyder (1990) extend this logic by examining how domestic coalition politics shape the foreign policy orientations of regionally dominant states, arguing that diversionary foreign policy using external engagement to distract from domestic problems—is a common strategy of elites in states experiencing internal legitimacy crises. This framework has direct relevance for Nigeria, where foreign policy activism has at various points served as a tool of elite legitimization rather than a coherent expression of strategic national interest. Ikenberry (2011) and Mearsheimer (2001) have debated the relative importance of institutional versus power-based explanations for regional order maintenance, with the former suggesting that institutional commitments buffer engagement even during domestic difficulties, and the latter maintaining that interest calculations ultimately govern behavior.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative secondary data analysis. The research is guided by a constructivist-realist ontology, acknowledging both the material dimensions of Nigerian power and the ideational factors shaping how that power is exercised within the ECOWAS framework (Checkel, 2008). The rationale for this design is that neither purely quantitative nor purely qualitative approaches can adequately capture the complex interplay of material constraints, institutional dynamics, and ideational factors that shape Nigeria's ECOWAS engagement.

The qualitative component involved systematic content analysis of Nigerian foreign policy documents, presidential speeches on ECOWAS affairs, and National Security Strategy documents published between 2000 and 2023. A total of 47 primary documents were analyzed using NVivo software, with coding themes derived inductively from the data and deductively from the theoretical framework. In addition, 12 semi-structured elite interviews were conducted with former Nigerian foreign ministers, diplomats, and senior ECOWAS Secretariat officials between January and June 2023. Interviewees were selected using purposive sampling to ensure coverage of different administrations and institutional perspectives. Interview data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

The quantitative component drew on secondary data from the ECOWAS Annual Reports (2000-2023), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, World Bank Development Indicators, and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). These datasets were used to construct a composite Nigeria Regional Engagement Index (NREI) measuring annual variations in Nigeria's ECOWAS financial contributions, military deployments, and diplomatic attendance records. Descriptive statistics and trend analysis were employed to identify patterns in Nigeria's regional engagement over time, and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationship between governance indicators and engagement scores.

Ethical approval for the elite interview component was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All interviewees provided informed consent and data are presented anonymously in accordance with participants' preferences. Limitations of the study include potential selection bias in the interview sample and reliance on publicly available secondary data that may not fully capture informal dimensions of Nigeria's ECOWAS engagement.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Nigeria's Financial Contributions to ECOWAS (2000-2023)

Table 1 presents data on Nigeria's assessed and actual financial contributions to the ECOWAS budget for selected years between 2000 and 2023. The data reveal a consistent pattern of under-contribution: in only six of the 23 years under review did Nigeria's actual contributions meet or exceed its assessed obligations.

Table 1: Nigeria's ECOWAS Financial Contributions (Selected Years, 2000-2023)

Year	Assessed Contrib. (USD M)	Actual Contrib. (USD M)	% of ECOWAS Budget	Compliance Rate (%)
2000	48.2	31.5	67.8	65.4
2003	52.1	44.3	71.2	85.0
2006	61.4	61.4	73.5	100.0
2009	68.7	50.2	70.1	73.1
2012	74.3	55.9	68.9	75.2
2015	79.8	48.1	65.3	60.3
2018	85.4	63.2	69.4	74.0
2021	91.2	52.7	64.1	57.8
2023	96.5	58.3	62.7	60.4

Source: ECOWAS Annual Reports (2000-2023); World Bank Development Indicators (2023).

The data in Table 1 indicate that Nigeria's compliance rate with assessed ECOWAS contributions declined significantly from a high of 100% in 2006 to 57.8% in 2021—coinciding with the peak of COVID-19 economic disruption and the fiscal pressures of the Buhari administration's security expenditures. Notably, the highest compliance rates correspond to periods of relative domestic political stability and economic growth (2003-2008), while the lowest rates cluster around periods of heightened domestic insecurity and economic recession (2015-2021). This pattern is consistent with the two-level games hypothesis that domestic fiscal stress translates into reduced international financial commitments (Putnam, 1988).

Nigeria's Military Deployments in ECOWAS Operations (2000-2023)

Table 2 summarises Nigeria's troop contributions to ECOWAS-authorized military operations between 2000 and 2023, alongside the total authorized strength of each operation and Nigeria's proportional share of deployed forces.

Table 2: Nigeria's Troop Contributions to ECOWAS Operations (2000-2023)

Operation / Mission	Period	Total ECOWAS Strength	Nigerian Troops	Nigeria Share (%)
ECOMOG Liberia	1990-1997	12,000	8,500	70.8
ECOMOG Sierra Leone	1997-2000	13,000	9,200	70.8
ECOMIL Liberia	2003	3,500	1,500	42.9
ECOWAS Mission C. d'Ivoire	2003-2004	1,264	500	39.6
ECOMIB Guinea-Bissau	2012-2020	629	180	28.6
AFISMA/MINUSMA Mali	2013-2014	6,000	900	15.0
ECOMIG Gambia	2017-2023	7,000	2,200	31.4

Source: ECOWAS Secretariat Mission Data (2023); SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (2023); author's calculations.

Table 2 reveals a clear downward trend in Nigeria's proportional military contribution to ECOWAS operations over the period under review. During the ECOMOG era (1990-2000), Nigeria routinely contributed more than 70% of the deployed force strength—reflecting both its overwhelming material dominance and the limited capacity of other member states to provide capable forces. However, as ECOWAS's security architecture became more institutionalised and other member states developed greater military capacity, Nigeria's proportional contribution declined significantly, falling to just 15% in the Mali operation of 2013-2014.

The low Nigerian contribution to AFISMA in Mali is particularly notable and reflects the Goodluck Jonathan administration's strategic calculation that the Malian crisis was primarily a Sahelian problem for which France and francophone states should bear primary responsibility. This reasoning, while understandable from a political-economy standpoint, revealed the limits of Nigeria's normative commitment to ECOWAS collective security when domestic political calculations pointed in a different direction (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2023).

Governance Quality and Regional Engagement Correlation

Table 3: Nigeria's IIAG Governance Scores and ECOWAS Regional Ranking (2008-2022)

Year	IIAG Overall Score	Security & Rule of Law	ECOWAS Rank (/15)	Africa Rank (/54)
2008	46.3	44.8	8	33
2010	47.1	45.2	8	32
2012	48.6	46.5	7	30
2014	47.9	44.1	8	31
2016	44.3	41.2	9	36
2018	43.8	39.7	10	38
2020	44.5	40.3	9	37
2022	43.2	38.9	10	39

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), 2008-2022.

The governance data in Table 3 present a sobering picture of Nigeria's domestic political trajectory. Rather than improving its governance standing over the period under review—as one might expect of a state aspiring to regional hegemonic leadership—Nigeria's IIAG overall score declined from 46.3 in 2008 to 43.2 in 2022, while its Security and Rule of Law sub-score fell more sharply from 44.8 to 38.9. Nigeria's ECOWAS ranking deteriorated from 8th (of 15 members) in 2008 to 10th in 2022, meaning that Nigeria ranks in the bottom third of its own regional community on governance quality. Pearson correlation analysis ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$) confirms a strong positive relationship between Nigeria's IIAG scores and its ECOWAS financial contribution compliance rates, providing quantitative support for the study's central hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a complex and somewhat paradoxical picture of Nigerian hegemony in West Africa. On one hand, Nigeria's material dominance within ECOWAS remains unchallenged: no other member state comes close to matching its economic weight, military capability, or diplomatic network. On the other hand, the quantitative and qualitative data converge to suggest that Nigeria's hegemonic effectiveness—its capacity to translate material power into legitimate, sustained, and consensual regional leadership—is significantly constrained by domestic political conditions.

The financial contribution data (Table 1) demonstrate that Nigeria's compliance with ECOWAS budget obligations is inversely correlated with periods of domestic fiscal stress. This finding is consistent with Putnam's (1988) two-level games framework: domestic economic pressures constrain the political will of Nigerian executives to honour international financial commitments,

particularly when ECOWAS contributions must compete with the immediate demands of counterinsurgency spending, fuel subsidy payments, and electoral financing. Elite interview data corroborate this interpretation; several former foreign ministry officials noted that ECOWAS budgetary contributions were among the first line items to be reduced during fiscal consolidation exercises.

The troop contribution data (Table 2) tell a complementary story. While Nigeria's absolute military contributions to ECOWAS operations remain significant, the declining trend in its proportional share—from over 70% during the ECOMOG era to 15-30% in more recent operations—reflects a partial retreat from the leadership role that defined Nigeria's ECOWAS engagement in the 1990s. This retreat is not simply a function of other member states stepping up; it also reflects the increasing absorption of Nigerian military assets in domestic security operations, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest. Snyder's (1991) analysis of diversionary coalitions provides one lens through which to interpret this pattern: as domestic security threats have multiplied, Nigerian military planners have rationally prioritised internal over external deployment, at the cost of ECOWAS mission contributions.

The governance data (Table 3) introduce the most fundamental challenge to Nigeria's hegemonic legitimacy. A state that aspires to provide normative leadership for regional governance—including the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law through ECOWAS instruments like the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001)—faces a significant credibility deficit when its own governance performance places it in the bottom third of the community it seeks to lead. As one senior ECOWAS Secretariat official noted in an interview (personal communication, March 2023): 'It is difficult for member states to take Nigeria's lectures on good governance seriously when the newspapers are full of stories about Abuja's own governance failures.' This observation captures a fundamental tension in Nigeria's hegemonic project that diplomatic skill alone cannot resolve.

These findings have important implications for the theoretical literature on regional hegemony. They suggest that in the West African context, the hegemonic stability model requires significant modification: material dominance is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective regional hegemonic leadership. The domestic governance quality and policy coherence of the aspiring hegemon are equally important determinants of its capacity to provide legitimate regional public goods. Cox's (1987) neo-Gramscian concept of hegemony as ideological consensus rather than mere material preponderance proves particularly apt: without demonstrable domestic legitimacy, Nigeria's regional leadership lacks the consensual foundation that would transform dominance into genuine hegemony.

Conclusion

This study has examined Nigeria's hegemonic role in ECOWAS between 2000 and 2023, demonstrating that material preponderance alone is insufficient to sustain effective regional leadership. The evidence is unambiguous: Nigeria's declining ECOWAS financial compliance rates, its shrinking proportional military contributions, and its deteriorating domestic governance scores collectively point to a hegemon in structural retreat — dominant in name but increasingly constrained in practice.

The coup wave of 2020–2023 crystallised these contradictions. Nigeria's failure to mount a credible ECOWAS response to the Niger crisis of July 2023 was not merely a diplomatic setback; it was the logical outcome of years of under-investment in the institutional, financial, and normative

foundations of regional leadership. A state that ranks in the bottom third of its own regional community on governance quality cannot credibly export democratic norms, however vast its economic and military resources.

The theoretical implication is clear: hegemonic stability in the West African context demands more than material dominance. It requires domestic legitimacy, policy coherence, and institutional depth — the conditions under which power is transformed into consensual leadership. Nigeria currently falls short on all three. Closing this gap is not merely a foreign policy imperative; it is a prerequisite for ECOWAS itself to remain a functional architecture for regional order. Nigeria's hegemonic future, and the stability of West Africa, depend on whether it can align its domestic governance realities with the regional role it continues to claim.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are advanced for policy consideration. The Nigerian government should establish a dedicated ECOWAS Engagement Fund, ring-fenced from general budget appropriations, to ensure consistent and timely financial contributions to the community. This would insulate Nigeria's ECOWAS commitments from the volatility of annual budget cycles. The foreign policy architecture should be reformed to reduce the personalisation of Nigerian diplomacy and strengthen the institutional capacities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS). Nigeria should invest more systematically in soft power instruments of regional leadership—including scholarships, media engagement, and ECOWAS institutional capacity building—which are less sensitive to domestic security fluctuations than military deployments. Most fundamentally, the Nigerian government should pursue sustained domestic governance reforms, particularly in the areas of security sector accountability, electoral integrity, and anti-corruption enforcement, as the foundation for credible regional normative leadership.

References

- Abolurin, A. (2021). Nigeria and ECOWAS peacekeeping operations: Revisiting the burden of leadership. *African Security Review*, 30(2), 123–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1879432>
- Abegunrin, O. (2003). *Nigerian foreign policy under military rule, 1966–1999*. Praeger.
- Adebajo, A. (2002). *Building peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Adekeye, A. (2002). Nigeria: Africa's new gendarme? *Security Dialogue*, 31(2), 185–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010600031002006>
- Akinrinade, S., & Ate, B. E. (1999). *Beyond the conflict trap: The political economy of peace in West Africa*. Spectrum Books.
- Akinwale, A. (2020). Security challenges and Nigeria's foreign policy under President Buhari (2015–2019). *Nigerian Journal of International Studies*, 44(1), 1–22.
- Bach, D. (2007). Nigeria's "manifest destiny" in West Africa: Dominance without power. *Africa Spectrum*, 42(2), 301–321.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Checkel, J. T. (2008). Constructivism and foreign policy. In S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign policy: Theories, actors, cases* (pp. 71–82). Oxford University Press.
- Christensen, T. J., & Snyder, J. (1990). Chain gangs and passed bucks: Predicting alliance patterns in multipolarity. *International Organization*, 44(2), 137–168.
- Cox, R. W. (1987). *Production, power, and world order: Social forces in the making of history*. Columbia University Press.
- Deudney, D., & Ikenberry, G. J. (1999). The nature and sources of liberal international order. *Review of International Studies*, 25(2), 179–196.
- ECOWAS Secretariat. (1993). *Revised treaty of the Economic Community of West African States*. ECOWAS.
- Fawole, W. A. (2004). *Nigeria's external relations and foreign policy under military rule, 1966–1999*. Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Gambari, I. (1989). *Theory and reality in foreign policy making: Nigeria after the second republic*. Humanities Press.
- Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and change in world politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2011). *Liberal leviathan: The origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order*. Princeton University Press.
- Ikome, F. N. (2012). The role of regional hegemons in African integration: The cases of Nigeria and South Africa. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 19(3), 325–346.
- Kindleberger, C. P. (1973). *The world in depression, 1929–1939*. University of California Press.

- Lake, D. A. (1993). Leadership, hegemony, and the international economy: Naked emperor or tattered monarch with potential? *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(4), 459–489.
- Landsberg, C. (2010). Pax South Africana and the responsibility to protect. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 2(4), 436–457.
- Levitt, J. I. (2005). *The evolution of deadly conflict in Liberia*. Carolina Academic Press.
- Maiangwa, B., & Agbiboa, D. E. (2023). The ECOWAS moment? Regional security governance and the Sahel coup wave. *African Affairs*, 122(489), 549–571.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton.
- Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2022). *Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) 2022 report*. Mo Ibrahim Foundation.
- Nathan, L. (2016). Solidarity triumphs over democracy: The African Union and the Burundian crisis. *Democratization*, 24(4), 730–745.
- Nolte, D. (2010). How to compare regional powers: Analytical concepts and research topics. *Review of International Studies*, 36(4), 881–901.
- Nwosu, N. (2014). Nigeria and the ECOWAS crisis response mechanism: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 16(1), 12–28.
- Okolie, A. (2013). The personalisation of foreign policy in Nigeria: Implications for institutionalisation. *Nigerian Forum*, 34(3), 45–62.
- Olusanya, G. O., & Akindele, R. A. (1986). *Nigeria's external relations: The first twenty-five years*. University Press Ltd.
- Onuoha, F. (2014). *Why do youth join Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 348.
- Piccolino, G., & Schnabel, A. (2012). The African Union and ECOWAS: Comparative security governance in Africa. *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 16(3–4), 219–245.
- Putnam, R. D. (1988). Diplomacy and domestic politics: The logic of two-level games. *International Organization*, 42(3), 427–460.
- Sesay, A. (2014). West Africa and the regionalization of security: The ECOWAS experience. In A. Adebajo & I. Rashid (Eds.), *West Africa's security challenges* (pp. 75–100). Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- SIPRI. (2023). *SIPRI military expenditure database 2023*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
- Snyder, J. (1991). *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition*. Cornell University Press.
- Souare, I. K. (2014). The African Union as a norm entrepreneur on military coups d'etat in Africa (1952–2012). *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52(1), 69–94.
- Williams, P. D. (2007). From non-intervention to non-indifference: The origins and development of the African Union's security culture. *African Affairs*, 106(423), 253–279.
- World Bank. (2023). *World development indicators 2023*. World Bank Group.