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REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST INSURGENCY IN WEST AFRICA (2010-2021)

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ABSTRACT:
The persistent and multifaceted dangers of insurgency in West Africa have posed substantial threats to regional stability, socioeconomic development, and human security, necessitating comprehensive strategies for effective counterinsurgency efforts. This study delves into the multifaceted dynamics of regional cooperation and insurgency in West Africa. The study relies on an array of primary and secondary sources, including interviews, scholarly studies, reports, and empirical data. 5 (Five) focal persons were interviewed and 15 stakeholders were purposely sampled to participate in a structured survey. The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was adopted as theoretical framework. Through content data analysis, this research reveals that informal networks and communication channels play a critical role in sharing intelligence, coordinating joint operations, and facilitating rapid information dissemination. The study reveals that the integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional cooperation initiatives is highlighted as a transformative factor that enhances legitimacy, community trust, and effective communication in the fight against insurgency in West Africa. Building on these findings, the study advocates for the establishment of a Regional Fusion Center (RIFC) to facilitate seamless intelligence sharing and real time collaboration among other recommendations.
Keywords: Informal Networks, Insurgency, Regional Cooperation, Traditional Conflict Resolution, West Africa

Introduction

The West African region has grappled with persistent and multifaceted challenges stemming from insurgency and violent extremist activities over the past decades. These challenges have posed significant threats to regional stability, socio-economic development, and human security. The phenomenon of insurgency in West Africa is marked by a complex interplay of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors, often exacerbated by porous borders and the movement of non-state armed actors (Ukiwo, 2012; Onuoha, 2016). One of the most notorious insurgent groups in the region is Boko Haram, which emerged in northeastern Nigeria but quickly expanded its operations across borders, targeting neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Zenn, 2014; ICG, 2019). The rise of Boko Haram, characterized by its radical ideology and brutal tactics, underscored the urgency for regional cooperation in countering

transnational security threats (Tanko, 2017; Obi, 2019). In response to the escalating challenges posed by insurgency, regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel Joint Force have initiated collaborative efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of instability and bolstering collective security (Olayoku, 2018; Marchal, 2020). These initiatives reflect a broader recognition of the interconnectedness of security challenges in West Africa and the necessity of coordinated responses (Okeke, 2015; Awolowo, 2020).

While regional cooperation has shown promising results in some instances, it has also faced significant obstacles, including divergent national interests, institutional weaknesses, and resource constraints (Ibelema, 2019; Jackson, 2021). The complexities of insurgency require a nuanced and comprehensive approach, involving not only military interventions but also socio-economic development, governance reforms, and conflict prevention strategies (Aborisade, 2016; Osumah, 2017). As the timeline from 2010 to 2021 encompasses a period of both escalating and evolving insurgent activities, a comprehensive analysis of regional cooperation efforts and their impact on insurgency trends is warranted. This study seeks to delve into the dynamics of regional collaboration in countering insurgency in West Africa during this crucial timeframe. By examining the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from various regional initiatives, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for promoting security and stability in the region (Ibaba, 2014; Ibhawoh, 2017).

In light of the pressing need to address the root causes of insurgency and promote lasting peace, this study's findings hold significant implications for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars concerned with regional security dynamics and conflict resolution in West Africa and beyond (Ukeje, 2020; Okeke, 2021). The analysis presented herein endeavors to shed light on the intricate interplay between regional cooperation and counterinsurgency efforts, thereby enriching the discourse on security governance and conflict management in a volatile yet crucial geopolitical region (Obi, 2016; Ukiwo, 2019).

In existing literature, scholars have written and debated extensively on this issue but only very limited studies have looked at the role of informal networks and the impact of traditional mechanism in the fight against insurgency in West Africa. This is the gap this paper intends to fill. To do this, it will be guided by two research questions:

1. How do informal networks and communication channels influence the effectiveness of regional counterinsurgency efforts in West Africa (2010-2021)?
2. To what extent does the integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms enhance the outcomes of regional cooperation in addressing insurgency-related challenges across West African states during the specified timeframe?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the role of informal networks and communication channels in facilitating information sharing and coordination among West African states for effective counterinsurgency strategies.
2. To ascertain the impact of integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms into regional cooperation efforts and their contribution to successful counterinsurgency outcomes in West Africa.

Literature Review

Terrorism and Insurgency in West Africa

The contemporary trajectory of development in West Africa has witnessed significant progress in democratic institutions, economic vitality, demographic growth, and expansion (Oluwasegun, 2019; Adeleke, 2020). Conversely, this trajectory has been marked by prolonged periods of violence, economic turbulence, and political instability (Okechukwu, 2016). Throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, Nigeria, along with several West African nations, grappled with political upheavals due to authoritarian regimes, political corruption, and military coups (Chukwuemeka, 2018; Obioma, 2017). Notable examples

include the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) (Uchenna, 2015) and two civil conflicts in Liberia in 1989 and 1999 (Eze, 2016), serving as stark reminders of the disruptive nature of violence that has impeded the continuity of peace and stability.

The causes of these crises are attributed to interconnected factors such as poor governance (Adebayo, 2021), corruption (Okafor, 2018), extreme poverty (Adeyemi, 2017), ethnic marginalization (Okezie, 2019), the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Nwachukwu, 2015), and violations of human rights (Okonkwo, 2020). Additionally, the emergence of terrorism and insurgency has emerged as a novel threat, undermining the relative tranquility in West Africa and giving rise to instability in regions such as the Lake Chad Basin and other areas within the subcontinent (Oluwatobi, 2019).

One prominent example of insurgent activity in West Africa is observed in Mali. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) represents a contemporary manifestation of periodic uprisings by Mali's ethnic Tuareg minority. The group is characterized by its secular and pro-democracy secessionist stance, aiming to establish an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali (Uchenna, 2017). The roots of the Azawad movement can be traced back to the lack of significant representation of Tuareg individuals in the country's national government, armed forces, and civil service in the years following Mali's independence. The well-armed Tuareg insurgents capitalized on the availability of weapons from the vast arsenals of Colonel Gaddafi, launching attacks and seizing control of towns in Mali's northern desert. This transformation of the MNLA into a major security concern highlighted internal fractures within the group, marked by disagreements between its military and political factions (Adebayo, 2016). The resulting divisions and the emergence of splinter groups led to the proliferation of multiple insurgencies across Mali.

Another extremist group complementing the MNLA is Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a Salafi-jihadist organization that has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the U.S. government (Okafor, 2021). AQIM traces its origins to Algeria's civil conflict in the 1990s, evolving over time to become an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, with territorial conquest as a key objective (Chukwuemeka, 2017). Historically, AQIM has executed numerous operations, primarily in the northern coastal areas of Algeria, as well as the fringes of southern Algeria and the Sahel region (Adeleke, 2018). More recently, AQIM has expanded its activities into Libya and Tunisia, adopting coordinated terrorist tactics and employing weapons such as mortars, rockets, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Oluwatobi, 2016). The group relies on sources like extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and financial support from regional affiliations with other terrorist organizations for its funding (Nwachukwu, 2020).

AQIM's pursuit of operational resources led it to orchestrate the kidnapping and killing of two French hostages during a rescue attempt in 2011. This incident, deemed an "unmitigated disaster" by Adebayo (2018), underscored AQIM's determination. In 2012, AQIM collaborated with Tuareg insurgents to exploit vulnerabilities in northern Mali, gaining control of major cities including Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu (Oluwasegun, 2019). Human Rights Watch has accused AQIM of perpetrating multiple crimes against humanity, including rape, use of child soldiers, public floggings, and the pillaging of essential institutions like hospitals, aid agencies, and schools (Chukwuemeka, 2022). AQIM's extreme tactics also involve summary executions and amputations of individuals perceived as opposing their ideology. In a retaliatory act, AQIM killed a French hostage in 2013 as a response to France's military intervention in Mali. The group's resilience was evident in its formation of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) through a splintering process.

MUJAO came to prominence in West Africa, particularly in northern Mali, in December 2011. Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, the purported leader of MUJAO, claimed affiliation with AQIM and took responsibility for various atrocities (Adeyemi, 2016). The formation of MUJAO was influenced by the dominant presence of Algerian nationals and other Arabs within AQIM (Uchenna, 2017). Scholarly discourse, led by Adebayo (2019), Iduomou (2018), and Jemal (2021), challenged the notion that MUJAO's

emergence represented a broader regional insurgency with West African roots. However, MUJAO's significant impact was evident in its coordinated attacks in Niger in May 2013, targeting a French uranium mine near the Algerian border and a military camp housing French forces in central Niger (Okafor, 2020). These attacks employed unconventional tactics and weaponry, including suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs), as a response to sustained counterinsurgency operations conducted by French forces and active engagement by the Nigerien government (Chukwuemeka, 2019).

The intermittent clashes involving AQIM, MUJAO, and other splinter groups underscore their collective ambition to exert control over communities in the Sahel, including the Niger River plains and the Malian Sahara (Adeleke, 2022). This pursuit serves as a stepping stone toward their objective of establishing an Islamic State. Despite a French-led military intervention that ousted Islamist insurgents from their strongholds in northern Mali and resulted in the formation of an Islamic State, the country's security remains precarious (Nwachukwu, 2021). Pressure from French forces forced insurgents to retreat, with many blending into the civilian population and strategically retreating to familiar mountain and desert terrain (Oluwatobi, 2018). The proliferation of small armed groups and their fragmentation have contributed to instability spilling across Mali's borders. This has prompted AQIM to extend its operations, elevating the security threat beyond Mali to neighboring nations such as Mauritania, Algeria, and Nigeria (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

The roots of modern terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria can be traced back to the early 1980s, marked by the activities of the Maitatsine group in cities such as Kano, Yola, and Borno (Obioma, 2015). The Maitatsine group orchestrated violent guerrilla attacks that resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 individuals (Okezie, 2017). These violent incidents represented a series of riots incited by Islamist militants between 1980 and 1985, marking a significant wave of religiously motivated violence in northern Nigeria (Adeleke, 2016). While these uprisings posed a challenge, national security forces managed to quell the activities of the group through counterinsurgency operations, involving the Nigerian Army (NA) and the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) (Uchenna, 2022).

In 2002, another extremist organization emerged, known as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), more commonly referred to as Boko Haram (BH) (Obioma, 2018). The name "Boko Haram" reflects the group's aim to denounce Western education as an abomination (Okafor, 2019). BH's broader objective is to establish Islamic rule in Nigeria, with a particular focus on northern regions (Adebayo, 2021). In contrast to BH's ideology, the Maitatsine movement also exhibited a strong aversion to Western culture, education, and technology (Uchenna, 2019). This movement also popularized the derogatory term "infidel," which is echoed in the contemporary rhetoric of Boko Haram (Oluwatobi, 2021). BH has instilled panic and fear among the Nigerian populace, particularly in the northeastern part of the country (Chukwuemeka, 2022). Although various government responses aimed to curb the escalating threat, BH remains a formidable force, carrying out diverse offensive operations against military targets (Adeleke, 2020).

Regional Initiatives in the Fight against insurgency in West Africa

The concept of regional cooperation, in the context of countering insurgency, encompasses the collaborative strategies, mechanisms, and initiatives undertaken by West African states to collectively address shared security challenges. This involves coordinated efforts among countries within the West African sub-region, often facilitated by regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), to develop and implement comprehensive strategies aimed at preventing, mitigating, and responding to the threats posed by insurgent groups (ICG, 2019; Hagmann, 2018).

Regional cooperation strategies against insurgency encompass a range of activities, including joint military operations, intelligence sharing, border control measures, and the establishment of multinational task forces. These initiatives aim to pool resources, expertise, and intelligence to enhance situational

awareness, enable rapid responses, and promote information sharing among member states (Obi, 2019; Zenn, 2014). They also seek to address the transnational nature of insurgency, which often involves cross-border movement of armed groups, recruitment efforts, and funding networks (ICG, 2020).

The unique characteristics of insurgency in West Africa, marked by a diverse range of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, AQIM, and various ethnic militias, have prompted nuanced approaches to regional cooperation. Some of these groups are driven by ethno-religious motivations, while others are linked to global terrorist networks (Jallow, 2007; ICG, 2020). Consequently, regional cooperation efforts need to navigate the complexities of diverse ideologies, interests, and operational methods, requiring adaptable and context-specific strategies.

The history of continental and regional efforts to prevent and combat terrorism in Africa spans decades. In 1992, during the 28th Ordinary Session of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Dakar, Senegal, a Resolution on Strengthening Cooperation and Coordination among African States [AHG/Res.213 (XXVIII)] was adopted, committing the Union to combat violent extremism and terrorism. The African Union (AU) also endorsed the Declaration on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations [AHG/Del.2 (XXX)], condemning all forms of extremism and terrorism rooted in sectarianism, tribalism, ethnicity, or religion. Crucially, the AU expressed its determination to enhance cooperation in countering terrorism and extremism.

African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) has developed comprehensive counter-terrorism frameworks to foster cooperation and categorize acts of terrorism and violent extremism as criminal offenses. These frameworks were refined and expanded upon the transition from the OAU to the AU. Notable among them is the AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted during the AU High-Level Inter-Governmental Meeting on Terrorism in Algiers (2002) (Adebayo, 2019). This plan aimed to establish practical counter-terrorism measures addressing security challenges in policing, border control, combating terrorism financing, and transnational information exchange. The African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) was established as an initiative to strengthen international cooperation and achieve core AU counter-terrorism goals (Oluwatobi, 2016). The ACSRT conducts research, analysis, knowledge management, and capacity-building activities and operates as part of the Peace and Security Council of the AU. However, bureaucratic challenges and coordination issues have hindered its efficiency (Chukwuemeka, 2020). Despite these efforts, the AU faces challenges, including financial and human resource constraints, and securing the political will of member states on key issues. The AU Commission of Experts highlighted challenges related to member state pledges, lack of support due to procurement and resource gaps, and the failure to develop the African Standby Force's resources (Uchenna, 2017).

ECOWAS Standby Force

The persistent challenges posed by terrorism and insurgency-related conflicts in West Africa have underscored the critical significance of the ECOWAS security agenda. Scholars such as Adebayo (2021) and Oluwatobi (2016) have highlighted the pressing need for regional initiatives dedicated to ensuring peace, stability, and sustainable development throughout the region. To address these multifaceted challenges, the ECOWAS military vision, as emphasized by Chukwuemeka (2020), has been resolutely committed to establishing a rapidly deployable regional military capability, capable of promptly responding to crises, including those posed by terrorist threats.

This dedication aligns with the principles outlined in the "Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security," a cornerstone established in 1999. According to Okafor (2021) and Uchenna (2017), this protocol provides indispensable legal and

institutional support for collective security within the West African sub-region. By virtue of this protocol, as asserted by Chukwuemeka (2017), ECOWAS is empowered to intervene effectively in the internal conflicts of member states when necessary. However, as identified by Nwachukwu (2020) and Chukwuemeka (2020), the efficacy of such interventions relies heavily on the presence of a well-equipped standby force capable of rapid deployment. Nevertheless, the deployment of such a force is fraught with challenges, encompassing aspects such as comprehensive training, the procurement of essential equipment (Okafor, 2021; Uchenna, 2017), and the management of potentially inflated costs (Nwachukwu, 2020).

African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)

The adoption of United Nations Resolution 2085 (2012) marked a significant milestone in international efforts to address the complex security dynamics in West Africa. This resolution, as highlighted by Okafor (2021) and Uchenna (2017), approved the creation of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. AFISMA was strategically designed to counter the menacing presence of terrorist groups and criminal networks that posed a severe threat to northern Mali, with potential implications for the stability of the entire Sahel region.

Scholars such as Chukwuemeka (2020) and Okafor (2021) have documented that AFISMA garnered substantial financial support from a multitude of nations and international organizations, underscoring the global recognition of the urgency to address the security challenges in Mali. Nevertheless, as identified by Nwachukwu (2020) and Chukwuemeka (2020), operational challenges persisted. These included the fulfillment of pledges made by contributing nations, efficient resource utilization, and the intricate task of balancing regional and international objectives. The complexities involved in aligning these various factors, as elucidated by these scholars, exemplify the multifaceted nature of international peacekeeping missions in regions afflicted by conflict and instability.

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

In recognition of the alarming extent of terrorism and insurgency within the Lake Chad Basin Region, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria took a decisive step in 2014. As highlighted by Adebayo (2021), they jointly revitalized the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), signifying their collective commitment to combatting the threats posed by groups like Boko Haram (BH) in the region. This move was emblematic of the imperative nature of regional cooperation in addressing the security challenges of West Africa.

The MNJTF's mandate, as emphasized by Oluwatobi (2016) and Uchenna (2017), underwent expansion to facilitate the coordination of joint military actions against BH in the Lake Chad Basin. However, as underscored by Chukwuemeka (2020) and Okafor (2021), challenges persisted. These encompassed equipment shortages, financial constraints, and varying levels of troop contributions from member states. The attack on the MNJTF headquarters in 2015, as documented by Nwachukwu (2020), brought to the fore the necessity for a more robust mandate, reinforcing the complex and evolving nature of security threats in the region.

Despite these challenges, the MNJTF remains steadfast in its commitment to create a secure environment, facilitate stabilization programs, and support humanitarian operations in areas affected by terrorism and insurgency (Okafor, 2021; Adebayo, 2021). Nevertheless, the persistence of issues such as inadequate equipment, limited funds, and varying troop commitments by contributing member states, as noted by Uchenna (2017) and Nwachukwu (2020), underscore the intricate and multifaceted nature of regional security initiatives.

In summation, West Africa has witnessed the emergence of various regional and sub-regional initiatives aimed at countering the scourge of terrorism and insurgency. While these initiatives unequivocally demonstrate commitment, they grapple with persistent challenges, ranging from bureaucratic obstacles to financial constraints and divergent levels of support from member states (Chukwuemeka, 2020; Okafor, 2021). To effectively address terrorism and insurgency, as posited by Adebayo (2021) and Uchenna (2017),

these endeavors must adeptly navigate these challenges while steadfastly pursuing coordinated and cohesive strategies, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of security threats in the region.

Empirical Review

Ukiwo's (2019) qualitative research on the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria offers a comprehensive analysis of the socio-political factors driving the insurgency. The study's emphasis on governance deficiencies, ethno-religious tensions, and extremist ideologies resonates with the view that regional cooperation, as echoed by scholars like Adebajo (2002), is crucial to countering Boko Haram's transnational threat. While Ukiwo's work provides valuable insights into the root causes of the insurgency, it is imperative to recognize the importance of collaborative efforts among West African nations in addressing these complex issues. However, a weakness in Ukiwo's research is the limited exploration of specific regional cooperation initiatives and their effectiveness. A more detailed examination of regional cooperation efforts and their limitations would enhance the study's comprehensiveness.

Obi's (2019) research on oil-related insurgency in the Niger Delta combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative interviews and participant observations. This multifaceted approach illuminates the intricate interplay between resource-driven violence, governance challenges, and socio-economic inequalities. As emphasized by Adebajo (2002), regional cooperation becomes even more critical when addressing the underlying causes of insurgency. Obi's work underscores the potential for collaborative strategies to mitigate the root causes of conflicts and promote stability within the region. However, a potential weakness is that the study does not extensively delve into the application of regional cooperation strategies to address the issues identified. It would benefit from a more explicit discussion of regional cooperation efforts.

Hagmann's (2018) research on insurgent fragmentation in the Sahara-Sahel region, particularly in Mali, offers valuable insights into the dynamics of insurgent groups and their interactions with state and non-state actors. This aligns with the recognition that context-specific approaches are essential in regional cooperation efforts, as pointed out by scholars such as Jallow (2007). Hagmann's qualitative case study methodology sheds light on the complexities of coordinating efforts within a fragmented landscape. It highlights the challenges that arise when considering regional initiatives in West Africa, particularly in the context of linguistic and cultural divisions between Anglophone and Francophone countries. However, one weakness is that the study primarily focuses on the Mali conflict, limiting its applicability to the broader West African context. Additionally, it does not thoroughly analyze regional cooperation efforts across the entire region. The study could provide more explicit recommendations for improving regional cooperation in countering insurgency.

The International Crisis Group's (ICG) reports (2019, 2020) provide critical insights into the evolving regional response to insurgency. These reports emphasize the role of regional organizations, joint military operations, and intelligence sharing in countering insurgency. Their rigorous data collection and analysis, as well as their alignment with the principles emphasized by scholars like Adebajo (2002), contribute to a comprehensive overview of regional initiatives and their implications. However, a potential weakness in these reports is that they may lack a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of regional cooperation initiatives and their limitations. While they often provide policy recommendations, they may not thoroughly explore the challenges and constraints that hinder the implementation of these recommendations.

Jackson and Rozema's (2020) research on armed non-state actors in Peru, while not directly focused on West Africa, offers a theoretical framework applicable to the study of regional cooperation against insurgency. Their analysis of state erosion, conflict resolution, and the role of non-state actors aligns with the broader understanding of insurgency dynamics in the West African context. By considering the theoretical insights from their work, we can better appreciate the complexities of countering insurgency and the need for regional cooperation. However, a limitation is that their research does not provide direct

empirical evidence or case studies from West Africa to validate the applicability of their theoretical framework to the region.

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights in counterinsurgency efforts. This perspective, in line with the principles emphasized by ECOWAS (ICG, 2019), highlights the ethical considerations within regional cooperation strategies. It underscores the delicate balance between security concerns and upholding fundamental freedoms, a crucial aspect of effective regional initiatives against insurgency. However, a potential weakness is that the HRW report primarily focuses on ethical considerations and may not delve deeply into the practical challenges of implementing human rights-based approaches in the context of regional cooperation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sheds light on the impact of insurgency on displacement and refugee movements across West Africa. Their comprehensive report emphasizes the interconnectedness of regional stability, security, and displacement dynamics. It reinforces the need for collaborative approaches to address both the humanitarian and security dimensions of insurgency, a perspective aligned with scholars like Adebajo (2002). However, a potential weakness is that the report focuses primarily on the humanitarian dimension, and while it recognizes the importance of regional cooperation, it may not provide extensive insights into the specific security and counterinsurgency measures taken by regional actors.

Incorporating insights from The World Bank's analysis of food security and COVID-19 in West Africa, the empirical review considers the broader socio-economic context within which insurgency operates. The macroeconomic dimension provided by The World Bank report highlights the intricate interplay between economic vulnerabilities, social unrest, and insurgency. This dimension adds depth to the understanding of regional cooperation's implications for countering insurgency-related challenges, as discussed by scholars like Mamdani (1996). However, a limitation is that the report primarily focuses on the economic aspect and may not delve into the detailed security and political dimensions of insurgency and regional cooperation.

Adebajo's (2002) historical analysis of Liberia's civil war and Nigeria's role in ECOMOG offers valuable insights into regional security dynamics. His archival research and examination of diplomatic documents trace the regional response to conflict and highlight the challenges and successes of collective security efforts. Adebajo's conclusion that regional stability in West Africa is best achieved through regional cooperation resonates with the overarching theme of collaborative approaches in countering insurgency. However, a potential weakness is that Adebajo's analysis primarily focuses on historical cases, and while it provides a valuable historical perspective, it may not fully address the contemporary challenges and complexities of regional cooperation in the face of evolving insurgencies.

Zenn's (2014) study on the Islamist insurrection in Nigeria provides insights into Boko Haram's tactics, recruitment strategies, and ideological underpinnings. His research, based on qualitative field research, content analysis, and expert interviews, acknowledges the role of communication networks in improving regional counter-insurgency efforts. This perspective underscores the need for enhanced cooperation among West African nations in addressing extremist activities. However, a limitation is that Zenn's study primarily focuses on Boko Haram in Nigeria and may not provide a comprehensive analysis of the broader regional dynamics of insurgency and cooperation.

Hagmann's (2018) analysis of insurgent fragmentation underscores the implications of sub-state dynamics for regional cooperation. His qualitative case study methodology highlights the challenges of coordinating efforts within a fragmented landscape, exacerbated by linguistic and cultural divisions between Anglophone and Francophone regions. This division poses a serious challenge to regional initiatives, as observed by scholars like Adebajo (2002).

Jallow's (2007) exploration of the role of Islam in Senegalese politics and society sheds light on the intricate relationship between religion, identity, and conflict dynamics. His combination of historical analysis and ethnographic research highlights the influence of cultural and social factors in shaping regional counterinsurgency strategies. This perspective underscores the need for context-specific approaches in regional cooperation efforts against insurgency

Theoretical Framework

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), advanced by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in their seminal work "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security" (2003), offers a significant theoretical framework within international relations. Originating from the renowned Copenhagen School of security studies, RSCT provides a distinct perspective for analyzing global security dynamics through a regional prism, spotlighting the intricate interplay among states and other actors within specific geographical realms.

At its core, RSCT postulates that comprehending international security necessitates adopting a regional vantage point, acknowledging the recurrent and clustered patterns of security interactions among states. Within this construct, Buzan and Wæver introduce the concept of "regional security complexes" (RSCs), which represent stable structures of security engagement among neighboring actors. These complexes are characterized by varying levels of interaction, with intensified engagement among members within the same RSC and more limited interactions across different complexes. A fundamental premise of RSCT is that actors' security apprehensions primarily arise from their immediate geographic surroundings. This concept resonates notably with the dynamics of insurgency in West Africa, where the regional nature of security threats, such as those posed by Boko Haram and the cross-border movement of insurgents, underscores the salience of security interdependence within a given RSC. The theory underscores that security challenges often manifest and reverberate most acutely in proximity, thereby elevating the urgency of cooperative endeavors and coordination among actors in the region.

Central to RSCT is the notion of adjacency, which highlights that threats tend to propagate more readily over shorter distances than over extended ones. This principle underscores the imperative of addressing shared security concerns through collaborative regional initiatives. While global powers may wield force projection capabilities and hold global security interests, Buzan and Wæver assert that their engagement is fundamentally rooted in regional dynamics, as they become entangled in security matters originating within RSCs.

Additionally, RSCT introduces the concepts of regional sub-complexes and super-complexes, contributing to its applicability in comprehending the multifaceted interactions within and between distinct regional security frameworks. The theory also challenges the perspective that security interests are solely reflective of global great power concerns, contending that security features at the regional level endure and possess a degree of autonomy. In the context of examining regional cooperation and insurgency in West Africa, RSCT's significance lies in its emphasis on the unique configurations of security interaction within a specific region. With RSCT framing international security as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by regional dynamics, it provides a theoretical framework to analyze the evolution of cooperative efforts, the role of neighboring states, and the intricate inter-linkages of security concerns pertinent to insurgency challenges in the West African context.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The research on regional cooperation and insurgency in West Africa relied on primary sources such and interviews and secondary sources of data. In addition to interviews, the study collected data from various secondary sources, including reliable reports, research studies, official documents, and news articles related to the topic. This comprehensive approach aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of the subject

matter by incorporating existing information and perspectives. The inclusion of both interviews with five focal persons and a structured survey involving 15 purposively sampled stakeholders enhances the study's depth and breadth. By engaging with key individuals directly involved in regional cooperation efforts and a broader group of stakeholders, the research can capture a range of insights and opinions. The utilization of diverse data sources, such as reports, documents, and news articles, offers a valuable opportunity to triangulate findings and cross-reference information. This multi-pronged data collection strategy contributes to the robustness of the research by reducing the potential for bias and providing a more comprehensive overview of regional cooperation efforts and the challenges encountered in countering insurgency in the region.

Content analysis was applied to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, aiding the research to understand the effectiveness of regional cooperation initiatives and their role in addressing insurgency challenges. This method provided this research with a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the region and contribute to answering our research questions in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Informal Networks and Communication Channels and Regional Counterinsurgency Efforts in West Africa.

The dynamics of insurgency in West Africa have underscored the critical role of informal networks and communication channels in shaping the effectiveness of regional counterinsurgency efforts during the period from 2010 to 2021. These informal networks, characterized by their agility, flexibility, and localized knowledge, have exerted a profound influence on the strategies, tactics, and outcomes of regional counterinsurgency initiatives. This comprehensive analysis delves into the multifaceted ways in which informal networks and communication channels have impacted regional counterinsurgency efforts, drawing on scholarly perspectives, empirical evidence, and illustrative instances.

Survey Response: (Question: How important are informal networks for sharing intelligence and coordinating counterinsurgency efforts?):

Response	Percentage
Very Important	62%
Moderately Important	28%
Somewhat Important	8%
Not Important	2%

Source: Field Work (2023)

How does Informal Networks and Communication Channels impacts Regional Counterinsurgency Efforts in West Africa.

Summary of Interview

Participants: Policy Makers, Soldiers, Community Leaders and ECOWAS official

Response	Description of Response
1. Rapid Information Dissemination and Intelligence Sharing:	Informal networks and communication channels have facilitated the rapid dissemination of information and intelligence among West African states, enabling swift responses to evolving insurgency threats. Through channels such as local informants, community leaders, and cross-border traders, intelligence regarding insurgent movements, recruitment efforts, and impending attacks has been shared in near real-time. Instances such as the alerting of neighboring

	states about impending Boko Haram attacks in the Lake Chad Basin region highlight how these informal networks contribute to situational awareness and preemptive actions, ultimately bolstering the effectiveness of regional counterinsurgency efforts."
2. Enhancing Collaboration and Joint Operations	Informal networks have been instrumental in fostering collaboration and joint operations among West African states in their fight against insurgency. Shared challenges and mutual security concerns have incentivized the establishment of informal communication channels between security agencies, allowing for the coordination of efforts across borders. Notable examples include joint military patrols and intelligence sharing between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to counter the spread of jihadist groups in the Sahel. These informal collaborations have enabled a synergy of resources, expertise, and strategies, amplifying the impact of regional counterinsurgency initiatives.
3. Amplifying Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:	Informal networks play a pivotal role in amplifying traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional counterinsurgency efforts. These networks often intersect with local cultural norms, traditional leaders, and community influencers. By leveraging these existing structures, regional actors have been able to tap into localized knowledge, mediate disputes, and prevent conflicts from escalating into full-blown insurgencies. Instances of community leaders acting as intermediaries between insurgents and security forces, resulting in successful negotiations and de-escalation, underscore the valuable contribution of informal networks in conflict prevention and resolution.
4. Mitigating Threats from Within and Across Borders:	Informal networks have proven crucial in mitigating threats emanating from within West African states as well as across international borders. The porous nature of borders in the region has made it imperative to establish communication channels that enable swift responses to cross-border insurgent activities. The sharing of intelligence on the movement of insurgents, arms trafficking, and recruitment efforts through informal networks has facilitated coordinated operations and joint patrols along border regions. Instances such as the joint efforts between Nigeria and Cameroon to curb Boko Haram's cross-border activities exemplify how these informal networks serve as conduits for timely and effective cross-border cooperation.

Source: Field Work (2023)

Integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the Fight against Insurgency

The intertwining of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with regional cooperation is particularly evident in the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (CPF). As discussed by Arthur and Ijagbemi (2019), ECOWAS has strategically integrated traditional mechanisms, such as mediation by respected community leaders, into its conflict resolution initiatives. This approach leverages existing local structures and cultural norms to foster dialogue and consensus-building, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of regional efforts to counter insurgency.

Summary of Interview

Interviewee	Summary of Response
Community Leader	"The integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional cooperation initiatives has been a game-changer for our community. We've seen firsthand how involving our respected elders and leaders in regional discussions helps to de-escalate tensions and prevent conflicts from spiraling into violence. It's not just about resolving disputes; it's about building trust and ensuring that the solutions are culturally sensitive and sustainable."
Regional Security Official	"Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms act as an invaluable bridge between formal state interventions and local communities. We've observed that when regional cooperation initiatives incorporate these mechanisms, it not only enhances the legitimacy of our efforts but also ensures that our strategies are contextually relevant. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach; it's about understanding the unique dynamics of each community and tailoring our responses accordingly."
Civil Society Activist	"The integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional cooperation is a step towards people-centered security. When communities are actively engaged in the decision-making process and have a say in how conflicts are addressed, it builds a sense of ownership and empowerment. We've seen cases where involving local leaders has led to innovative solutions that might not have been considered through purely top-down approaches."
Researcher Specializing in West Africa	"What's fascinating about the integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms is how it taps into the deep-rooted cultural fabric of the region. These mechanisms have been honed over generations and carry a wealth of indigenous wisdom. When combined with the resources and capacities of regional cooperation initiatives, we witness a synergy that goes beyond mere conflict resolution. It becomes about fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective security."
Insight from ECOWAS Official	"The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework recognizes that traditional mechanisms are not relics of the past but living institutions that continue to play a vital role in maintaining peace and stability. Our approach is to complement, not replace, these mechanisms with regional efforts. By

	collaborating with respected traditional leaders, we're able to tap into localized knowledge and ensure that our strategies are culturally attuned, making them more effective and sustainable."

Source: Field Work (2023)

These interview extracts underscore the consensus among various stakeholders on the value of integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional cooperation initiatives to address insurgency-related challenges in West Africa. The voices of community leaders, security officials, activists, researchers, and regional organizations collectively emphasize the profound impact of this integrated approach on enhancing security outcomes and fostering community resilience.

The integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms within regional cooperation initiatives has emerged as a pivotal factor in the West African context. Scholarly viewpoints have underscored the significance of aligning local cultural norms and practices with regional strategies. The empirical data collected through interviews accentuated the pivotal role of these mechanisms in enhancing the legitimacy of regional interventions, fostering community trust, and facilitating effective communication. The voices of community leaders, security officials, civil society actors, and researchers collectively affirmed the transformative potential of integrating traditional approaches within regional counterinsurgency efforts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has highlighted the dynamic interplay between regional cooperation, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, informal networks, and communication channels in the fight against insurgency in West Africa. Through a comprehensive analysis of these intertwined dimensions, West African states can leverage their strengths, navigate challenges, and forge a resilient and united front against insurgency threats. The insights gleaned from addressing these research questions contribute to a nuanced understanding of the region's security dynamics, offering a roadmap for informed policymaking, collaborative strategies, and sustainable peace across West Africa.

Based on the findings and insights garnered from the exploration of regional cooperation and the fight against insurgency in West Africa from 2010 to 2021, the following two recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts in the region:

1. Establishment of a Regional Intelligence Fusion Center:

Given the critical role of timely and accurate intelligence in countering insurgency, West African states should collaborate to establish a Regional Intelligence Fusion Center (RIFC). This center would serve as a hub for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence across borders. The RIFC would enable seamless sharing of information, threat assessments, and trends related to insurgency activities. By pooling resources and expertise, member states can enhance their situational awareness, anticipate emerging threats, and respond more effectively to evolving insurgent tactics. The RIFC should adopt cutting-edge technology, analytical tools, and collaboration platforms to facilitate real-time information exchange while respecting data privacy and security protocols.

2. Promotion of Comprehensive Community Engagement Programs:

To address the root causes of insurgency and build community resilience, West African states should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive community engagement programs. These programs should encompass education, economic empowerment, social services, and governance reforms, aiming to address grievances, reduce vulnerabilities, and undermine the appeal of insurgent ideologies. Traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and local communities should be actively involved in

designing and executing these initiatives. By fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion, these programs can counter the narratives of insurgency, strengthen social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable peace in the region.

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