**Opinion**

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What do the Withdrawal of Member States from the Alliance of Sahelian States of ECOWAS in January 2025 and the Crackdown on African Migrants in South Africa in 2026 have in Common?

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Received Date: August 11, 2026**Published Date:** August 20, 2026**Abstract**

At first glance, there seems to be no connection between the persecution of Black African immigrants in South Africa and the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS. However, this paper argues that these two phenomena are linked by the nature of the diagnosis of the underlying problems, by the nature of the solutions offered by these two phenomena, and by the perspectives they present.

Keywords: Unemployment; immigration; national sovereignty; diagnosis; african continental integration

Jel Classification: F00; F01; F02

Introduction

The persecution of African migrants in South Africa in 2026 and the withdrawal of member states of the Alliance of Sahelian States from ECOWAS in 2025 are two phenomena that appear very distinct in terms of scale, scope, location, timing (2025 is different from 2026) and subject matter. From this perspective, at first glance there can be no link between these two phenomena. However, both phenomena result, each in its own way, in the suffering of the African population in general, and that of West Africa in particular. Furthermore, both phenomena follow not only on from protests but also from the demands of the populations – or at least a section of them – in the countries concerned. Finally, another point of similarity is the economic rationale underpinning both phenomena: unemployment in one case, and underdevelopment or domination in the other. Thus, notwithstanding the significant

differences between them, it is not so incongruous to ask whether there is a link between these two phenomena?

To address this question, we aim to understand the underlying motivations (or fundamental reasons) behind these two phenomena. Specifically, we will: 1) to assess the analytical foundations underpinning the diagnoses on which these phenomena are based, 2) to examine these two phenomena as solutions to the problems at hand, and 3) to evaluate their effectiveness as solutions to the problems at hand.

To this end, our methodological approach involves applying a political economy analysis. The remainder of this two-page document is structured as follows. In the next section, we will show that the diagnoses of the problems at hand were flawed. In the third section, we will demonstrate that these phenomena constitute a

way of applying the principle of national sovereignty, which is thus seen as the solution adopted. In the fourth section, we will show that these two phenomena are ineffective solutions to the problems at hand. We will have a fifth section to conclude our analysis.

Two Problems and Two Incorrect Diagnoses of their Causes

Terrorism and persistent political violence have been a reality in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger for years, as ACLED data show (see Appendix, Figure 1) [1]. These problems, coupled with French inefficiency, laxity or even complicity, stem from France's determination to continue exploiting the economies of all French-speaking African countries, and those of these three West African nations in particular. France's predatory agenda is carried out with the complicity of the leaders of French-speaking African countries,

notably those who are members of ECOWAS. This complicity stems from the need for political recognition on the part of leaders who have been improperly elected or who cling to supreme power in their respective countries by tampering with constitutions and engaging in other subversive acts. This collusion is endorsed by the other (non-French-speaking) member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as they employ the same mechanisms to gain or retain power in their own countries. Such are the problem and the analysis of its causes in the AES countries, which led to their withdrawal from ECOWAS in 2025. The notion of predation by France and, more generally, by Western capitalist countries in Africa is not new. It stems from the work of Amin, Emanuel [2,3] and many other authors. It has continued to be supported by economists such as Hugon [4] and Onwutuebe (2023).

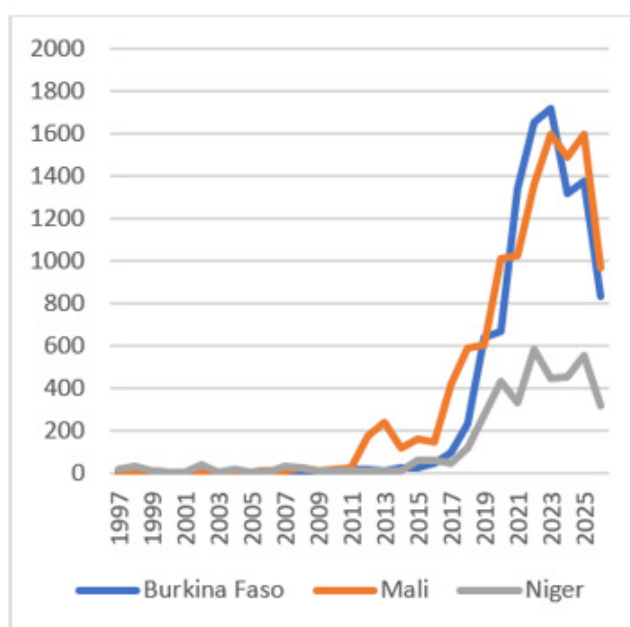


Figure 1: Trends in the number of clashes, explosions/remote violence and acts of violence against civilians over the period 1997–2026 in the AES countries.

Sources: ACLED data (<https://acleddata.com/aggregated/number-political-violence-events-country-month-year>).

This analysis of the problems of terrorism and political violence in the Sahelian countries of West Africa is based on at least three main reasons. Firstly, political violence and terrorism are not new in these countries, even though terrorism went by different names in the period following independence. Thus, coups d'état has been rife in these three countries since their independence [5]. Secondly, accepting this analysis implies that these three countries (their populations and leaders) have always been dependent on France's decisions; in other words, that they are not acting rationally – otherwise, the perfect alignment between France's decisions and those of the leaders of the time would be difficult to conceive of, unless one resorts to conspiracy theories. Then, analyzing from

another angle, if this continued predation of Francophone African economies by France were justified, one would observe, in reality, numerous conflicts between France and these countries since the 1960s stemming from tensions over resource allocation. Finally, to conclude, the root cause of terrorism and political violence is primarily the absence of socio-political agreements accepted by all parties. The article by Lemarchand [6] is instructive on this subject, as is that of Cilliers [7].

High unemployment and high immigration rates are a reality in South Africa, as demonstrated by World Bank statistics (see Appendix, Figure 2) [8]. Against this backdrop, it is argued that the

high rate of immigration – particularly from sub-Saharan Africa – is the main cause of the high unemployment rate among South African-born citizens. The causal link between the immigration rate and the unemployment rate among South African-born citizens thus runs from immigration to unemployment, as black African immigrants flee unemployment and poverty in their respective

countries in search of better social conditions and jobs in South Africa. These black African immigrants come from countries whose economies are still being exploited by Western nations, notably France, whereas the South African population has waged a hard-fought battle against this exploitation, including against white South Africans.

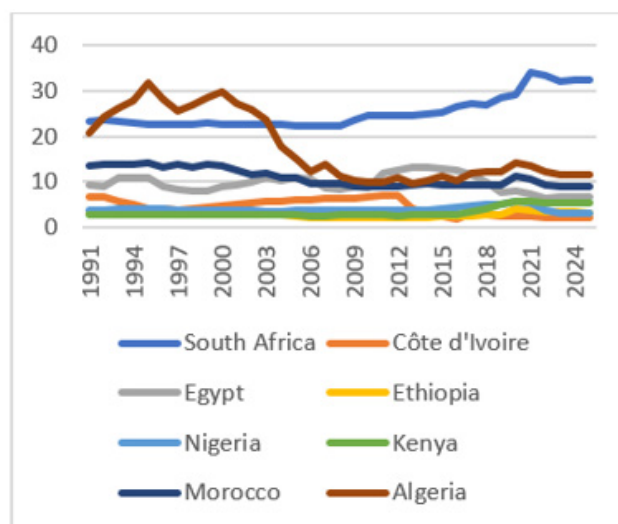


Figure 2: Trends in the overall unemployment rate in selected African countries from 1991 to 2025.

Sources: World Bank data.

This assessment is flawed in several respects. Firstly, whilst the determinants of unemployment are certainly political and institutional, they are also linked to the individual characteristics of the jobseeker. In short, employment policy choices alone do not explain the unemployment of any given individual. Secondly, and to supplement the first argument, the various breakdowns of unemployment statistics in South Africa do not appear to reveal any evidence of discrimination against South African nationals in the South African labour market. Furthermore, it would be surprising, if not impossible, for a political authority in South Africa to agree to implement a discriminatory employment policy to the detriment of South Africans, given the potential political consequences for any political party in light of the legacy of the struggle against apartheid. Finally, World Bank statistics show that the proportion of migrants in South Africa's total population is relatively low – around 4.11 per cent in 2024. This proportion cannot be held responsible for an unemployment rate of around 32 per cent.

Two ways of applying the principle of national sovereignty

The withdrawal of the member states of the Alliance of Sahelian States from ECOWAS in January 2025 and the crackdown on African migrants in South Africa in 2026 are, in reality, two ways of applying the principle of national sovereignty. In the case of the AES countries' withdrawal from ECOWAS, the analysis of the causes of terrorism

and political violence suggests that the exploitation of African economies is comprehensive and all-encompassing. Under these circumstances, only a breakaway from the periphery of its center – as described by Amin (1970) [2] – enables a country to escape such exploitation. It is therefore this breakaway that has been brought about by the leaders of the AES countries. A breakaway that enables the AES countries to restore their sovereignty over their economies, their security and their policies in all areas of state governance.

Similarly, the misdiagnosis of unemployment in South Africa means that solidarity amongst Africans cannot take precedence over the need for every South African to have a decent job or a job that enables them to support themselves. Consequently, driving immigrants out of their jobs in order to allocate them to South Africans is simply a way of exercising South Africans' freedom to decide, as they see fit, how to organize their country's economy within its borders, as they possess this freedom by virtue of national sovereignty. The crackdown on immigrants in South Africa is simply an application of the principle of national sovereignty in the field of employment.

National Sovereignty: an ineffective solution to both problems

The principle of sovereignty, when applied as a solution to the problems at hand, proves ineffective in practice and in principle, for at least two main reasons. Firstly, because the problems facing these

countries do not relate to challenges to their national sovereignty, even though some sources of terrorism in Africa are international in nature. Secondly, the principle of national sovereignty, as applied in the field of international economic relations today, is more likely to fail or even exacerbate the original problem. The increase in disruptive activity observed in the AES countries following their break with France and ECOWAS, on the one hand, and the threats of reciprocal action by other African countries towards South Africa, both in terms of immigration and foreign direct investment, support our assertion.

Secondly, even if the withdrawal of the ESA countries from ECOWAS and the expulsion of foreigners by the South Africans were based on sound analysis, the decision to prioritize national sovereignty would be a mistake. Indeed, for any country today to consider tackling problems such as unemployment, terrorism and political violence in isolation would be ineffective, at least in part given the degree of interdependence between the world's economies. In this regard, it should be noted that in the field of international trade, this inefficiency is now well established. Indeed, the existence of borders does not guarantee a better allocation of global resources, nor even of national resources [9-11].

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyze the potential link between the crackdown on African migrants in South Africa in 2026 and the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS in 2025. To this end, we conducted a political economy analysis using a hypothetical-deductive approach. Our conclusion is that a link does indeed exist on at least four levels. First, these two phenomena are linked by the misdiagnosis of the real causes of existing problems. This misdiagnosis led them to find scapegoats in the West and in Black Africa. Second, they are linked by the application of the principle of sovereignty as the sole solution to the problems posed.

Third, they are linked by the amplification of the initial problems, thus rendering the application of the principle of national sovereignty a solution ineffective. Finally, these two phenomena complicate the process of African integration through the AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area). It is therefore high time that our Black African states addressed the real problems facing their populations by making accurate assessments rather than resorting to political posturing.

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