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Political Instability: A Barrier to Regional Economic Integration in Africa

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Abstract:

Regional economic integration (REI) is a key strategy for promoting economic growth and development in Africa. However, in spite of the enormous potential for REI to promote growth, political instability, poses a major hurdle to the functioning of REI. This article examines the impact of political instability on REI in three regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa: the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In this article we indicate that political instability has a negative impact on REI in all three REI in Africa. We show that in the EAC, political instability has led to the suspension of trade between member states, the delay of regional projects, and a loss of confidence from external investors. We further point out that political instability has contributed to the outbreak of conflict, the displacement of people, and the destruction of infrastructure in SADC. Finally, we argue that political instability has led to coups d'état, civil wars, and the displacement of millions of people in ECOWAS. The article concludes that political instability is a major obstacle to REI in Africa. In order to achieve the full benefits of REI, African countries must work to address the root causes of political instability. These include promoting good governance, strengthening institutions, and addressing economic inequality and poverty.

Keywords: **Regional economic integration, political instability, Africa, EAC, SADC, ECOWAS**

Introduction

Regional economic integration has been a key trend in the global economy in recent decades, with countries coming together to form closer economic ties in order to promote greater economic efficiency, increase trade and investment flows, and create a more level playing field for businesses operating in the participating countries(Obasaju et al., 2021). From a global perspective, there are several notable examples of regional economic integration. The European Union (EU) is perhaps the most comprehensive example, with its member states sharing a single market, a customs union, and a common currency (Falkner, 2010). Other examples include the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (ERIA, 2012).

In Africa, there have been several regional economic integration initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and development on the continent (Draper, 2010). These include the African Union (AU) and its various organs, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to create a single market for goods and services among member states (*Hippolyte Fofack*, 2018). Other initiatives include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC).There have been some notable successes in regional economic integration in Africa. For example, the East African Community (EAC) has made significant progress in integrating its member states through the establishment of a customs union and a common market. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also made progress in promoting economic integration, with the establishment of a free trade area and efforts to harmonize trade policies. Regional economic integration initiatives in Africa have had some successes in promoting economic growth and development, but they also face significant challenges. Some of the main challenges is the lack of infrastructure and institutional capacity in many African countries, which can make it difficult to implement and enforce regional trade agreements. In addition, there is often a lack of political will and commitment to regional economic integration among some African leaders, which can lead to delays and setbacks in the implementation of regional economic integration initiatives (Jiboku,2015).

But amidst these challenges, political instability and insecurity within the member states has stood out as one of the biggest hindrances towards achieving the goals of regional economic integrations, therefore the central argument of this article is that political instability is the major hinderance towards the growth and development of REIs in Africa. The article achieves this aim through highlighting the different ways in which political instability has contributed to the underperformance of REI in EAC, ECOWAS and SADC. For purposes of this paper, Political instability is defined as a set of activities or events that aim to change or actually change the political system of a country through undemocratic ways (Gyimah-Brempong and Traynor,1999) This paper urges that insecurities and political instabilities have weakened the REIs in four ways; disruption of trade delayed or canceled projects, reduced investor confidence, decline in trust and cooperation, this paper will be divided into two sections. In section one brief recent information about the EAC, ECOWAs and SADC will be elucidated, the ways in which political instability has hindered the development of these regional economic integration will be provided in section two

Section One

In this section, a brief introduction and information about the some of the biggest three regional economic integration in Africa i.e. EAC, ECOWAS and SADC. In doing so this chapter provides a brief background and also explore the regional economic integrations', world trade shares, GDP per capita, unemployment and employment rates, and foreign capital flows. The chapter starts off focusing on the East African Community, followed with the Southern African Development Community and ends with The Economic Community of Western African States

The East African Community

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organization that was established in 1967 with the signing of the East African Cooperation Treaty by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The original EAC collapsed in 1977 due to political differences between the member states, but was revived in 2000 with the signing of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community. The EAC currently has seven member states: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda and the most recent entrant The Democratic Republic of Congo. The EAC has a wide range of objectives, including promoting trade and investment, improving infrastructure, enhancing regional security, and fostering social and cultural cooperation among its member states. In order to achieve these objectives, the EAC has implemented a number of initiatives, such as the establishment of a common market, customs union, and monetary union (Mcintyre, 2005).

The EAC's common market allows for the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital among its member states. This has led to increased trade and investment flows within the region and has helped to promote economic growth and development. The EAC's customs union, which was established in 2005, has reduced trade barriers among its member states, making it easier and cheaper for businesses to trade across borders(Mayer, T., Thoenig, M. & Wolf, S. 2016). The EAC's monetary union aims to create a single currency for the region, which would further facilitate trade and investment among member states (Katembo, 2008). However, progress towards this goal has been slow, with a number of challenges still to be addressed, such as harmonizing macroeconomic policies and achieving fiscal convergence among member states (Davoodi, n.d.).

The EAC has also made efforts to improve infrastructure within the region, such as the construction of a new railway line linking Kenya and Uganda and the development of a regional power grid to increase access to electricity. Despite its successes, the EAC faces a number of challenges, including political tensions among member states, disparities in economic development and infrastructure, and the need for greater institutional capacity and stronger enforcement of regional agreements (Kagwanja, 2007). However, the EAC remains an important regional bloc in East Africa, with significant potential for promoting economic growth and development and improving regional cooperation and stability.

Table 1.1 A Table Showing Some Key Macroeconomic Indicators In Eac Member States (2020-2021)

COUNTRY	**YEAR**	**GDP per capita (current US$)**	**Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)**	**Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$)**	**Exports of goods and services (current US$)**	**Imports of goods and services (current US$)**	**PO**
KENYA	2020	1936	5.6	426,305,189	9,703,784,283	17,711,640,494	51,9
KENYA	2021	2081	5.6	463,348,935	11,662,731,888	22,179,806,763	53,0
UGANDA	2020	846	4.5	873,769,790	5,796,021,005	8,116,375,563	44,4
UGANDA	2021	883	4.2	1,100,458,610	6,396,009,317	10,510,437,217	45,8
TANZANIA	2020	1042	2.7	684,887,679	8,921,772,261	9,554,154,049	61,7
TANZANIA	2021	1099	2.7	921,826,558	9,722,217,412	11,568,526,504	63,5
BURUNDI	2020	216	1	8,473,943	120,542,058	588,863,369	12,2
BURUNDI	2021	221	1.1	7,898,029	138,998,735	662,106,262	12,5
RWANDA	2020	774	13	152,614,120	1,966,296,256	3,648,739,820	13,1
RWANDA	2021	822	13.3	211,896,128	2,110,469,007	3,851,166,792	13,4
DRC	2020	524	5.1	1,498,084,807	13,935,463,039	14,559,943,484	92,8
DRC	2021	577	5.1	1,677,673,789	22,353,947,838	22193237569	95,8
SOUTH SUDAN	2020	N/A	13.7	17,500,000	N/A	N/A	10,6
SOUTH SUDAN	2021	N/A	13.4	67,500,000	N/A	N/A	10,7

SOURCE: WORLD BANK INDICATORS 2020

From the table above, Kenya had the highest GDP per capita of 2081 in 2021 followed by Tanzania which had a total of 1099 US dollars, Burundi which is the poorest country in Africa had the lowest GDP per capita of only 221 in 2021, and in recent times it has been associated by low intensity political instabilities mostly concerned with killing of political opponents and kidnappings. The Democratic Republic of Congo in spite of its richness in numerous minerals and natural resources had the second lowest GDP per capita in the EAC of only 577 us dollars in 2021, this could mostly be explained by the un ending political conflicts and wars with the Democratic Republic Of Congo.

Political Instabilities In EAC

In February 2021, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) emphasized the need for **political integration** within the EAC. This integration involves a triad approach, including a common foreign policy, peace and security, and good governance. EALA called for strong political will. There have been various political instabilities in EAC like the Burundi Crisis. Burundi has experienced significant political turmoil from The **coup attempt** in May 2015 which widened splits along political lines among EAC member states and undermined a coherent stance on Burundi's crisis. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a newer EAC member, faces security issues is also known for its recurrent political instabilities and a big number of rebel groups are located in DRC (Larmer and Clark, 2013). The political instabilities in East African Community (EAC) are due to a number of factors, including: Ideological differences, State sovereignty, Exchange controls and import restrictions, Difficulty harmonizing economic policies, Weak institutional structures and Pre-existing tensions between governments

Southern African Development Community

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional intergovernmental organization that was established in 1980 with the adoption of the Lusaka Declaration by nine southern African countries. The organization has its headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana and currently has 16 member states: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The primary goal of SADC is to promote regional economic integration and development in southern Africa. SADC aims to achieve this goal through a range of initiatives, including the promotion of trade and investment, the establishment of a free trade area, the development of infrastructure, and the promotion of political and security cooperation among its member states.

SADC has made significant progress in promoting economic integration and development in the region. In 2008, SADC established a free trade area, which has helped to increase trade and investment flows among the member states. SADC has also established a number of institutions to support its economic integration efforts, including the SADC Secretariat, the SADC Development Finance Resource Centre, and the SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency(Mayer, T., Thoenig, M. & Wolf, S. 2016)). In addition to economic integration, SADC also promotes political and security cooperation among its member states. The organization has played a key role in promoting peace and stability in the region, with efforts to address conflicts in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe. Despite its successes, SADC also faces several challenges to its continued success. These include economic disparities among the member states, weak institutions and governance in some member states, and the ongoing impact of conflicts and instability in some parts of the region (Itai, 2014). SADC also faces competition from other regional integration initiatives in Africa, such as the East African Community and the Economic Community of West African States.

In summary according to (SADC statistics 2023) population 366million 2019, gdp at current prices us$657400million2020, FDI inflows us$6620million 2020 GDP growth-4%, total merchandise trade us$317664million 2020, total intra-SADC merchandise trade us$58743million 2020

Table 1.2. A Table Showing Some of the Macroeconomic Indicators from SADC member states in the Year 2021

Country	GDP per capita (current US$)	Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	Unemployment, total (% of total labor force)	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$)	Exports of goods and services (current US$)	Imports of goods and services (current US$)
Angola	1953.533757	25.75426565	10.38399982	-4355116553	29843731085	1091770759
Botswana	6805.221274	7.240977656	21.15500069	55155205.35	7858650140	8783714114
Comoros	1577.471027	N/A	8.979000092	4024772.182	140072575	407884683.9
Congo, Dem. Rep.	577.2092152	N/A	5.111999989	1677673790	22353947839	2219323756

Eswatini	3978.403528	N/A	24.55999947	112865288.3	2137038523	2177895951
Lesotho	1094.098185	6.04774592	18.29299927	-12372192.46	N/A	N/A
Madagascar	500.511032	5.812251188	2.309999943	357536665.3	3042228929	4254240707
Malawi	634.8356601	N/A	5.657999992	46413011.47	N/A	N/A
Mauritius	9106.237202	4.028528882	7.656000137	253189252.8	5077292820	6196761497
Mozambique	491.8391128	5.688486991	3.938999891	5295396105	4951390235	10859636829
Namibia	4865.557765	3.616905301	21.26799965	649117215.9	3907060129	5907894998
Seychelles	14653.30939	N/A	N/A	111455091.6	1051705334	1169822777
South Africa	7055.044776	4.611672178	28.77000046	41296138765	1.30707E+11	1.04855E+11
Tanzania	1099.287598	3.690919588	2.74000001	921826558.4	9722217412	11568526505
Zambia	1137.343633	22.02123429	6.21999979	-823082735.9	11534130929	7511102230
Zimbabwe	1773.920411	98.54610509	8.067000389	166000000	7209542056	8767062802

SOURCE: World Bank Indicators

From the table above Mozambique had the lowest GDP per capita of just 491 us dollars followed by Madagascar and Democratic Republic of Congo which had less than 600 GDP per capita in 2021, the country which had a better performance in terms of GDP per capita according to the 2021 world bank data was Seychelles was the small island of only 99,258 and it had a GDP per capita of 14653 us dollars. south Africa which is by far the better performing economy in the SADC block had a GDP per capita of 7055 in 2021, south Africa also had a total of more than 44 billion us dollars in foreign direct investment inflows

The Economic Community Of West African States

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1975. The organization has its headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria and currently has 15 member states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The main objective of ECOWAS is to promote economic integration and development in the West African region. The organization has made significant progress in promoting economic integration, with the establishment of a free trade area in 1979 and a customs union in 1990, which aims to eliminate barriers to trade among member states (Ajide & Raheem, 2016).

ECOWAS also works to promote political and security cooperation among its member states, with efforts to address regional conflicts and promote peace and stability. The organization has also made progress in promoting social and cultural cooperation among its member states, with efforts to harmonize education, health, and other social policies. However, ECOWAS also faces several challenges, including economic disparities among its member states, political instability in some countries, and concerns about corruption and weak institutions in some member states (Arthur, 2010). In addition, the organization has struggled to address regional conflicts, such as the ongoing conflict in the Sahel region and the political crisis in Mali. Despite these challenges, ECOWAS remains an important organization for promoting regional integration and cooperation in West Africa, and has the potential to play a key role in promoting economic growth and development in the region.

According to the (World Bank, 2022) income classification, six member countries are classified as lower middle-income and the other nine members are classified as low-income countries. ECOWAS had the fourth largest economy among Africa's RECs in 2019, with an estimated GDP of US$816.4 billion, representing about 27% of the continent's economy. This constituted an increase of 234.3% from 1990, when the GDP was estimated at US$244.2 billion.

The economy of ECOWAS is driven mainly by that of Nigeria, whose GDP of US$560.7 billion in 2019 constituted 68.7% of the total economy of ECOWAS; this was higher than all the economies of the other member countries put together. The smallest economies in ECOWAS are those of Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Cape Verde, each representing less than 0.3% of the economy of ECOWAS.

In ECOWAS, the average GDP per capita climbed from US$2 824 in 1990 to US$4 373 in 2019, an increase of 54.9 percent. The region's GDP per person in 2019 was US$5,289, which was 82.6 percent of the average for Africa. After the Southern African Development Community, CEN-SAD, and AMU, it is the fourth-highest REC in Africa In member nations, GDP per capita ranges from US$7 533 in Cape Verde, to US$5 773 in Nigeria, and US$4 784 in Ghana, to US$1000 in Niger, in Liberia US$1 160, and US$1 427 in ESIERA LEONE. Nigeria's vast oil reserves are responsible for its greater GDP per capita, but Ghana's GDP is the consequence of its abundant natural resources, including cocoa, gold, and, more recently, significant oil reserves. . In the case of Cape Verde, a thriving tourism industry and a tiny population can account for the country's greater GDP per capita. Niger, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, in contrast, are poorer nations as a result of civil conflicts and instability. (World Bank, 2021)

TABLE 1.3 **A Table Showing Some Key Macroeconomic Indicators In ECOWAS Member States (2021)**

	GDP per capita (current US$)	Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$)	Exports of goods and services (current US$)	Imports of goods and services (current US$)
Benin	1319.154995	1.751999974	1.733539627	345985235.7	4878137303	5878287109
Burkina Faso	893.0771558	5.231999874	3.653532872	137372387.6	N/A	N/A
Cabo Verde	3293.233054	13.90999985	1.862152975	104735749.6	476614904.2	1123172278
Cote d'Ivoire	2549.041297	2.816999912	4.091951897	1392435143	16083020558	15941291126
Gambia, The	772.1523951	4.980999947	7.370347589	251822628.8	131923456.4	726103441
Ghana	2363.299296	3.91899991	9.971088675	2612789793	23206601901	22131745925
Guinea	1189.175999	5.820000172	12.59706951	197610000	10349491215	10953261528
Guinea-Bissau	795.1185693	3.687000036	2.242488796	23815238.33	N/A	N/A
Liberia	675.6631858	3.671999931	N/A	45680000	N/A	NA
Mali	873.7948624	2.602999926	3.925602831	639944165.4	5662920686	7697809646
Niger	590.6294548	0.667999983	3.837868028	594829131.8	1533845341	4060936442
Nigeria	2065.749068	5.93599987	16.95284572	3313210000	47338716492	52186247815
Senegal	1636.893209	3.497999907	N/A	2231904247	6164686203	11312124798
Sierra Leone	480.0392113	3.697000027	11.87395888	212289192.8	684275812.6	1676020509
Togo	973.2061291	4.175000191	N/A	129885315	1961685800	2879433005

SOURCE: WORLD BANK INDICATORS

From the table above, Mali had the lowest GDP per capita mounting to a total of only 675 us dollars in 2021, the country with the highest GDP per capita in ECOWAS was Cabo Verde which had a total of 3293. Much as Cabo Verde has got the highest GDP per capita, it also happens to have the highest rate of unemployment in the community

Section Two

Political instability has had a significant negative impact on the achievement of the goals of regional economic integration in Africa (Fosu, 2003). In a study conducted by Aisen and Veiga,(2013) about the impact of political instability and economic growth, the results of the study showed that political instabilities lower economic growth through reducing on the total factor productivity and reducing on both the physical and capital accumulation .According to (SIPRI Yearbook, 2022) There were at least 18 states in sub-Saharan Africa with active armed conflicts in 2021.In ECOWAS these included Niger, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Nigeria, Benin, Chad, and in EAC these were; Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) South Sudan, and some low intensity conflicts in Burundi , Uganda and Kenya . In SADC countries like Madagascar and Mozambique also experienced low intensity conflicts. In this chapter some of the ways in which political instability has hampered regional economic integrations from achieving its goals. The ways in which political instabilities have undermined the growth of REIs in Africa are explained below

Disruption Of Trade

Whereas other regional economic integrations like the European Union have benefitted from steps like the single market, because of the political instabilities, this is far from the case when it comes to regional integrations in Africa. This is so because political instabilities have at times led to the closure of borders and the imposition of trade barriers. For example, in the East African Community, border closures due to political instability have disrupted the movement of goods, causing significant losses to businesses and reducing economic activity (ADES Goldman & Hak Chua, 1997). Also according to (Compaoré et al., 2020) it's a highly held view that the activities like wars in neighboring countries usually have negative effects in the member countries, as such political instabilities have led to a reduction in trade flows, increase costs, and limit the opportunities for businesses to operate across borders, ultimately reducing economic growth and development in both the countries experiencing the conflicts and the neighboring member countries

Political instability in Burundi led to the closure of the border between Burundi and Rwanda which had a significant impact on trade between the two countries abilities to trade among each other (Bello-Schünemann and Moyer,2018),. The closure of the border led to a shortage of goods in Rwanda, as many products are imported from Burundi, and caused a decline in exports from Rwanda to Burundi. This disruption in trade caused significant losses to businesses and reduced economic activity in both countries (Adefeso & Adefeso, 2018). Another example of political instability disrupting trade can be seen in the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2013, the flow of goods and services between South Sudan and its neighbors, including Uganda and Kenya, has been disrupted due to the closure of borders and the imposition of trade barriers. This has led to shortages of goods, increased prices, and reduced economic growth in both South Sudan and neighboring countries. Moreover, the imposition of trade barriers and border closures led to increased costs for businesses, which can reduce their competitiveness in the market. This has led to a decline in cross-border trade and reduced economic growth in the region. Furthermore, political instability can also lead to the closure of businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, which are more vulnerable to economic shocks. For example, in South Sudan, political instability and conflict have led to the closure of many businesses, resulting in significant job losses and a decline in economic activity

In conclusion, political instability can have a significant impact on trade and economic growth in regional economic integration agreements, as seen in the East African Community and other regional blocs in Africa. By addressing the root causes of political instability, promoting cooperation and trust among member states, and addressing trade barriers and border closures, regional organizations can help to promote economic growth and sustainable development in the region

Reduced Investor Confidence:

Political instability can reduce investor confidence, leading to a decline in foreign direct investment (Adefeso & Adefeso, 2018). This can limit the opportunities for businesses to operate across borders and contribute to economic growth. In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been working towards promoting economic cooperation and integration among its member states. However, political instability in countries such as Guinea, Mali, and Nigeria has had a significant impact on investor confidence in the region (Okafor, 2017). For instance, in 2021, after a military coup in Guinea, investors became cautious about investing in the country, The Decline in foreign direct investment to Nigeria, the biggest oil exporter in Africa caused by constant attacks by terrorist groups like Boko Haram IS leading to a decline in foreign direct investment. This, in turn, impacted the economy of the country and the region as a whole(Asiedu, 2000).Similarly, the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has led to a decline in investor confidence in the region, limiting opportunities for businesses to operate across borders and contribute to economic growth. The conflict has also led to a decline in trust and cooperation among member states, making it more difficult to work together on regional initiatives.

Furthermore, political instability can lead to a decline in the credibility of regional institutions and frameworks, which can further erode investor confidence. For example, the political crisis in Burundi led to the withdrawal of funding from international donors, including the European Union, which had a significant impact on the country's economy .political instability have had the tendency of disrupting supply chains, increasing costs, reducing efficiency, and decreasing economic activity. Hence leading to a reduction in the amount of trade that is would be achieved as a result of the integration

Delayed or Canceled Projects:

Ades and Chua, (1997) have argued that political instability in neighboring countries, has an adverse impact on other country's economic performance, they further argue that the magnitude of the negative effects of wars in neighboring country is equal to that of a low intensity conflict to countries in close proximity, because of this, development projects that would have taken on in the region can all be equally affected by an occurrence of a war in just one neighboring country and hence delaying the development projects. This undermines the goals of the integration due to the delay or cancellation of regional projects, reducing the potential benefits of economic integration. This delay in or cancellation in projects is at times manifested by the divergence from planned projects of fund to less productive ventures such as buying weapons and border patrol (Okafor, 2017) .For instance, the development of a railway line connecting Cameroon, Chad, and Central African Republic has been delayed due to political instability in the Central African Republic, leading to increased costs and a slower pace of economic integration. Similarly, a regional fiber optic cable project has been delayed due to political instability in Chad, leading to a lack of access to high-speed internet, which is essential for businesses to operate efficiently. Moreover, political instability can lead to the cancellation of regional projects, further reducing the potential benefits of economic integration. For example, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project, which aims to transport oil from Uganda to the Tanzanian port of Tanga, was delayed due to political instability in Uganda, and there were concerns about the environmental impact of the project. As a result, the project's international partners have threatened to cancel the project altogether, which could lead to a significant loss of potential economic benefits for the region.

Furthermore, delays and cancellations of projects due to political instability can lead to a decline in investor confidence, as investors become hesitant to invest in projects that may face political risks. This can further hinder economic development and integration in the region, limiting opportunities for businesses to expand and contribute to economic growth. In conclusion, political instability can lead to the delay or cancellation of regional projects, reducing the potential benefits of economic integration. By promoting stability and cooperation among member states, regional organizations can help to mitigate the negative impacts of political instability on regional projects, enabling businesses to operate more efficiently and contribute to economic growth

Reduced Regional Cooperation:

Political instability can lead to a decline in trust and cooperation among member states in regional economic integration agreements. This can make it difficult to achieve the goals of regional economic integration and can lead to the disintegration of these agreements (Strachan, 2018). When political instability occurs within a regional economic integration agreement, it can cause member states to become more inward-looking and less willing to cooperate with each other. This reduction in cooperation can manifest in various ways, such as the imposition of trade barriers, reduced financial contributions to regional institutions, and a decline in diplomatic engagement between member states. For instance, in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), political instability in Zimbabwe led to the imposition of trade restrictions by some member states, reducing trade flows and hindering the achievement of the organization's goals.

Furthermore, political instability can also lead to a decline in trust among member states, making it more difficult to work together on regional initiatives. This lack of trust can manifest in various ways, such as disagreements over the allocation of resources, disputes over the implementation of regional policies, and a lack of confidence in the integrity of regional institutions. For example, in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), political instability in Mali led to a lack of trust among member states, with some members expressing concern about the legitimacy of the transitional government established after a coup (Atuobi, 2007.). This lack of trust has made it more difficult for ECOWAS to achieve its goals of promoting peace and economic development in the region.

Moreover, a decline in trust and cooperation among member states can lead to the disintegration of regional economic integration agreements. This disintegration can occur when member states become more focused on their individual interests and less willing to cooperate with each other, leading to the dissolution of the organization. For instance, the disintegration of the East African Community in 1977 was due to political differences among member states, which made it difficult to maintain a common vision for economic integration in the region (El-Affendi, 2009). In conclusion, political instability can lead to a reduction in trust and cooperation among member states, making it more challenging to achieve the goals of regional economic integration. By promoting stability and cooperation among member states, regional organizations can help to mitigate the negative impacts of political instability on regional economic integration, enabling businesses to operate more efficiently and contribute to economic growth

In conclusion, political instability is a significant challenge to regional economic integration in Africa, and can undermine the achievement of the goals of these agreements. To address this challenge, it is important for regional organizations to work with member states to promote good governance, strengthening institutions, and addressing economic inequality and poverty. By doing so, according to Ades and Chua, (1997) the benefits got from minimizing regional political instability not only benefit the country experiencing the conflict but also the region as a whole

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