

ELECTORAL REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN WEST AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND GHANA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC.

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Abstract

The study titled "Electoral Reforms and Democratic Consolidation in West Africa: A comparative study of Nigeria and Ghana's Fourth Republic investigated the role of electoral reforms in promoting democratic consolidation in West Africa, a sub region that has in recent times witnessed a resurgence of military coups and counter coups, democratic decline occasioned by electoral malpractices, manifested in forms like election results mutilations and manipulations, vote buying, registration of under aged voters, electoral violence, political apathy expressed in low voters turn out, endemic poverty, amongst others have posed a great challenge to democratic

consolidation. To carry out the study, Data were generated from secondary sources and analyzed qualitatively. The study was anchored on the institutional theory of democratic consolidation as its theoretical framework. The study findings revealed that electoral reforms have the prospects of enhancing democratic consolidation in West Africa in general and Nigeria and Ghana in particular and has contributed immensely in strengthening the electoral process and enhancing democratic consolidation more in Ghana than in Nigeria but has not significantly promoted democratic consolidation as allegations of electoral malpractice, pockets of electoral violence, electoral apathy, and other election related vices still persist. The study recommends, amongst others, periodic electoral reforms, amendment of some relevant sections of the 1999 and 1992 Nigeria and Ghana Constitutions, value reorientation for more civic engagements amongst others as conditions necessary to ensure the promotion of democratic consolidation through electoral reforms not just for Nigeria and Ghana, but for the West African sub region particularly and for Africa generally.

Keywords: Electoral Reform, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria, Ghana.

Introduction

With the independence of most of the countries in West African sub-region in the late 1950's, early 1960's and 1970's, parliamentary democracy was adopted as elections were held. Soon, these newly independent states, particularly Nigeria and Ghana experienced a surge in military coups and counter coups. Firstly in the mid

1960's and 1970's, and secondly in the 1980s' and early 1990's sweeping across the region. The reasons for these coups includes political crises and instability, ethno-religious induced tensions, corruption, bad and inept leadership, mutual suspicion and distrust amongst the elites of various ethnic groups, fear of domination, civil unrest, amongst others.

With the third wave of democratization which began in the late 1980's and early 1990's, most countries in West Africa experienced a transition from military rule to a democratically elected civilian government. This period also saw the introduction of one form of electoral reforms or the other in West Africa, particularly in Ghana, and then, Nigeria in order to improve the electoral process for the purposes of transparency, fairness, integrity and inclusiveness. After each election circle, countries in West Africa will initiate one electoral reform or the other to strengthen her electoral process, conduct a free, fair and credible elections to ensure the general acceptance of the electoral outcome with a view enhance the prospect of democratic consolidation. Despite all efforts at reforming the electoral processes in Nigeria and Ghana, democratic consolidation appears to be out of reach. Rather than consolidating on the gains of electoral reforms, there has been democratic decline occasioned by electoral malpractices manifested in forms of election results mutilations and manipulations, vote buying, registration of under aged voters, electoral violence, political apathy expressed in low voters turn out, insecurity, endemic poverty, underdevelopment, inept and corrupt leadership,

amongst others have posed a great challenge to democratic consolidation.

With the resurgence of military coups in the sub-region, particularly in Guinea Bissau (February 1, 2022), Burkina-Faso (Jan, 24 2022), Guinea (September 5, 2021), Niger (March 31, 2021), Mali (May 24, 2021), (Suleiman, 2024), the growing influence and activities of terrorist and Bandits in the sub-region, democratic backsliding as a result of citizens frustration with their economic and social conditions, These and many more have questioned the democratic credentials of states in the West African sub-region, particularly, Nigeria and Ghana as democracy appears to be under existential threat. Can electoral reforms salvage the situation and ensure that democracy is consolidated in West Africa in general and in Nigeria and Ghana in particular? This is the problem the study investigated.

Conceptual Clarification

Electoral Reforms

Electoral reform as a concept has so many meanings and interpretations from scholars as each attempt to explain it from his or her own perspective, exposure, experience and understanding. Every society has laid down rules, regulations and laws that guide the conduct of elections. From time to time, these laws are reviewed, amended, or altered to accommodate the changes of the times. These review or changes captures the concept of “Electoral Reforms”: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA (2014:1), submits thus:

Electoral reform is an integral part of democratic development. In broad terms, electoral reforms are undertaken to improve the electoral process by promoting the electoral rights of citizens and by operationalizing key principles such as impartiality, inclusiveness, transparency, integrity and accuracy. Continuous reflection, reform and adoption of the legal framework governing electoral processes that are based on experiences, reviews and assessments are necessary in both old and new democracies.

Supporting the above, Matthew (2023) agrees that “... electoral reforms are not carried out in a vacuum, but to achieve a specific goal.” Ughulu and Ihaza (2023), contend that electoral reforms may serve the following:

- i. To increase the impartiality of the electoral body and other institutions involved in the administration of elections such as the police and the court.
- ii. To guarantee the electoral body’s inclusivity, independence and financial autonomy.
- iii. And to ensure transparency, the expansion of the franchise, broader participation, and the integrity of the process.

It encompasses adjustments to electoral rules, procedures and institutions to improve democratic governance (Solomon and Jaja, 2024).

Democratic Consolidation

In most of the available academic literatures, consolidation of democracy means either to remove the threat of democratic breakdown or to move towards some higher stage of democratic performance (or both things together). A consolidated democracy is meant to be either a crisis-proof democracy or a high-quality democracy or both things altogether (Shelder, 1997). Most authors who wrote extensively on democratic consolidation either think of it as “the stabilization of democracy” or the deepening of democracy.” (Schelder, 1997:24).

Yagbooyaju (2013) further opines that democratic consolidation could be said to effectively prevail in most mature and advanced democracies of the world, where many of the prominent democratic principles largely constitutes the political culture. According to Okeke (2015:29), democratic consolidation critically refers to the growing of the defense mechanism of democracy. Therefore, it is a process and not an accomplishment. The building of a consolidated democracy involves the affirmation and strengthening of certain institutions, such as the electoral system, vibrant political parties, judicial independence and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the institutional theory of Democratic Consolidation. The theory is rooted in the writings and seminar work of scholars like Juan Linz, a prominent Spanish-American Sociologist and political scientist in his

work, co-authored with Alfred Stepan, an American political scientist and sociologist, titled “Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe” published in 1996. Other notable proponents whose contributions to the development of the theory are Andreas Schedler, a German political scientist and Larry Diamond, a prominent American political scientist and sociologist in his work titled “Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation” published in 1999. The major assumption and strength of the institutional theory of democratic consolidation is that it stresses the crucial and all-important role of robust institutional building and reforms as means through which democracy can consolidate and deepen over time (Linz and Stepan, 1996). The importance of robust institutions, democratic norms and procedures in consolidating democracy is captured thus:

In the majority of cases, after the transitions towards consolidation is completed, there are still number of tasks that need to be accomplished, habits and attitudes that must be cultivated and conditions that must be established before democracy can be regarded as fully consolidated. (Linz and Stepan, 1996:2).

Just like every other theory, Linz and Stepan institutional theory was criticized. Prominent amongst the critics is Guillermo O'Donnell, an Argentine political scientist in his 1996 article “illusions about Consolidation.” O'Donnell argued that Linz and Stepan theory places too

much emphasis on institutions, neglecting the role of other factors such as social and economic structures in shaping democratic outcomes. He also criticized the theory for not adequately addressing power dynamics such as the role of the elites, interest groups and social movements. In summary, his criticism highlights the limitations of Linz and Stepan institutional theory and emphasize the need for a more comprehensive understanding of democratic consolidation that takes into account; power dynamics, social and economic structures, and informal institutions. Thomas Carothers, An American political scientist, also offered some insightful criticism of Linz and Stepan institutional theory in his 2002 article “The end of the Transition Paradigm.” He argued that Linz and Stepan theory is based on a flawed transition paradigm, which assumes that democratization is a linear process that proceeds from authoritarianism to democracy. He also suggested that the theory over simplifies the complex and messy process of democratization, neglecting the role of contingency, uncertainty and context-specific factors. Despite these criticisms, the study adopted the institutional theory as its theoretical framework for analysis.

Electoral Reforms in Nigeria and Ghana: Trends and Patterns.

While Nigeria has undergone significant electoral reforms in her fourth republic, the origin of these reforms is traced to the colonial era. According to Ogbeidi, (2010: 3),

Electoral reform in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial period, when the Clifford constitutional in 1922 for the first time

introduced the elective principle into the political system. Elections were for four elective seats in the Nigerian legislative council that was sustained and developed by succeeding colonial regimes.

The scope of our study is not on the chronicles of electoral reforms from pre-independence Nigeria till present, but on the Nigerian fourth republic which began in 1999. Therefore, below is a summary of electoral reform efforts in Nigeria within the period under study.

Table 1: Electoral Reforms in Nigeria' Fourth Republic and Key Features/Recommendations.

Year	Reforms/Initiative	Key features
1999	Return to Democracy (Fourth Republic)	1999 Constitution established INEC as an Independent Electoral Body (First elections after another round of military rule)
2002	Electoral Act, 2002	Made provisions for standardized procedures in the conduct of elections, provided INEC the authority to register political parties and conduct elections
2006	Electoral Act, 2006	Provided for an improved regulatory powers for INEC, addressed candidates nomination and election petitions

2008	Uwai's Electoral Reform Committee	Recommended the establishment of an electoral offenses commission, made a case for the introduction of electronic voting and strict tribunal timelines (though not all recommendations were implemented), proposed the amendment of the constitution to shield INEC from Political influence of the executive regarding its composition and funding, transfer of the power to appoint the INEC board from the President to the National Judicial Council and the funding, a first line charge on the consolidated revenue of the Federation, providing time limits for election petitions, an elected person not to assume office till cases against them in the tribunals or courts are resolved, amongst others
2010	Electoral Act 2010 as amended	Provisions to strengthen INEC's independence and funding, introduction of political finance regulations, empowered INEC to monitor party primaries (outcomes which can be appealed before a court), mandated results to be posted at polling stations; improved tribunal timeliness
2015	Introduction of Smart	Used to (for the first time, authenticate the eligibility of

	Card Readers	voters, reduce fraud and increase credibility of the electoral process,
2016	Ken Nnarmani's Committee on Electoral Reform	Recommended Diaspora voting, independent candidacy, unbundling of INEC, and use of more ICT in the conduct of elections (not fully implemented)
2018	Electoral Amendment attempts	Passed by the Nigerian National Assembly for electronic voting and smart card reader to be used in the conduct of elections in Nigeria but Presidential assent was withheld.
2022	Electoral Act, 2022	Legalized the use of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAs) for voters accreditation, introduced electronic transmission of results with the BVAs to INEC-IREV in real time, improved timelines for party primaries, campaign financing and candidate substitution, strengthened INEC's powers and financial autonomy.
2023	First Nationwide use of BVAs and IREV	Used during the 2023 General Elections for Biometric verification and real-time results upload. Increased transparency in the electoral process but faced technical

		and logistical challenges.
2025 (Proposals and ongoing Reforms)	INEC Reforms Proposal ahead of 2027 Elections in Nigeria	Proposing the introduction of Diaspora voting, phasing out PVC's in favour of digital slips, establishment of electoral offences tribunal, single day nationwide voting, stronger anti-vote-buying measure, greater inclusivity for women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Source: Authors Compilation, 2025.

Ghana has also had electoral reforms in the past whose history dates back to the 1960's. Deborah (2015:5) captures it thus:

...after the overthrow of the Nkurumah's Convention Peoples Party (CPP), the military Junta set up the Siriboe's Commission to implement electoral reforms. The commission's report led to a paradigm shift from a practice where a minister was assigned the responsibility for managing elections (Siriboe Report 1968:3). Indeed, the electoral provisions act, 1965 (Act 291) and the electoral provision (registration) regulations 1988 gave the ministers of local government the power to appoint election staff and register voters. The 1969 constitution altered the electoral laws and ushered in the Independent Electoral Commission model...

However, the major phase of electoral reform in Ghana started from the 1990's. After the 1992 elections contested by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the opposition parties led by the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the challenges arising therefrom, there was need for reform. According to Gyampo, Agbevide and Graham (2022) in a book published by the National Patriotic Party titled "The Stolen Verdict", they encapsulated all the cases of electoral fraud perpetrated by agents of the National Democratic Congress and the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the 1992 Presidential elections. The NPP produced a litany of instances of election related violence perpetrated against its candidates and officials and then laid out stringent conditions to be met before they would consider returning to the polls (Gyampo *et al*, 2022:126). Consequently, in March, 1994, an elite consensus body called the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) was inaugurated. It comprised the Electoral Commission (EC) which was established by Act 451 in 1993, together with representatives of political parties with donors as observers (Ayee, 1998). However, the elites used the IPAC as a platform to reform the electoral process through an agreement among themselves on the thorny areas of the electoral process (Gyampo, 2018). There was yet another reform in 2012 following the Presidential elections. There was also a proposal for electoral reform submitted after the 2020 elections. Therefore, since 1993, there have been several interventions aimed at fine-tuning Ghana's electoral processes (Gyampo *et al.*, 2022). The table below captures a summary of electoral reforms in Ghana's fourth republic.

Table 2: Electoral Reforms in Ghana's Fourth Republic and Key Features/Recommendations

Year/Period	Reform/Initiative	Key features
1992	1992 Constitution and Transition to Fourth Republic	Reintroduced Multiparty Democracy, made provisions for legal basis for Electoral Commission (EC), used in the conduct of Presidential – Parliamentary Elections
1993	Electoral Commission (EC) Act 451	Formally established the EC as an independent body to manage elections in Ghana.
1994	Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC)	Established as a consultative platform between the EC, political parties, observer members from civil society organizations to build trust and consensus on the electoral process.
1995	New Voters Register	Provided to clean up the inaccuracies seen in the one used for the 1992 election, presidential and parliamentary elections were to be held simultaneously to prevent an unfair advantage for the winning presidential candidates party to improve the credibility of the electoral process and outcome
1996-2007	Photo Voters I.D cards, Ballot Reforms, Process	Introduction of photo IDs for voters, provision of transparent ballot boxes and cardboard

	and Inclusivity Reforms	voting screens for secrecy, creation of the registration review committees in all constituencies to resolve all conflicts related to voters registration.
2008 – 2010	Operational Reforms	Introduced the use of numbered seals on ballot boxes, improved collation procedures, (counting of votes and declaration of results to be done immediately after voting in the presence of all party agents and voters, rather than central collation), provided for assets and expenditure declaration of political parties 90 days after registration and 21 days before general elections,
2012	Biometric Voters Registration (BVR) and Verification (BVV)	Introduced fingerprint-based registration and verification devices to curb double registration and impersonation(Biometric registration and registration of voters), increase/expansion of parliamentary seats from 230 to 275 constituencies, the need for well-trained election officials to staff the polls, establishment of a national collation centre to replace the strong room, the institutionalization of IPAC

		meetings, the raising of minimum educational qualification requirements for various levels of election officials, the deferment on the adoption of electronic voting, an improved compensation package for electoral officials, the granting of priority to vulnerable persons, amongst others
2016	Reforms (EC)	Introduced serial numbering of results forms, appointment of collation officers, and expansion of special voting (security forces, media personalities and observers), enhanced training and oath for election officials.
2017-2020	Improved Voter's Register and Transparency	Biometric voters displays (BVD's) at registration, provisional registers displayed publicly, final registers given to political parties 20 days before elections.
2020's (ongoing Proposals for Reforms)	Campaign Finance and EC Independence Debate	Calls for stronger regulation of campaign spending, state funding of parties and reforms to EC officials appointment processes (aimed at reducing/addressing all forms of presidential control)

Source: Authors Compilation, 2025.

Electoral Reforms and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria and Ghana's Fourth Republics.

Researchers have extensively explored how electoral reforms have not addressed the pervading incidences of electoral fraud, electoral violence and voters' apathy in Nigeria and thus, have not significantly promoted Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. For instance, Orji (2020) posits that:

...electoral reforms in Nigeria can be regarded as generally ineffective. The fact that Nigerian politicians and the general public continue to clamour for more reforms despite the series of changes made to the electoral process indicate that past reforms have wholly or partially failed to achieve their expected benefits. I have argued that the failure of electoral reforms in Nigeria is due to, among other things, the wrong conception of the reform programme and the attitude of the reformers who often strive to manipulate the process to their advantage (Orji, 2020:138 and 139).

In a similar submission, the former INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega has expressed fear in Nigerians Democracy being at risk without urgent reforms. He argues thus:

Despite nearly three Decades of uninterrupted civilian rule, Nigerians democracy remains dangerously underdeveloped..... While Nigeria has perfected the rituals of democracy - Elections, party campaigns, political handovers, it has failed to build the substance. He

However, added that for Nigeria to salvage its republic, it must embrace far-reaching institutional reforms to ensure accountability, strengthen the rule of laws, and make governance truly serve the people (Jega, 2025:1).

Tsokwa and Nwanegbo (2024) provided more insights on how electoral reforms, particularly the 2022 electoral act failed to meet the expectations of Nigerians. They argued that the outcome of the election, particularly the Presidential election indicates that the act failed to meet the expectations of Nigerians. The result of the study strongly indicates that while the act provides a legal Framework for stronger elections in Nigeria, it has not sufficiently ensured a free and fair election, particularly in the Presidential election.

Building on the above submissions, Itodo (2024) argues that the enactment of the Electoral Act, 2022 was predicated on the belief that a new electoral legal framework would address the intractable problems of elections manipulation, electoral impunity, operational inefficiencies and weak democratic institutions plaguing Nigeria's electoral process. The act widely adjudged as the most progressive electoral legislation in Nigerians recent history, produced positive outcomes in the last elections. However, several loopholes were exposed during its first application in the 2023 general election. Hassan and Obe (2023) further highlight how trust and turnout had defined the Nigerian 2023 general elections. They argued that INEC and its technology are not solely responsible for the

crisis of confidence in the electoral process as political parties were guilty of engaging in vote buying as reported by Chatham house. The introduction of technology which was heralded as a game changer following its successful use in off-cycle gubernatorial elections in 2022 (Ekiti and Osun states respectively) failed to live up to lofty expectations and have done more harm than good (Hassan and Obe, 2023:4).

Despite the series of reforms, particularly the 2022 Electoral Act, Nigerian Democracy has faced significant challenges. While the nation has maintained 26 years of uninterrupted civilian rule since 1999, many Nigerians say the ideals of Democracy; justice, equity, good governance and accountability remain elusive (Taofeek, 2025). Nigeria is ranked 104th out of 167 in the latest Democracy index report for 2024 by the Economists Intelligence Unit. The EIU in its report described the country as practicing “hybrid regime” like Liberia, Sierre-Leone and Cote d’Ivoire because the 2023 general elections lacked fairness with voter;s intimidation being a common future (Ali, 2024).More worrisome also is the poor voters turnout witnessed in the 2023 Nigeria general elections. According to a publication by Yiaga Africa, (2025), voter’s turnout (a vital aspect of political participation, and a necessity for a healthy democracy) is a crucial indicator of the strength and vibrancy of a democratic society. Voter’s turnout in Nigeria is summarized in the Table below:

Table 3: Voters Turnout in Nigeria

Year	Percentage of voters’
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	turnout
1979	34.6%
1983	38.9%
1993	35.0%
1999	52.3%
2003	69.1%
2007	57.5%
2011	53.7%
2015	43.7%
2019	34.7%
2023	27.1%

Source: (Yiaga Africa, 2025)

From Table 3 above, there has been a noticeable decline in voter's turnout in Nigeria elections. Voter's turnout is a key requirement to measure a thriving democratic society. In the 2023 Nigerian general elections, the number of voter's turnout stood at only 27.1%, a record low and a situation that speaks volume of the country's democratic credential deficits.

In Ghana, there are also scholarly works that suggest a significant reduction in electoral malpractices. However, there are still some pockets of fraud, violence and other malpractices recorded in her past and most recent elections. Though Ghana is severally described as a model and bastion of Democracy in not just West Africa but also

Africa as a result of some factors which may include peaceful transition of power from a ruling party to an opposition part in 2000, 2008, 2016 and 2024. There are scholars who have argued that electoral reforms in Ghana have yielded more positive results, compared to Nigeria. Yet, allegations of electoral related malpractices still persist. For instance, Sapp (2024) submits that:

Ghana, often hailed as a model of democracy in West Africa, now faces a serious challenge to its electoral processes and democratic institutions. Ahead of the country's December 7th Presidential and Parliamentary elections, allegations of irregularities in voters roll have ignited widespread protest, primarily led by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which accuses the electoral commission of facilitating fraud. (Sapp, 2024:1).

Supporting the above view that past Ghanaian elections have been marred by electoral malpractices, Nyonko (2024) posits that "...Regrettably, elections in Ghana have also been characterized by monetization, cheating, electoral manipulation, violence, ethnocentrism and sadly even deaths. The above submission was contained in a communiqué issued by the Pentecostal and charismatic council of Ghana. Nyanko (2024:1) posits thus:

Due to economic hardships in the country, voters tend to be more easily induced by gifts, vote buying and other forms of electoral monetization by politicians. We recognize that this trend is getting worse and

has the propensity of compromising the integrity of the electoral process and may in future affect the quality of people that would emerge as leaders.

Adebowale (2025:9) noted that:

Ghana and Nigeria, two Prominent Nations in West Africa presents contrasting examples of how elections are conducted and perceived. While Ghana December 2024 elections demonstrated a well-functioning democratic process, Nigeria's 2024 off-cycle elections in Edo and Ondo states revealed persistent challenges that has continued to hinder the nations democratic aspirations. Despite challenges like Galamsey (illegal mining) and regional security concerns, the 2024 Ghanaian elections were lauded for their efficiency and integrity, offering a model of how elections can function effectively in West Africa.

It is impossible to suggest that incidences of electoral malpractices are not recorded in Ghanaian elections. Whereas a lot of factors have contributed in its reduction like the creation of the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC), electoral reforms amongst others, Ghana has minimal incidences and or cases of electoral malpractices relatively compared to other countries in the sub-region. Though some have attributed this to its small population/size, a robust and engaging political culture that promotes tolerance encourages political participation and post-election reconciliation. Little wonder, Ghana is

adjudged as one, if not the most stable democracy in West Africa.

Ghanian voter’s turnout has never been below 50% in all elections conducted in her fourth republic. Table 4 below presents a summary of voter’s turnout in Ghana

Table 4. Percentage of Voters Turnout in Ghana, 1992 – 2024

Year	Percentage of voters turnout
1992	50.29%
1996	78.3%
2000	61.74%
2004	85.6%
2008	69.50%
2012	79.43%
2016	68.62%
2018 (Referendum)	84.0%
2020	78.89%
2024	63.90%

Source: Authors Compilation, (2024)

For Elklit and Reynolds (2002), a free and fair election has a direct impact on political legitimacy and democratic consolidation in new democracies. There are other studies that have also supported the view that while electoral reforms in Ghana have checked electoral malpractice to some extent; it has however not addressed it. Using Linz and Stepan multi-dimensional framework which examines the three dimensions of consolidation indicated that significant progress has been made, though the specter of potential violence in all three served as a reminder that consolidation remains fragile (Abdul-Gafaru and Gordo, 2010).

Although, Ghanaian's disposition towards democracy and support for elections remains strong compared to Nigerians, the above submission appears to be in line with the Afro barometer survey, round 10 (2024) were "73% of Ghanaians expressed their support for democracy, 82% expressing support for the choice of leaders through regular, open and honest elections. Yet, the efficiency of elections remains mixed. It is therefore important to address these emerging electoral issues so that the country can consolidate its electoral gains. (Osae-Kwamong, 2024).

Challenges of Electoral Reform Efforts in Nigeria and Ghana

The following are challenges to electoral reform efforts in not just Nigeria and Ghana. But also in West Africa. They are:

i. Conspiracy and lack of Sincerity by the Ruling Elites

Every society is structured in a way that there exist a small group, who are usually in charge of the means of

production, distribution and exchange. Without sincerity in the part of these group; the elites, all efforts at reforming the electoral process will make minimal impact. According to the former Minister for transportation, Rotimi Amechi in a submit organized by the movement for credible elections (MCE), admitted that a group of cabals within the Buhari's administration, who are also serving in the current President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's led administration were responsible for frustrating the administration's genuine efforts at reforming Nigeria's electoral process (Platformtimes, 2025). Therefore, what constitutes electoral reforms is what the elites say it is and this has constituted in itself a major cog to democratic consolidation.

ii. Weak Institutions Expressed in Weak Laws

Every institution of government in a democracy is a creation of an enabling law. Therefore, when we say weak institutions, we are invariably alluding to weak legal frameworks that seems to confer enormous powers on chief executives who in most cases appears more powerful than the institutions of government. This has led to a situation where there are powerful individuals in the saddle rather than powerful institutions. For example, both the President of Nigeria and Ghana are not just the Presidents but also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. This challenge to democratic consolidation still persists even at present and can only be addressed through constitutional amendments.

iii. Failure to Demand for Accountability by Citizens

There appears to be a growing concern on apathy amongst citizens, particularly more in Nigeria expressed in low

voter's turnout during elections. This disaffection and disconnect has created citizens who hardly hold their leaders accountable for their policies and programmes. Whereas democracy is built on the ultimate believe that power belongs to the people, and exercised through their accredited representatives. Yet, the citizens have failed to harness this opportunity to demand for more responsible, responsible, people-centric and accountable leadership. Therefore, until an army of critical citizenry rise and demand for accountability from the leaders, electoral reform efforts may likely be a mere routine, orchestrated by the elites to recycle and perpetuate themselves in power from one generation to the other.

iv. Weaponization of Poverty

Often, people are more preoccupied with making ends meet than thinker on electoral reform efforts. There is a calculated attempt, through poor economic policies, unemployment and underemployment, inept leadership, corruption, amongst others to weaponize poverty for some selfish ends. Poverty expressed in hunger, inability to provide basic necessities like food, shelter and clothes is used to control the minds, actions and inactions of citizens. Other challenge exacerbated by Poverty is insecurity. Today, Nigeria and indeed the West African sub-region has become home to many terrorist groups, bandits and other criminal groups. Therefore, addressing poverty is a major gateway to ensuring an impactful electoral reform effort.

Conclusion

Electoral reform has promoted democratic consolidation in Ghana more than in Nigeria. The practice of Democracy in Ghana is not without challenges. Though these challenges still persist but Ghana has collectively made efforts to ensure democratic stability by reasserting their resolve for a push to ensure that democracy is fully consolidated. However, Nigeria appears not to be moving towards that direction. Events from the 2023 post-election environment and the inability of the present All Progressive Congress led administration to address these challenges despite calls from electoral stakeholders for more electoral reforms before the 2027 Nigerian general election is another factor that has shown that Nigeria is not yet ready to ensure that democracy is promoted and consolidated. But this trend can be addressed through periodic electoral reforms and other means which will be suggested below as recommendations.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- i. Electoral reforms in Nigeria and Ghana should be periodic if it must significantly enhanced democratic consolidation. This will go a long way to address the identified flaws after each general election.
- ii. The entire electoral process should be digitalized from voter's registration to accreditation, voting and online transmission of results. This will address the fear of electoral malpractice particularly from the opposition candidates.

iii. There is need to reassure the citizens that they are part of the democratic project. The government through relevant agencies and medium should encourage more civic engagement to foster a culture of democratic values, promote inclusiveness and enhance transparency in the electoral process in Nigeria and Ghana.

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