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An Appraisal of Election Administration in Ghana: A Case Study of 2020 General Elections

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LAWAL Sultan Babatunde

University of Ibadan
39, Kokoro-Abu Street, Ikorodu, Lagos State

ABSTRACT

The thrust of this paper is election administration in Ghana, dissecting the challenges undermining the efforts of EC in conduct credible elections. The institutional theory was adopted to explain the roles of EMBs and other key institutions in election administration. Monetization of elections, weak civic culture, controversies over voter's register, duopoly party politics among others were unravelled as the challenges of elections administration in Ghana. In conclusion, the untransformed character of African States speak to the same problem of politics and governance not being about productive transformation, but about seeking State resources for personal gains. The paper recommended stakeholders involvement, party agents should be the first suspects in any form of violence/irregularity that occur in their polling unit, this will deter them from being informants to destructive and disruptive elements. Also, election manipulation and rigging must be dressed in filthy garments that they truly deserve, with politicians made to forfeit seats if they are found guilty of attempting to undermine the electoral process. A Three party system should be adopted in Ghana because the dominant two parties are aggressively and dangerously dividing the country through all available means, threatening the her future and unity.

Keywords: Democracy, Elections, Election Management Body (EMB), Ghana, Election Commission (EC), Election Administration.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is often said to be one of the most appropriate systems for a modern State, due to the complexities that arise from the administration of States in contemporary times. In a quest to surmount the Hobbesian conundrum of order in society, democracy with all its inherent flaws has been favoured ahead of other systems of government that exist. As Nwokeke & Jayum (2011: 129) submitted, "If democracy is all about choosing who is to be entrusted with the mandate of governing the people, then an election is a paramount way of making that choice." This is in line with Oluwasuji & Okajare (2021: 371-372) when they posited that; Elections are the principal mechanisms by which citizens hold their government accountable both retrospectively for the policies and more generally for how they govern. The administration and management of elections is not a strait jacket affair because of the stakes that are involved and the desperation of the actors in some scenarios. Akanji (2018: 101) noted that the management of elections is a notoriously difficult task. Election administration is consequently a sacred duty, necessary in upholding and guaranteeing the healthy existence of any state (Oduntan, 2022: 54). This is because, in every state, the electoral process is vital to the peaceful existence of the state. After all, rancors always exist where the people's will are subverted and the purpose of election as a means of having a government base on the consent of the people becomes defeated. The democratic essence of elections lies in the role of revalidation of a political mandate which ideally stems from the people (Oluwasuji & Okajare 2021: 372).

Corresponding Author:

LAWAL Sultan Babatunde, University of Ibadan, 39, Kokoro-Abu Street, Ikorodu, Lagos State.
Email; lawalsultan@gmail.com; slawal4665@stu.ui.edu.ng

The performance of most EMBs in Africa has been said to have improved over the years with few identifiable bright spots, but the performance of these institutions is still not encouraging enough if they must make convincing strides enough to earn more public confidence. This confidence can be earned through the display of credibility in a substantial amount. Nwokeke (2019: 1) opined that; while many African States struggle to get their democracies on the right part, few have succeeded. Since the 1990's Africa has witnessed both progress and reversal in electoral administration.

The desperation that comes with the winner's take all syndrome that features in the democratic system in African states has configured the political players to hold certain strong assumptions which Ake & Ihonvbere (1989) summed up as the perception by political actors that political offices are everlasting and the need to acquire such offices are seen as a do-or-die affair. The submission by Ake & Ihonvbere makes the struggle for political leadership become an overriding worry. The centrality of election to democracy makes the former a germane attribute of any modern State. Election with widespread participation is the hallmark of not just a democratic government alone. Even in non-democracies like China and the former USSR, elections were and have continued to be held at regular intervals, even though it is mostly argued that such elections hold no democratic relevance.

Elections in Ghana has been said to be relatively peaceful with several alternations of power between the ruling party and opposition party achieved in the recent past. The 2020 election in Ghana was commended by both local and foreign observers (Kapilima, 2023: 8-9). As Asekere (2021: 25) stated, It emerged that in the 2020 elections in Ghana, despite some avoidable hiccups and isolated incidents of violence and deaths, the polls were generally free, fair and transparent. He noted that, while the election has commendable traits, there is a need to re-examine issues such as vote collation and transmission, ballot snatching and the use of the armed forces in elections. According to Taden (2021), the post-election political environment was rife with tension. The opposition rejected the results and called on supporters to take to the streets to stop the electoral commission from "stealing the election". Similarly, in the 2016 election, the incumbent President lost to the candidate of the opposition, in an election many considered to be highly significant to democratic consolidation in Africa. However, the acrimonious transition of power in Ghana in the aftermath of the 2016 Elections and the lack of faith that minority parties exhibited during the election are trends that do not bode well for national cohesion and future transitions (Ayee, 2017: 325).

The literature on election administration has been greatly and richly improved over the years. Scholars like Sefah (2029), Akanji (2018), Aliyu & Ambali (2021), Ejalonibu (2019), and Adebisi (2015) have written extensively on the subject matter. In their various studies, election administration is commonly seen as being an albatross to the democratic advancement of any polity.

Kimball, Kroff & Battles (2006) summarily explained that the level of partisanship of election officials can influence positively or negatively the turnout of electorates and the eventual outcome of the election. Alayande (2016) examined the impact which the legal framework creating an Election management body and regulating the totality of election administration can have on the quest for free, fair, credible and competitive elections. Unufe & Justin-Ugo's (2019) effort focused on how both developed and developing countries has fared with the acceptability of the transformation of election administration from manual to electronic voting. Bob-Millar & Pallet (2018) question the extent to which election administration provides hope for the opposition in ascension to power, probing if Election management bodies can be impartial enough to conduct elections where it is possible to defeat the ruling party and most especially an incumbent presidency under free and fair conditions. Ita & Atai (2018) consider the acceptability of election outcomes as a resultant effect of how the Election management body's level of effectiveness is perceived.

However, these studies and many others downplayed the significance of the collaborative efforts of stakeholders, who are non-states actors but can complement the efforts of the Election management

body and other institutions of the state by playing crucial roles towards achieving electoral credibility. It is against this perceived limited scholarship in this area that this study, therefore, investigated the involvement of some of such stakeholders, which includes but are not limited to political parties, civil societies, media houses/platforms, International organizations, NGOs, traditional institutions, religious bodies, politicians, private individuals, youth groups, labour union, women organizations, etc. This becomes necessary because of the importance of elections to all democratic polities. The performance of the electoral system in the administration of elections depends hugely on a complex network of people, tasks, organizations, relationships and technology (Montjoy, 2008: 788).

The study thus inquires into the administration of elections in Ghana, unravelling areas of strength and weaknesses, pinpointing how the perceived strength can be improved upon and the maladies remedied through proffered panacea.

In order to clearly address the purpose of the study, the following germane questions were formulated tailor the conduct of the study:

1. What are the challenges faced by EC in the administration of elections in Ghana?
2. What are the implications of these challenges on the democratic existence of the polity?
3. How can the perceived challenges be overcome?
4. To what extent can the Impacts of collaborative efforts of stakeholders in the conduct of an election increase the chances of credibility?
5. How has EC fared in the conduct of elections in Ghana?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted qualitative approach, which depended on secondary data. Relying on reports of election observers and data readily available in literature and publications of scholars and institutions. Qualitative approach is a an approach employed to analyse and interpret non-quantified or non-statistical data (Aiyede, 2020: 18). 2020 General Elections In Ghana was the case observed.

The study utilized content analysis as a method of data analysis and representation. The content analysis allowed the researcher to examine the contents of the findings and relate them to the objectives of the study. The content analysis is an observational technique that focuses on gathering, examining, and analyzing written or oral human statements, comments, speeches, or write-ups (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019: 94). The adoption of the method of analysis and presentation enabled the researcher to paint reality in its original form.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The administration is mainly concerned with the means that are essential for the accomplishment of pre-determined goals (Ejalonibu, 2019: 25). According to Jinadu (2014: 20) Election management bodies are the fulcrum around which electoral administration and management revolve. Ebirim (2013: 13) sees election administration to comprise the bureaucracy that is set up and established to organize and conduct elections. These organizations are not just institutions of the state but are germane democratic institutions. Pal (2016: 87) emphasized that Election management bodies are established

democratic institutions which are statutorily created from legislation that defines their existence, functions, authorities, and appointment/recruitment processes.

Election administration is the management and organization of all stages of the election (Ajayi, 2007: 144). These managerial stages according to Adebisi (2015: 4) are classified into 3, which are; pre-election, during election, and post-election. The administration of an election connotes the act of organizing an election to comply with the stipulations on the enabling laws and regulations. Election administration refers to the process used to compile the voters register and then cast and eventually count votes (Ejalonibu 2019: 25), It Involves a whole range of activities including running elections on Election day as well as all pre and post-election activities.

Electoral administration and management cover the task and processes for conducting credible, free, and fair elections following domestic and International codes (UNESA 2013: 113)

ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES

Election administration is the management of elections by an Election management body. Hence, Election management bodies are usually constitutionally recognized bodies or institutions charged with the conduct of elections (Afolabi, 2014). Election management bodies are responsible for supervising the work of all levels of the election administration, ranging from polling station boards and regional bodies up to decision making and overall coordination (OHCHR 2015: 13). Tokaji (2021:3) sees election management body as a public entity that performs a variety of functions. Administering the conduct of a trustworthy and integrity based free, fair, and transparent election is the main function expected of every election management body (Sefah, 2020: 284). In the administration of election in any polity, there is a legal framework that must be abided to. The sources of these originating laws that made up the legal framework as well as their rigidity and flexibility are as follows;Afolabi (2014) noted that election administration goes beyond the conduct and management of elections, rather it involves the institution, structure, and framework/process extended in the operation and conduct of the election

The functions of election management bodies as stated by International IDEA (2002: 40) include;

- (1) Ensuring that election officials and staff responsible for the administration of the election are well trained and act impartially and independently of any political interest;
- (2) Ensuring that clear voting procedures are established and made known to the voting public;
- (3) Ensuring that voters are informed and educated concerning the election processes, contesting political parties and candidates;
- (4) Ensuring the registration of voters and updating voter registers;
- (5) Ensuring the secrecy of the vote;
- (6) Ensuring the integrity of the ballot through appropriate measures to prevent unlawful and fraudulent voting; and
- (7) Ensuring the integrity of the process for the transparent counting, tabulating, and aggregating of votes.
- (8) Certification of the final election results;
- (9) Elimination of electoral boundaries;
- (10) Monitoring and overseeing electoral campaign finance and expenditure; and
- (11) Research, advice to government and/or parliament, and international liaison.

CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

Credible elections are organized methods of peaceful democratic transition, a salient indicator of democratic consolidation, and the principal institutionalized means for large numbers of people to participate peacefully in forming and changing democratic government afterwards (Mozaffar, 2002: 86). Election management bodies that manage and organizes elections are expected to portray certain qualities for the parties and public to have confidence in them (Sefah, 2020: 280).

In the view of van Ham & Lindberg (2015: 459) the integrity and credibility of an election are likely to be strengthened when the election management body impartially discharges its duties, guaranteeing both a level playing field for parties and candidates contesting elections, as well as freedom of choice for electorates. One of the most important tasks facing a nation aspiring to become a consolidated democracy is to design electoral machinery that can produce free and fair elections (Padmanabhan (2002: 1157). Dele & Ukeaja (2019) emphasized that conducting elections on a common regular basis holds optimism for democratic heralding progress. However, when these elections are fraught with irregularities and defects, it will not only undermine the entire democratic process but will impinge on the capacity of the election management body to conduct credible elections.

Zhizhi & Ibrahim (2020: 18) believe that, where there is a long history of badly conducted elections, the people can virtually give up hope of their votes counting in choosing elected executive and legislative office holders. Each of the players and stakeholders involved in the election has a pivotal role to play in achieving a free, fair, and credible election. However, election management bodies are at the top of the ladder that is charged with the responsibilities (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2019: 5).

The quality of elections being free, fair, credible, and impartial is highly germane, for James, Leobar, Garnett & van Ham (2016: 3) posited that while elections are conducted across the world to very high standards, there remains evidence of problems with election quality in transitional and equally established democracies. Olaniyi (2016: 125) believes that the essence of election management bodies is to marshal all that is in their capacity to control their political environment, to conduct elections that can be adjudged as free, fair, and credible. Effective election administration and management are crucial in securing credible elections (Mozaffar, 2002: 86). Election management bodies are crucial for election integrity due to their dual responsibilities of organizing elections and monitoring electoral conduct throughout the electoral cycle (van Ham & Lindberg, 2015: 459).

CHALLENGES OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

It should be understood that elections are about power and they designate who will control power and lead the community. As such, there are many conundrums electoral management bodies (EMBs) face in many parts of Africa in organizing elections. In most of the elections so far held in Africa, cases of intimidation of EMBs officials are reported to be common, especially by the security forces, party cadres, and senior government officials among others (Onyalo, 2020:167-168).

Olaniyi (2016: 154) identified major challenges successive election management bodies often face in Africa, these are;

- (a) Constitutional provision that empowers the executive to appoint certain electoral officers
- (b) Lack of truly independent election management bodies
- (c) Absence of independent funds for election management bodies to discharge their duties
- (d) Protracted litigations of election-related issues and contradictory court injunctions
- (e) System of recruitment of election officers and ad-hoc staff in particular
- (f) Ambiguous constitutional provision/ electoral laws/ decrees

- (g) Security
- h) Logistics.

For WANEP (2013: 23) Election disputes can be caused by a variety of things which include; resources, values, psychological needs, communication, design/management of elections, and the mood of the ruling regime.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A major feature of social science research and scholarship is the illumination of phenomena through theoretical lenses. Theory is highly pertinent in the conduct of political research (Aiyede, 2020:11). A theoretical framework is a conscious and deliberate decision that a researcher has made in terms of the theory or combination of theories that guides his research efforts (Saliu, 2019:50).

This research work is anchored on institutional theory, to explain the role of the electoral bodies as major institutions in the administration of elections in Ghana. Other institutions involved in the electoral process were also examined in the quest to broaden our knowledge of electoral administration in these polities.

In the view of EUI (2020) "Institutions" are the second nature of society. Creations of men and women, institutions order social, political, economic, and even cultural intercourse. Indeed, institutions constitute the very basis for human interaction. Consequently, institutions bear within them equally the potential danger of the most deep-seated social control, as well as the promise of human liberation from both the social bond and the constraints of nature. Institutionalism is the study of the origins, effects, and potential for reform of institutions.

The EMB is a major institution that channels Social action. Just like every other social institutions, it takes shape and grows as actors begin to compete for resources and positions (Abrutyn, 2012: 177). Samuel Huntington argued that there are four dimensions through which we can judge the level of institutionalization of any structure that we observe: autonomy, adaptability, complexity, and coherence (Peters: 2000: 8). These four have been applied to several types of institutional arrangements (Meleshevich, 2007) and they do provide one avenue for understanding the transformation that structures must make in order to survive, and to be able to influence their members and their environment.

There is surely a contagious effect that the society that an institution operates in have on the institution. Abrutyn (2012: 168) noted that institutions are built through adaptations to previous challenges and reflects past "actions, goals and decision making process". Apparently, in any electoral contest there are a number of institutions the most prominent of which is the electoral body. In other words, the EC has a germane role to play in the administration of elections in Ghana. As Idowu & Mimiko (2020: 92) rightly stated; fairness shown in the management of election often determines how participants will react to the end result. Other relevant institutions in the conduct of elections also includes; political parties, mass media and security agencies (Omotola, 2010: 6), who are all required to play significant roles in the electoral process. The relevance of this theory lies in the role democratic institutions have to play in the conduct of free, fair, credible and competitive election, because without election democracy is unthinkable (Aliyu & Ambali, 2021: 141). EC play vital roles in the quest for democratic advancement both in Ghana. Certainly, it has more important roles to play if democracy is to be further consolidated, because when basic democratic institutions are strong, democracy thrives.

HISTORY AND DYNAMISM OF ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATION IN GHANA

Ghana in her early years of Independence under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President operated under one party political order which did not provide the citizenry a legitimate means to change government, if they so desired. Therefore coup d'état remained one, if not the only avenue available (Osafo-Danso, 2015:152-153). With the overthrow of One-Party regime of Dr Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, Ghana opened up a long search for the most visible way of achieving a credible election authority (Aiyede, Eramah & Oriomolade, and 2013: 23). The history of elections in Ghana since the inception of the 4th republic in 1992 is a history of two term regime cycle of change of power. This is has consistently been demonstrated with the NDC and NPP alternating power in 8years interval (Van Gyampo, Graham & Yobo, 2017: 32-33). EC has a good track record of organizing credible elections (EU EOM, 2020: 5).

The elections value chain in Ghana begins with a voter registration exercise, which includes the re-demarcation of electoral constituencies. That exercise is followed by the electoral campaign period, voting, counting, and tallying of votes, the declaration of results as well as election dispute adjudication (Asante, 2018: 5). IFES (2016, 2) summited that EC is responsible for the creation of regularities related to the registration of voters, the conduct and supervision of public elections including voting by proxy, voter's cards and other matters related to elections. EC has however been hindered in the performance of these functions due to certain challenges.

Since the return of democracy and restoration of multiparty democracy in 1992, election has emerged as the only means of electing and disposing political leaders and government in Ghana (Asante, 2013: 56). Ghana's description as a beacon of hope for democracy in Africa is tied with the country's record of relatively successive free and fair elections (Garr, 2021: 3). Both dominant parties have won elections 4 times each, NPP won in 2000, 2004, 2016 and 2020, while NDC won in 1992, 1996, 2008 and 2012 (EU EOM, 2020: 10).

Elections In Independent Ghana date back to 1957, Ghana as the first sub-Saharan African State to become independent soon became recognised as not just a pioneer but also a laboratory for the investigation of different problems confronting Africa as a whole (Ayee, 2008: 233). In the 1960 election, it was evident that politics was taking a new turn. The actors in the election abused the freedoms conferred by democratic politics and this resulted in the one-party regime of the CPP that reigned from 1960 to February 1966 (Ninsin, 1991: 23)

Ghana experienced a transition to civilian government in 1969, the constitution was parliamentary, and the National Liberation Council (NLC) military government orchestrated the election. Progress Party (PP) won 105 out of available 140 seats, followed by the National Alliance of Liberals (NAL); 29, United Nationalist Party (UNP) and People's Action Party (PAP) won 2 seats each while the All People's Republican Party (APRP) won 1 seat. The PP was said to have edged other parties in the contest because of the alleged organizational advantage received from the NLC led military government (Agomor, 2019: 69)

In 1979, Ghana returned to the Presidential system of government as the 3rd republic began in 1969 when the military National Liberation Council (NLC) handed over power to the democratically elected government of the Progress Party (PP) led by Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia (Boafo-Arthur, 1991: 41)

Ghana has held eight different elections in the present fourth republic, these elections were held in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 (Idowu, 2021: 182).

In 1992, Jerry Rawlings under internal and external pressure conducted an election, the exercise was regarded by the opposition as fraudulent to the extent of boycotting the parliamentary election that was

held subsequently (Meisser, 2010: 3). One of the causes of violence 1992 is the perceived bloated election register which the Provisional National Defence Council PNDC headed by Jerry Rawlings in connivance with Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) was alleged to have used in enthroning Rawlings who was the Presidential candidate of the NDC (Frempong, 2008: 186). As Agomor (2019: 15) puts it, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings purposely laid a tactical foundation to transform his Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) junta into a political party, which became known as the National Democratic Congress (NDC). INEC officially became scrapped as a new election umpire named Electoral Commission (EC) was inaugurated in August 1993 (Frempong, 2008: 190). The Committee (IPAC) was also formed as different restructuring was initiated to build public confidence in the electoral process (Idowu, 2021: 184).

Notably, the elections of 2000, 2008, and 2016 resulted in alternation in power from one political party to another. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) wrestled power from the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 2000, while the NDC came back to power after winning the 2008 elections from the NPP. In 2016, however, the NPP soundly defeated the ruling NDC, which was very sure that it would win the elections (Ayee, 2017: 2).

A pocket of election-related crises broke out before, during, and after elections in 2000, the postelection violence in Bawku, the Upper East regional capital was a reference point (Frempong, 2008: 200)

The electoral umpire EC, provided political parties with vehicles to help with their campaigns in the 2004 election. A total of 35 vehicles were released to political parties and presidential candidates. Presidential candidates received two vehicles while parties that fielded parliamentary candidates benefited pro rata to the number of their candidates (Ayee, 2009: 6)

Ayee (2009: 32) noted that the 2008 elections were bitterly fought between NPC and NDC as non of the candidates met the 50%+1 requirement to win the presidency. Despite the extremely close outcome of the Presidential race and the subsequent early tension as well as the allegations of EC making an undemocratic compromise the result was peacefully accepted as the sitting President Nana Akufo-Addo of NPP handed over to John Mills of NDC (Meisser, 2010: 2). In the view of Mapuva (2013: 94), he submitted that An assessment of the Ghana elections of 2008 showed that large and visible presence of foreign media, and diverse groups of international observers including the EU, the Carter Centre, the Africa Union, the Pan African Parliament, the Commonwealth, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and domestic observers contributed to increased public confidence in the entire exercise.

In the 2012 election, the incumbent NDC emerged as the winner, the victory was challenged by the opposition NPP with a petition to the Supreme Court to annul the results. The court however upheld the results (Saliu & Aning, 2013). Even though the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the declared winner, several recommendations were made that eventually paved the way for numerous interventions aimed at putting together proposals for electoral reform to reform Ghana's electoral processes. Several such proposals were submitted to the Electoral Commission (EC) by the end of 2013 (Van Gyampo, 2017: 95).

The preparedness of the EC to conduct the 2016 elections were doubted on the ground of the perceived inexperience of the newly appropriate EC Chairperson. However, the organization and management of the election were considered a success in the end, despite doubts and alleged lack of neutrality, administrative lapses, and unpreparedness on the part of the election umpire (Ayee, 2017: 6). Van Gyampo (2017: 95) noted that several suggestions on reforms were generated from the litigation of the 2012 election which made their way into the electoral reforms of 2013, nevertheless, the 2013 electoral reforms were not implemented to guide the 2016 general elections. The successful conduct of the 2016 elections has therefore been described as a "miracle".

Regrettably, despite the success that was recorded over the years, Ghana's 2020 elections saw a major twist to the peacefulness of the electoral process, as violence and deaths were recorded in an election that was keenly contested by the incumbent government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) led by President Nana Akufo-Addo and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) led by the former President John Dramani Mahama (Idowu, 2021: 195). Professor Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, a renowned Ghanaian Political Scientist described the electoral processes as “highly flawed”, characterized by electoral violence and general democratic backsliding, but he went further to state that some improvements were indeed recorded (Van Gyampo & Graham, 2021: 12).

CHALLENGES OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION IN GHANA

In spite of the positive image EC has earned itself, there still exist major challenges that are unsatisfactory (Osaf-Danso, 2015: 67). EC's efforts and reforms have not been sufficient to guarantee credible and peaceful elections (Asante, 2013: 61). Osaf-Danso (2015: 73) powerfully submitted that average Ghanaians are of the view that the intervening years and by extension democracy in the fourth republic has not lived up to expectations. Democracy is not an end but a process (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 2016: 21). A sprinkling of elections, however free and fair, on a sea of corruption, economic mismanagement, and plutocracy, cannot cure the problem of social and economic backwardness (Ninsin, 2016: 10).

Increase in the monetization of an election has led to an increase in corruption in elections, what is obtainable now is a patron-client relationship between aspirants and electorates (Asante, 2018: 8). The pursuit of selfish interest does not encourage economic progress which is indeed a necessary requirement for democratic development (Ninsin, 2016: 10). Despite the accolades enjoyed by the country over the credibility of elections, doubts still emerge in every election regarding integrity of EC on allegations of irregularities, malpractice, connivance with the ruling party to abuse the power of incumbency (Aiyede, Eramah & Oriomolade, 2013: 15)

Weak civic culture in Ghana coupled with corruption, impunity for law breaking and poor service delivery has brought about not just greivous decline in patriotism but also loss of trust in State and Public institutions (Garr, 2021: 16). As Huntington noted, In light of unstable political history, governance institutions couldn't develop appropriate rules and procedures (Ninsin, 2016: 3). Poor democratic culture has also continued to weaken political institutions such as the constitution, judiciary, political parties, and electoral management boards (EMBs) (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 2016: 25). There are mounting proofs pointing to the fact that institutions of governance are not working in tandem with global standard (Ninsin, 2016: 5). The pathos of public life is that anti-corruption laws are left unenforced with accountability institutions not carrying out their legal mandate (Ninsin, 2016: 10). Political accountability is not just absent, separation of power among branches and Institutions of government seems to be lacking (OsafDanso, 2015: 175).

Lack of proper involvement of relevant stakeholders in the election process is also a major challenge confronting the conduct of elections in Ghana. Gyampo (2015: 4) noted that, involvement of political parties especially those in opposition in development planning is minimal or in most cases non-existent. Despite the elaborate legal provisions for citizen's participation and engagement in National politics across all levels, citizen's engagement still remain minimal (Garr, 2021: 12). Similarly, the clamor for involvement in the appointment of election officials has been an age long issue. Since the establishment of EC in 1993, certain concerns have been raised about how the electoral commissioners are appointed (Asante, 2018: 6). The appointment mechanism is not inclusive and does not build confidence in the institution (EU EOM, 2020: 16). There is the absence of stakeholder's consultation in the process, as the constitution in article 40 & 70 empower the President to appoint the Chair, two deputies and four other commissioners of EC in consultant with the Council of State (Asante, 2018: 6). Citizens engaged in active civic activities such as demanding for accountability and holding office holders responsible

are often victimized in order to uphold and promote the "culture of silence" (Garr, 2021: 13). Also, political parties conduct their affairs in a way that cut off member's genuine participation. Party primaries are only democratic in principle and rhetoric despite the huge membership, voting is limited to delegates that are open to a number of extraneous influences thereby defeating article 55 (5) of the constitution that mandates conformity to the democratic principle of internal democracy (Ninsin, 2016: 5).

The duopoly of party politics in the 1992 fourth republic constitution of Ghana has brought about a competitive multiparty system which brings about acrimony and sometimes latent violence perpetrated by the party affiliated vigilante groups (Asante, 2018: 8). The struggle for power among the two main parties is "hostile and vitriolic" such that it has polarized the country along partisan, tribal and ethnic lines (Garr, 2021: 13). Campaign seasons are beclouded by acrimony, politics of insults, accusation and counter-accusations among participants (Osafo-Danso, 2015: 70). Electoral dispute most significantly the 2012 exercise brought Ghana to the brink of violence (Asante, 2013: 57).

The winner's take all syndrome in the politics of Ghana poses a danger to Ghana developing democracy breeding apathy and creating division leading to continuous acrimony, tension and rancour (Gyampo, 2015: 2). The political environment is often colored by deep suspicion and anxieties between and among political actors and their fanatic supporters (Asante, 2013: 63). There is no doubt that the winner's take all nature of Ghana's democracy accounts for the keen contest, however with the increase in natural resources revenue the contest became increasingly keen (Aiyede, Erameh & Orimolade, 2014: 28). Partisan media, politically inclined communicators and negative political culture makes Ghana's campaign dominated by personalities and colorized by personalities, politics of insults, use of abusive language, personality attacks, smear campaign, name-calling, stocking of ethnic sentiments and divisive tactics (Asante, 2018: 7)

The level of political participation in Ghana is relatively high in the African contest (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 2016: 22). However, as Garr (2021: 15) succinctly put it, While voters' turnout in Presidential since the beginning of the fourth republic has been on the high with the number hovering around an average of 72% , experience have shown that local level elections which are closer to the people and their daily lives record lower interest with an average turnout of 38%. Even with the success recorded in the voters' turnout of Presidential election, there is a need for further public education geared towards enhancing the quality of participation in the electoral process (Aiyede, Eremeh & Orimolade, and 2013: 29).

Controversies over the voters register, authenticity of the names therein has been a major issue creating tensions in virtually all elections especially since the beginning of the fourth republic. This is why Asante (2018: 6) posited that, one can rarely point at any election registration exercise that is devoid of names of deceased persons, underage or alien voters. The registration exercise is often characterized by pressure, misunderstanding; and abuse of procedures such as the guarantor procedures (CODEO, 2016: 1). The fundamental challenge of voters' register lies with the lack of trust in the various proofs of identity (Asante, 2018: 7). It is in view of the recurring conflicts resulting from controversies surrounding voter register and other issues that made Osafo-Danso (2015: 168) stated that, Elections has been a major reason for Ghana's political instability. As studies have shown that the EC have started enjoying the trust and confidence of Ghanians before the conduct of the relatively controversial 2012 elections (Aiyede, Erameh & Orimolade, and 2013: 24).

REVIEW OF 2020 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GHANA

On the 7th of December 2020 Ghanaians went to the polls to elect a new government for the next four years (GFD, 2020: 5). The Presidential elections produced very close results with the incumbent Nana Akufo-Addo of NPP pulling 51.3% of the total vote and his closest rival; former President John

Mahama of NDC pulling 47.4%, both parties secured 137 seats each in the parliament (International IDEA, 2021: 5). EC conducted some preparatory activities such as voter's transfer, voter education and exhibition of provisional voter register (CODEO, 2020). EC also organized at the national level a periodic Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) meeting attended by representatives of EC, political parties, civil society, and other cooperating partners (EU EOM, 2020: 17). The Vigilantism and related offences act 2019 was enacted to deal with the rising scourge of insecurity as experienced in the last election (The Commonwealth, 2020: 4). The nomination fees were criticized for remaining unreasonable high (EU EOM, 2020: 6).

Election campaign was highly competitive and often confrontational, dominated by the NPP and NDC with campaign unregulated and no framework or measures to regulate the abuse of incumbency and State resources (EU EOM, 2020: 7). Lack of effective communication between EC and citizens led to speculation, suspicion and eventual circulation of wrong information about the electoral process (WANEP, 2020: 7). Misinformation and disinformation through social media became a potential weapon against democracy (The Commonwealth, 2020: 5).

The credibility and accuracy of voter register is a long standing source of conflict between the two main political parties prior to the 2020 elections with the then opposition NPP at a point unsuccessfully demanding a new voter's register alleging that the existing one was inflated by large number of death voters, under aged and non Ghanians (EU EOM, 2020: 18). The issue of trust especially between NDC and the electoral umpire contributed to some of the challenges that were encountered (Asereke, 2021: 25). The EC, however, decided to compile a completely new voter's register, a decision which was contested at the Supreme Court by the opposition NDC (International IDEA, 2021: 6).

The registration was dealt with a major hindrance by Covid19, as there were doubts over the likelihood of the general election taking place (International IDEA, 2020: 7). A debate ensued in the media and among political observers over the uncertainty of compiling register and holding elections. Some suggested that a state of emergency be declared, and others opined on extension of tenure. Another idea was for the Chief Justice to act as President till conditions were right for elections. A consensus was eventually reached that elections should hold while ensuring the safety of lives in a way that will not endanger health (International IDEA, 2021: 7). The elections were finally held in unprecedented circumstances posed by the severe acute respiratory syndrome called Corona virus (The Commonwealth, 2020: 3). The final voter's register however consist of 17,024 Ghanians with 8,810,283 (51.7%) female and 8,217,358 (48.3%) male (WANEP, 2020: 2).

To reduce the risk of spreading Corona virus at the poll, EC significantly increased the number of polling stations throughout the country this reducing the number of registered voters assigned to one polling station (EU EOM, 2020: 17). Making sure that no voting station has more than 750 voters, with 70% of them having less than 500 voters (Asereke, 2021: 19)

All stakeholders in the electoral process showed maturity despite the competitive nature of the elections (The Commonwealth, 2020: 5). Most of the laid-out electoral procedure which includes; display of empty boxes before electorates and party agents, closure and sealing of ballots boxes as well as validation of ballots by the ballot paper issuer were followed by EC officials (WANEP, 2020: 2). GFD (2020: 10) observed that majority of election officials made early arrival to the polling station. Closing procedures were equally transparent with presiding officers and polling officials predominantly conducting the process in a careful manner free from interference in accordance with the prescribed procedures (The Commonwealth, 2020: 8).

The elections were well managed despite legal uncertainties and logistical challenges encountered (ODIHR, 2020: 1). It was hinged largely on the continued electoral reforms, cooperation from competing political parties, civil society organization and media which brought about issue based

campaign and the desire of the electorate to deepen multiparty democracy (Asereke, 2021: 25). WANE0 (2020: 1) summited that the conduct of the election was satisfactory and commendable. Stating that there are however room for improvement and transformation in the priority areas of upholding strongly the operational culture of due diligence, transparency and accuracy in the collation and tabulation of election results before public declaration.

However, International IDEA (2021:13) noted that the 2020 General Elections in Ghana experienced more violence than its immediate predecessors in 2016 and 2012. Incident of gun shots is said to have occurred outside a polling station at Kasao in Awutu Senya Constituency leaving a journalist and polling staff wounded (WANEP, 2020: 3). WANE0 (2020: 2) recounted with serious concern what it called an "unwarranted and needless incidents" of live bullet shooting at unarmed civilians by election security officials which led to 5 civilian death during and after the elections across the country.

Similarly, allegations of vote buying were reported in some constituencies (WANEP, 2020: 4). EU EOM (2020: 6) noted several irregularities such as voters not able to cast their vote confidentially in most cases due to the poor layout of polling stations. WANEP (2020: 3) Identified improper detachment of some ballots papers for the election into the office of the President leading to the exclusion of one of the candidates name and party logo leading to disenfranchisement which is a major issue that can undermine the credibility of any electoral process.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the outcome of the election contributed to positioning Ghana as one of the beacon of hope in electoral politics in Africa (Asereke, 2020: 25).

CONCLUSION

The untransformed character of African States speaks to the same problem of politics and governance not being about productive transformation but about seeking State resources for personal gains. This has been a major hindrance to democratic advancement and societal development.

Despite the positive image EC has earned itself, there still exist major challenges that are unsatisfactory (Osaf0-Danso, 2015: 67). These challenges however includes; monetization of elections, weak civic culture, lack of proper involvement of stakeholders, winner's take all syndrome, duopoly of party politics, among others have constituted hindrances to hitch free successive elections.

Importantly, the role of party agents in the conduct of credible elections seems to be downplayed by EMBs, election observers and in literature on elections. It is noteworthy to state that no matter the level of sensitization or laws guiding the electoral process, the agents execute the bulk of plans on the part of the parties during the voting exercise in their respective polling units. As Olaniyi (2017) posited, election (voting) is the most crucial stage of the electoral process, because any mistake (actions/inactions) on the part of the electoral stakeholders can mar all the other efforts. The agents as the representatives of their respective parties cannot be exempted from election violence because the perpetrators of these acts will likely need firsthand information from the agents on the situation on ground before coming in to cause destruction. When the agents assert that their party is currently in a lead, violence is unlikely to happen. If the agent communicate that the security situation is tight with high presence of security personnel, political thugs will either not go to such polling station or up their game if they must go. In terms of malpractices, the agents are those who get in contact with the presiding officers and other polling officers, offering bribe and other incentives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the observed challenges bedeviling elections administration in Ghana. The researcher in contemplating these maladies came up with a possible panacea noting that there is a need to however document these possible solutions to serve as a guide to future policy papers. These are;

1. Legislation on election spending as well as regulations of party finance and how much finances can be generated
2. Proper involvement of relevant stakeholders on regular basis about elections, this is necessary even in periods that elections are not in the process
3. Stricter rules on the campaign of calumny and hate speech
4. Banning of political parties that have vigilante groups or sponsor any armed group from elections
5. Internal democracy must be strengthened through laws and sanctions.
6. Adoption of three (3) party system. The dominant two parties are strongly and dangerously dividing the country through all possible means and this spells doom for the future and unity of the country. A three party system is less likely to cause disunity and it will promote more participation as there will be a ruling party, an opposition and a credible alternative all capable of winning elections.
7. Electoral laws should accommodate rules that guides the conduct of party agents and all parties must be made to submit the list of their agents including backup agents prior to any election.
8. Party agents should be first and primary suspect of any form of violence that occur in their respective polling unit. This will discourage them from being informants to destructive and disruptive elements.
9. An efficient and reliable data base should be developed not just to solve the issue of election register controversies in every elections. But to also assist with security of lives and properties at all times including during elections.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Lawal attended the prestigious University of Ibadan earning a M.Sc in Political Science. He also attended University of Ilorin obtaining B.Sc Political Science and a Diploma in Administrative Management. He is an emerging researcher with interest in Elections Administration, Federalism, Intergovernmental Relations, Governance and Political Theory.