



Ghana: A Consolidated Democracy?

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ABSTRACT

Ghana has experienced three peaceful transfers of power over the past 26 years. There are effective systems in place that have been handling election-related issues in the country. The people have accepted democracy as the 'only game in town'.

The paper adopts an expository approach. It uses both primary and secondary sources of information such as press releases, news items, official reports from the EC and various election observer groups and international organizations. Interviews and focus group discussions were also undertaken.

The study finds that Ghana still faces some challenges in terms of its ability to produce some democratic dividends despite the many years of enjoying a seemingly consolidated democracy. Massive unemployment persists; corruption exists in all branches of government; political elites usually escape the ambit of the law while the poor masses are always hemmed in. Are these really characteristics of a consolidated democracy?

The paper submits that despite the fact that most of the conditions that fuel democratic consolidation exist in Ghana, the country is now on the second step of the democratic consolidation ladder- electoral democracy. In essence, there are better prospects for future democratic consolidation in the country.

Keywords: *Ghana; democracy; democratic consolidation; elections.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a world of difference in making a swift transition from dictatorial rule to democracy and ensuring that democracy becomes the game of the day. In many African countries, the modern view of democracy was an inheritance and inextricable mark of the post-independence era. The colonial masters left the colonies with fragile democratic institutions which were soon to collapse into dictatorships. Once most of them disintegrated into some forms of dictatorships it became a hard nut to crack in making the transition back into democratic regimes. However, the early 1990s saw more than a dozen African countries, including Ghana, making the transition to democracy by introducing multiparty elections.

Ghana has over the years suffered a tottering democracy. Thus, since independence, the country's political experience has been marred by approximately 26 years of intermittent military rule and 34 years of civilian administration of which 26 occurred in the Fourth Republic. However, once a democratic government was established in 1992 it became indispensable to pursue policies to sustain it. This culminated in the success of the seventh consecutive general election held in December 2016. For those who believe in democratic procedures such as election, democracy has come to stay despite the fact that a lot has to be done in strengthening the democratic procedures. But there are those who still, despite seven consecutive peaceful elections and transitions, believe that as long as democracy has not provided the desired expectations (better conditions of living), it is fragile. Clearly, this gives the indication that democracy is differently perceived in the country.

On the eve of democratic transition, it is not unusual for reformers to encounter a problem of how to ensure the continued existence of the democratic ideology while embarking upon appropriate policies to ensure democracy fares well or produces the expected result. There are two reasons why this dilemma is an intricate part of the democratic transition. For one, the consolidation of new democracies involves much more than the formality of regular free and fair elections. Secondly, citizens of these states are usually in haste to welcome a major economic and socio-political development, whether or not they understand democratic ideology. The belief is that democracy paves the way for growth and development [1] [2], hence too much is expected

of the new democratic regime, failure of which poses a serious danger not only to the government of the day but also to the entire state. As a result, reformers have to choose which of these to make a priority. Any prioritization of one at the expense of the other poses a threat to the democratic ideology. Focusing on the two at the same time therefore becomes the obvious choice, yet many African countries missed this point; no conscious efforts were made to deepen democratic procedures.

The first part of the paper gives an introduction to the study and also defines some key concepts such as democracy and democratic consolidation. The section further throws some light on the minimalist and maximalist conceptions of democratic consolidation and ends by summarizing available literature on democratic consolidation in Ghana. The second part of the paper outlines the methodology that was adopted for the paper. In the third part, the findings of the study are discussed. The final part concludes the study and offers critical views on what can be done to enhance democratic consolidation in Ghana.

1.1 Operational Definition of Terms

1.1.1 Democracy

Democracy in this paper means rule by the people as contrasted with rule by a person or group. Thus, democracy here refers to the majority rule-cum-minority rights [3].

1.1.2 Democratic consolidation

Democratic consolidation in this paper refers to the 'stability and persistence of democracy' and democratic principles. Democratic consolidation is most practically understood as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, to the extent that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic rule is "the most right and appropriate for the society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine" [4, p. 65]. In other words, democracy must become the only game in town behaviourally, attitudinally, and constitutionally [5].

1.2 Democratic Consolidation: The Minimalist Vs the Maximalist Conceptions

Since the 'collapse' of the communist regimes of the Eastern bloc, contemporary conventional

wisdom opines that democracy rules supreme and unquestionable and has become the pantheon of political values. Thus, just as every age has its own guiding ideas and post, a cursory glance at our contemporary age points to liberal democracy and its consolidation as a guidepost [6]. Hence, although originating in Western societies, the idea of liberal democracy, in recent times is circulating as an orienting lodestar among people in Africa, the Middle East as well as South and East Asia [7].

As can readily be seen, this guidepost is actually a composite phrase combining the two terms 'liberal' and 'democracy'. But there is a deeply problematic paradox at the heart of this nearly universal acceptance (at least in theory) of the unquestionable value and unique legitimacy of democracy and its consolidation. Thus, though most people purport to be in favour of democracy, there is little agreement over what democracy really is [8]. Hence, while the very terms 'democracy' and 'democratic' carry with them the honorific connotations of legitimacy, there are widely divergent and sometimes radically incompatible accounts both of the nature of democracy and of the reasons why democracy is such a desirable form of government [9,10].

According to Hyland [9], the language of democracy is too deeply embedded in contemporary political discourse and is charged with such an enormous polemical force that it has become itself the inevitable and inescapable battleground for much contemporary political debate. Similarly, it is said that there is no fixed timeframe for democratic consolidation and this stems from the fact that democracy is a process and requires constant engineering in light of the challenges that may confront the nation in question [11].

The minimalist conception of democracy has as its key proponent Joseph Schumpeter [12] and its key adherents include Samuel P. Huntington [13], Adam Przeworski et al. [14]. Such scholars usually lay excessive emphasis on elections as the key and major element in consolidating democracy, eventually committing what Terry Karl describes as the 'fallacy of electoralism' [4]. Schumpeter [12] for instance has noted that the democratic method is that institutional procedure designated for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. In other words for Schumpeter, the doctrine

of democracy is only about the competition of leaders for votes. The implication, therefore, is that democracy is just a method, hence it is neither valuable in itself nor tending to right action or good ends [15]. Therefore for Schumpeter, competitive election is a necessary condition of representative democracy. This view of democracy has however been described by Mackie [15] as implausible, both descriptively and prescriptively. It is therefore argued that though competitive election is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition of democracy, thus, not sufficient even for the limited empirical purpose of regime classification. Consequently, any adequate definition of democracy must make reference to the common will, the common good and other values [15]. Mackie is therefore of the view that Schumpeter's definition of democracy is a construction intended to preserve elite domination in the unwelcome socialist democracies of the future.

Dahl [16] as well as O'Donnell [17] and Przeworski et al. [14] also define democracy in 'minimal' terms (notably elections). That is, they deliberately focus on the smallest possible number of characteristics necessary for a viable standard of democracy. These scholars in their work lend themselves more readily to empirical studies of democracy, hence their definitions are widely employed by empirically oriented scholars of democracy and institutions that carry out democracy audits [8].

A more recent scholar who also believes in the minimalist conception is Staffan Lindberg whose current studies in Africa portrays that even the quality of elections do not necessarily matter, rather what matters is the frequency or number of elections conducted [18,19]. Lindberg in his work has argued that "repeated elections-regardless of their relative freeness or fairness-appear to have a positive impact on human freedom and democratic values" [18, p. 139]. But it has been argued elsewhere that holding elections alone will not accomplish the task of consolidating a democracy and neither will simply promulgate laws that officially institute political rights be enough to do same [20].

Similarly, it has been reiterated that democracy is more than formal political pluralism or the process of producing an electoral code or an electoral commission. Thus, democracy is both a process and a practice that involves equal economic and social opportunities for the citizenry [21]. This is a position that the paper

upholds. Thus, all things being equal, democracy is much more than periodic elections. Invariably, one may evaluate the democratic method by the quality of its outcomes, that is, whether they promote justice, efficiency, liberty, equality, or the common good. And we evaluate the democratic method by the quality of its procedure, i.e. whether it is inclusive and fair; in other words, whether it permits the public realization of equal advancement of interests.

1.3 Literature on Democratic Consolidation in Ghana

The literature on Ghana's democratic consolidation abounds. However, most of these works have focused on building strong and credible institutions [22,23], enhancing the role and participation of CSOs in the governance process [24,25], promoting periodic free and fair elections [26,27] and undertaking regular and periodic electoral reforms [28,29,30]. Others have also emphasized the need for prompt and effective conflict resolutions [31], the development of political parties [32], and local level participation [33] as a means of consolidating democracy in Ghana. However, not much work has been done on the role that the provision of economic dividends plays in efforts at consolidating democracy in the country. In addition, very little has been done on how the attempt at making both political and socio-economic dividends central to the governance process can impact positively on democratic consolidation. It is in light of these reasons that this paper sought to draw attention to these seemingly neglected issues and also contribute to the existing literature on the subject of democratic consolidation.

2. METHODOLOGY

In attempting to understand whether Ghana is a consolidated democracy or not, the paper situates the study in an expository research design. The reason is that the design allows for descriptive and explanatory studies [34,35]. It consequently enabled the researcher to obtain relevant data in a non-numerical form which generates rich, in-depth insight into the research questions.

The paper uses both primary and secondary sources of information for analysis. The sources for information includes journal articles, policy documents, etc. Press releases, news items and official reports from relevant bodies such the EC

and various election observer groups and international organizations were also analyzed.

Moreover, in order to get firsthand information, the researcher conducted a formal face-to-face interview with 15 stakeholders in Ghanaian politics. These were representatives of various political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), and officials from the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC). The interviewees were selected purposively since they officially represented the key institutions and organizations under consideration. They are thus considered as possessing relatively much insight and interest in the topic under consideration.

Focus group discussions were also held to ascertain the views of some Ghanaians regarding their views on the country's perceived democratic credentials. Whereas the interviews were usually guided by the use of a semi-structured interview guide, the focus group discussions were much more open-ended in nature. These were to ensure that the researcher asked all the relevant follow-up questions that could not be captured in the interview guide.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Ghana: Democracy and Elections; Prospects and Challenges (1957-2017)

3.1.1 The early years of 'democratic' practices (1957-2004)

On March 6, 1957, Ghana became the first African country south of the Sahara to attain independence. Its first democratically elected government was formed by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) with Kwame Nkrumah as the first president. The country was governed by an independent constitution which had many democratic practices enshrined in it. The constitution also guaranteed the independence of the judiciary among others. According to Ninsin [36], the vigor of democratic life in the country was reflected in the diversity of political parties that existed prior to 1964 before the country became a constitutional one-party socialist system. The situation however did not remain the same after 1966 when the CPP government was overthrown by the National Liberation Council (NLC) and the subsequent emergence of military interventions and dictatorial regimes that virtually dimmed the hope of living safely in one's own country and

quenching the flame of democracy that has been kindled by the early pioneers.

The era of the military regimes eventually came to a halt when Flt. Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings led the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) on December 31, 1981, to stage the coup of coups and ruled the country until January 1993 when the country was returned to democracy. This return to democracy is believed to be the response to calls from CSOs, the international community, World Bank, IMF, etc. For some scholars, when Rawlings and his PNDC came to power it was not envisaged that political parties would have a place in the country's political process again [37]. To drive the point home, after so many years of military rule, the 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections prepared the grounds for a return to democratic rule. However, this particular election have been regarded by most people to be very controversial. Both the transparency and validity of the final results was highly contested and ill-spoken of by most Ghanaians and this consequently led to the boycotting of the parliamentary elections by the opposition parties led by the New Patriotic Party (NPP). It accordingly led to the publication of '*The Stolen Verdict*' [38]. The boycott eventually led to the formation of a legitimised one-party parliament with a military socialist-oriented president in the first administration of the Fourth Republic.

By November 1996, an improvement was seen in the transparency of the elections as most of the electoral malpractices were curbed and the EC made more independent than it used to be. This eventually led to the relatively high acceptance of the validity of the election results. This election was won by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) under Rawlings.

The December 2000 elections brought in a new government under the leadership of J. A. Kufuor. Thus, Rawlings had successfully served his two terms of office (8 years) and that was the first of its kind in the history of the country. However, since none of the two leading presidential candidates scored 50%+1 of the votes required to win the elections, a presidential run-off was held on December 28, 2000. According to Ayee, these elections were "arguably the most important since independence in 1957" because they marked the robustness of the country's burgeoning democracy by the smooth transition of the reins of government from a constitutionally

elected government that served two terms of office to another one, whose members belong to the largest opposition party, through the ballot box. It is in this respect that he has described the 2000 elections as "a 'referendum' on the durability of the 1992 Constitution" [39, p. 24]. Moreover, unlike the previous elections, the 2000 elections had seven presidential candidates whose stance on major issues confronting the nation like agriculture, education, health, corruption and empowerment of vulnerable groups, etc. did not differ significantly across the board [40]. The election was however characterized by a low voter turnout to the extent that the media pled with electorates to exercise their franchise on the voting day. Only 61.7% of registered voters turned out to vote during the first run and 60.4% in the run-off. In the end, Kufuor had 56.90% as against Mills' 43.10% after the run-off which saw all the then opposition parties joining forces with the NPP.

Ghana's fourth consecutive peaceful general elections were conducted in 2004. Evidence shows that this election was an improvement on previous ones as it was more free, fair, peaceful and transparent. This relative success has been attributed to the existence of the 2004 Political Parties Code of Conduct among other things [22]. According to the EC, over 85% of registered voters casted their vote and this totaled 8,625,785 eligible voters. On the whole, 52.4% voted for the NPP presidential candidate- Kufuor, 44.6% for Mills (NDC), 1.9% for Edward Mahama (Peoples National Convention-PNC) and 1.0 for George Aguddey (CPP). The NPP won a total of 128 seats in parliament while the NDC had 94. The remaining six seats were shared among the PNC, CPP and an independent candidate with the ratio 4: 1:1 respectively.

3.1.2 The 2008 elections: A new era for democratic consolidation

Just after the 2008 elections, there were unfounded claims and rumors of massive rigging in some constituencies in the Ashanti and Volta regions which are the strongholds of the NPP and NDC respectively. Moreover, prior to the elections, stakes were high as to what was going to happen in the country. The credibility of the elections was the issue on board. After the elections, a lot of questions remained about the refereeing of the EC, the campaign conducts, messages and strategies of political parties, the conduct of the media, etc.

The year 2008 consequently marks a very important milestone in the history of Ghana as far as elections and democratic consolidation are concerned. From the office of the EC, eight candidates formally registered for the presidential elections while many individuals and representatives of the registered political parties also contested for the two hundred and thirty parliamentary seats. In all, a total of one thousand and sixty (1,060) candidates filed for the parliamentary contest out of which 956 were males and 104 females. It is important also to note that 964 of the candidates contested on tickets of political parties whereas the other 96 were independent candidates. The NDC and NPP recorded the highest number of candidates, 229 each. Whereas the NDC candidate for Asokwa constituency was disqualified, the NPP did not present a candidate for the Ellembelle constituency.

The turnout on the Election Day was high and encouraging. But since no candidate received the required 50% +1 vote, a run-off election was held on the December 28 between the two leading candidates- Nana Akufo-Addo and John Evans Atta Mills. The 2008 elections also saw the opposition-NDC winning 114 Parliamentary seats with the incumbent NPP getting 107 seats, notwithstanding the fact that Akufo-Addo won 49.13% of the votes in the first round of the presidential race, with Atta Mills winning 47.92%. Interestingly, as the focus of the run-off campaign shifted away from issues-based to personality, party loyalty, and ethnicity, Atta Mills eventually won 50.23% of the vote against Akufo-Addo's 49.77%, thereby leading to a second alternation of power from one party to the other. Following the late run-off conducted on January 2, 2009 by the EC in the Tain District due to logistics problems, Mills was certified as the victor in the run-off election by a margin of less than one percent.

Prior to the declaration of the results and the Tain run-off, hundreds of NDC supporters converged on the election headquarters demanding that Mills be declared the victor. This, therefore, made the NPP file a lawsuit seeking to delay voting in Tain as it claimed that the atmosphere in the rural district was not conducive to a free and fair election. According to the NPP, their action was necessitated by the fear of Election Day violence. The court, however, denied the NPP's injunction request and stated that it would only hear the case on January 5, 2009. This situation then forced the

party to call its supporters to boycott the vote. This idea was however criticised by civil groups. Eventually, both parties accepted the final results of the election.

The above information in one way or the other makes Ghana's 2008 general elections unique. Unique in the sense that for the very first time, the country has gone for a "third run" in the presidential election and not just that but the incumbent party (NPP) which won the last elections with an overwhelming majority of votes (over 8.2%) lost to the main opposition party (NDC) with a slight difference of less than one percent (0.46%). After the "third run", Mills (NDC) had 4,521,032 votes representing 50.23% of the total valid vote cast while Akufo Addo (NPP) had 4,480,446 (49.77%). The surprising thing is that contrary to what most people thought, the incumbent president- Kufuor handed over peacefully to the president-elect while the presidential candidate for the NPP also calmly accepted the outcome of the elections as opposed to what normally happens in most developing countries (the case of power-sharing).

3.1.3 2012 General elections: Uncertainties in the midst of a 'Better Ghana'

As the 1992 Constitution requires, the 2012 general election was held on December 7 to elect a president and members of parliament in 275 electoral constituencies. However, the breakdown of some biometric verification machines (BVM) prevented some voters from casting their ballot. This resulted in voting being extended to December 8, 2012. It must be noted that this was the first time the country was using the biometric voting system (BVS). The point must also be reiterated that just about six months to the election, 45 new constituencies were added to the previously 230 seat Parliament- a decision by the EC which was contested in the country's Supreme Court. There was the question of timing and also the allegation of gerrymandering by some stakeholders. The Court however upheld the EC's decision in October 2012. The vigor of this criticism eventually diminished as focus switched to candidate-nomination and campaigning to win the newly created seats [41].

Among the competing candidates for the presidency were incumbent president John Mahama of the NDC (who has succeeded Atta Mills who died suddenly in office on July 24,

2012). The main opposition party (NPP) was led by Akufo-Addo. The election also saw six other candidates contending for the presidency, including an independent candidate. During the campaigns, there were some substantive policy differences between the two leading parties. Whereas the NDC describes itself as a social democratic party and thus believes in the egalitarian treatment of all persons, the NPP pledged to promote a vibrant, free-market economy. The NPP also promised to create a property-owning democracy. All the competing parties hyped the economy as the key electoral battleground with the intention of using the country's newly-found oil and other mineral wealth to kick-start an industrial transformation, improving state education and health services, as well as infrastructure, and the creation of jobs. However, the two main parties had sharp differences in terms of their educational policies. Thus, whereas the NPP proposed free High School education immediately, the NDC claimed such a policy was unrealistic. They instead opted for the phasing-in of free Senior High School Education over a twenty year period [41].

Some scholars have argued that a comparison of the 2012 polls with those of 2008, could reveal that there were more technical problems, but almost certainly less manipulation of the figures. It is also argued that before Mills died, the NDC were in trouble to the extent that they would have struggled to win an election and that, they subsequently winning the 2012 elections can only be seen as partly due to a "sympathy" vote as the "Better Ghana" agenda was already failing. As a matter of fact, the NDC did not run a very good campaign, and that, there were few fresh ideas [42].

Notwithstanding the fact that the NPP campaign was deemed to be very good, evidence shows that that they became victims of their own propaganda machine [42]. Thus, their excessive confidence of winning the election, somewhat made them complacent to the extent that they failed to call their wayward party members to order, and openly attacked every dissenting view, even from their own party. They seemed to have forgotten that elections is all about figures and that there are millions of floating voters in the Ghanaian society who usually weigh the actions of each party among other things before casting their ballot.

Eventually, Mahama was declared the winner of the election with 50.7% of the vote, while his

main challenger-Akufo-Addo received 47.74%. Notwithstanding the fact that all election observers (CODEO, ECOWAS, AU, etc.) declared the elections were, for the most part, free and fair, there were still widespread allegations of voting irregularities. These allegations, however, did not undermine the fairness of the elections [43]. Conversely, with the NPP alleging the tampering of results by the EC in favour of the incumbent, a petition was filed at the country's Supreme Court to review the results of the election. According to the NPP, the declaration forms' ("pink sheets") results as counted in single polling stations, before aggregation to higher levels, including the municipalities, districts and regions, did not tally with the final results as declared by the EC. There was also the challenge that the EC had to prove that 14,000 expat Ghanaians had voted abroad. The Supreme Court on August 29, 2013, gave its verdict on the case and concluded that Mahama won the election. It must also be noted that even prior to the election, in the eagerness of petitions regarding the election, the country's Chief Justice established two public complaints secretariats with the aim of swiftly processing such concerns [44].

After the verdict, the statement from the petitioners (NPP) was quite crucial in the sense that it gnarled the pressure that had already inundated every corner of the country and consequently calmed the anxieties of the supporters of the NPP. According Asante and Asare [45, p. 5], "the general comportment of Ghanaians during this period especially after the verdict was remarkable" and that "this may be as a result of having at the back of their minds that once again Ghana wanted to open another chapter in Africa's democracy and which it perfectly did".

The 2012 elections indeed constituted an important step in democratic consolidation in Ghana. This stems from the fact that the stakes were considerably high in light of growing popular demands for better living standards. With regards to this election, the AU Observer Mission asserts that it "afforded Ghanaians an opportunity to assess the strength of their democracy and to confirm that the country is gradually developing a culture of political transition." [46, p. 7]

The EC report indicates that out of 14,158, 890 registered voters, 11,246,982 voters participated in the poll, thus representing 79.43% voter

turnout making it one the highest turnout recorded in recent time. Moreover, the AU report reveals that the relationship between the polling staff, observers and party agents in the polling stations was cordial and the polling staff made efforts to address various concerns raised by the agents and observers [46].

3.1.4 The 2016 general elections: A call for change or continuity

The 2016 election offered the 15,712,499 registered Ghanaian voters the power to elect a new president, together with a vice, as well as 275 members of Parliament. In a country where there are no seats specifically reserved for women coupled with the fact that there are also no legislative or voluntary quotas in place, the elections are open and unbiasedly reflective of the peoples' choices. It must, however, be noted that various political parties implement some form of affirmative actions aimed at getting more women into the legislature which as at the time of the 2016 election had only 30 (10.9%) female parliamentarians.

The 2016 election witnessed the second time the country was using the BVS to prevent double registration and voting. Moreover, through the efforts of the EC, voters were able to send SMS to receive their registration details which included their registered polling stations. This eventually eased the pressure and tensions that usually characterized elections across the country.

The fact that several measures were put in place at polling stations during elections so as to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to cast their ballot, to some extent shows the level of importance the country attaches to allowing all eligible citizens to participate in the governance. For instance, according to electoral rules, polling stations cannot be located on verandas, across from gutters or in any location that would impede the access of persons with disabilities to polling stations. Moreover, persons with disabilities should be given special treatment at the polling station to vote. The list embraces the elderly, sick, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, as well as women with young kids. As a matter of fact, tactile ballots have also been introduced for the blind and partially sighted individuals to enable them easily cast their vote. The case is also similar for persons with wheelchairs, thus, the height of some voting booths have been lowered to make voting easier. Furthermore, proxy votes are allowed for persons with

disabilities who are unable to make it to the polls on Election Day provided the appropriate documentation are secured [47].

3.1.4.1 Spotlights of the 2016 elections

The 2016 election season was characterized by a number of incidences that are worth noting. First is the filing of an application by one political party which sought an injunction from the Court, restraining the EC from receiving the published filing fees for contesting candidates. The EC was served with the application on September 27, 2016. It must also be noted that the EC had prior to this being served with court applications challenging the processes and basis for the filing fees it has announced. However, the court on October 7, 2016, dismissed the injunction thereby clearing the way for the EC to receive the filing fees and completing the nomination process [48].

Secondly, despite the launching of "A Guide to Candidates and their Agents for the 2016 elections" in September 2016, more than half of the presidential aspirants failed to meet the required standards as provided by the EC and were eventually disqualified from contesting. Some of the disqualified candidates subsequently challenged the decision of the EC at the law court. The High Court on October 28, ruled on the first case filed by Papa Kwesi Nduom, the presidential candidate for the Progressive People's Party (PPP). The Court eventually directed the EC to allow Nduom to correct mistakes on his nomination form and resubmit it. However, the EC appealed this ruling to the Supreme Court and sought clarity on the relevant aspects of the law on candidate nominations. The Supreme Court, however, upheld the decision of the High Court and consequently directed on November 7, 2016 that the EC extends the nomination period from November 7 to 8, 2016 and allow the disqualified candidates to resubmit their nomination forms within the extended period. The EC as result on November 9 cleared and reinstated three out of the twelve disqualified candidates, bringing the number of presidential candidates to seven [49].

Thirdly, the two main presidential candidates from the NDC and NPP ironically did not take part in the presidential debate organized by the IEA on November 22. Moreover, though all candidates were invited to take part in the debate organized by the Ghana Broadcasting

Corporation (GBC) and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the NPP and National Democratic Party (NDP) presidential candidates did not take part.

Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that the political environment was very much charged throughout the campaign season, it was largely peaceful, with few incidents of violence. Thus, despite the fact that the 2016 elections was a keenly contested one between the two dominant parties-NDC and NPP, commendable efforts were made by the National Peace Council (NPC) and other related bodies to encourage the presidential candidates to sign a peace pact (Accra Declaration) in which they agreed to take a definitive stand against any form of electoral violence, impunity, and injustice [49].

According to the assessment of the Commonwealth Observer Group, the electoral process as a whole was credible, inclusive and transparent and that many of the key benchmarks for democratic elections were met. Thus, with regards to the campaigning, though it was highly competitive and closely contested, it was also conducted in a largely peaceful and vibrant manner, with essential rights of candidates, political parties, and supporters for all intents and purposes been valued.

As compared to previous elections, the EC was on this occasion relatively more equipped and organized, thus, administering the electoral process efficiently and professionally. This gives an indication of the lessons it learned from the 2012 Election Petition. Consequently, the polls were mostly opened on time with election materials available and polling staff, security and party agents all been present. Observers have indicated that the poll set up, voting, and the count, as well as collation and results process, mostly followed the prescribed procedures. In addition, the vast majority of voters found their names on the voters' lists and were able to vote with only a few incidents been reported [49].

Among the key issues raised during the 2016 election campaign were the fight against corruption, improving the energy sector, the economy, and education, as well as infrastructure and health, and addressing the high rate of unemployment. Restructuring agriculture and rural

development, natural resources, as well as improving ICT were all on the campaign trail. The subject of the personalities of the candidates was however not missing as party faithful chanted the praise of their heroes and sought to malign their opponents as much as possible.

The final result of the parliamentary election from the 275 constituencies confirmed that the NPP obtained 169 seats while the NDC obtained 106 seats. Akufo-Addo had 53.85% while Mahama had 44.40%. The remaining 1.75% was shared among the other five candidates. This basically goes to confirm the de facto two-party system that the country has over the years metamorphosed into. The election thus saw the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the other for the third time.

Indeed the 2016 elections in Ghana were norm-setting for Africa, the Commonwealth and beyond as observed by the Commonwealth. Thus, according to the Commonwealth, "the EC, the people of Ghana and the political parties and their leaders all contributed to this further deepening of the democratic process in Ghana by delivering elections that for many in the Group are among the best they have observed." [49, p. 40].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Ghanaian EC has been in existence since 1992 and as a result, has gathered a lot of experience in the conduct of its mandate. In addition, the reputation of the EC Chair and the courage it has proven in applying the law impartially has also contributed to the confidence that Ghanaians have reposed in the EC to discharge its function. Consequently, the EC is widely seen as an impartial institution in dealing with electoral matters especially in the management of complaints and conflicting interests from various stakeholders.

Moreover, as a scheme for promoting inter-party harmony and cohesion, the various political parties in Ghana through the mediation of the EC and IEA have established the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) which is a platform for dialogue. Since its formation, IPAC has provided a conducive platform for mediating and resolving the inter-party dispute and for articulating possible future electoral reforms. The

IPAC has thus aided in consensus building among all stakeholders.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana (Chapter 7) provides the legal framework for the representation of the people and the participation of political parties (Article 55). The Political Parties Law, Act 2000 also gives further provisions and details. Among the provisions are the declaration of assets and liabilities as well as the statement of their accounts, the sources of donations in cash or kind and the audited accounts of all political parties. The Constitution also precludes political parties from raising campaign funds from foreigners (Art. 55 (14, 15)). These provisions and many others make political parties in Ghana relatively fairly well developed with sound institutional frameworks and national outreach than in other parts of the continent [46].

Furthermore, Ghana has established an effective mechanism for dealing with election disputes, including a fast-track dispute resolution mechanism for dealing with election-related complaints during the electoral period. Moreover, decisions of the EC can be challenged through the Courts as can challenges to election results. Whereas a challenge to the results of the Presidential Election must be submitted to the Supreme Court within 21 days of the declaration of results (Art. 64), that of the parliamentary elections must be submitted to the High Court (Art. 99[1a, 2]) within 21 days of declaration of the results. However, a challenge to the validity of the process on the grounds of corrupt practice etc. must be made prior to the publication of results.

The fact that Ghana has experienced three peaceful transfers of power over the past 26 years gives it a prestigious position in the world of democracies, especially considering the fact that the country finds itself as an island of democracy in an ocean of dictatorial regimes and prebendal governments. The return to democracy in 1992 after decades of military rule, the peaceful transfer of power from the socialist-oriented NDC under Rawlings to the capitalist-inclined NPP of Kufuour, and to the humbling anti-elitist government of Mills and the subsequent ordered succession following Mills' passing away, the handling the 2012 election petition, all the way to the handling of the multiple court cases of the 2016 elections, are all an affirmation of the strength of democracy and the rule of law in Ghana.

These aside, can it be said that Ghana has really consolidated her democracy? Is democratic consolidation all about elections and its related matters? Certainly not. Democratic consolidation is much more than the conduct of periodic free and fair elections. It is much more than just the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the other. It is also much more than the cordial resolution of election-related conflicts.

As a matter of fact, for democratic consolidation to be complete, the political system should not just be truly representative with voters needing an electoral process that is imbued with integrity, and various stakeholders all conforming to the laid down laws and procedures, but the system must also provide democratic dividends. Thus, a truly consolidated democracy must reflect on the socio-economic wellbeing of the electorates: the standard of living of the citizens must be commensurate with the authenticity of the national institutions. The point is that a state cannot claim to have consolidated its democracy while the masses of the youth are largely unemployed or underemployed.

Ghana cannot continue to boast of her democratic credentials just because the judicial system is effective in dealing with election-related matters whilst it cannot check the abuse of power by the executive and while there is also corruption in the judiciary.

Ghana cannot be boasting of a consolidated democracy while vigilante groups go about ceasing state asserts and vandalizing private properties just because their parties are in power. In a truly consolidated democracy, state security supersedes political party interests. In a truly consolidated democracy, paramilitary groups are not entertained by the state just because they aided the ruling party to win an election.

In a truly consolidated democracy, meritocracy is cherished while abhorring mediocrity. Thus, Parliament does not just approve of Executive's decision simply because the ruling party has an overwhelming majority. Instead, it serves as a check on the excesses of the Executive.

In a truly consolidated democracy, the government does not connive with directors of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to loot the state. It instead has a responsibility of ensuring equitable distribution of resources and the

welfare of the citizenry by creating the conducive environment for growth.

In a truly consolidated democracy, it is not only the voice and opinions of the few political elites that matter; the rules must not be applicable only to the ordinary citizens but also to the elites. There should be equal application of the laws. Equality before the law must be a reality, not just in books.

The author argues that there are better prospects for democratic consolidation in Ghana. Thus, the paper submits that despite the fact that most of the conditions that fuel and aid democratic consolidation exist in Ghana, the country is now on the second step of democratic consolidation ladder- electoral democracy [50].

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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