

## **OPPOSITION POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA AND GHANA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, 2011-2022**

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### **Abstract**

This study compared opposition politics and democratic stability in Nigeria and Ghana, between 2011 and 2022. Utilizing the Marxist theory of the state, ex-post-factoresearch design, qualitative method of data collection and qualitative method of data analysis, the study investigated the link between weak structure of election management body and repression of opposition political parties by the ruling party; repression of opposition political parties by the ruling party and electoral violence; as well as manipulation of electoral processes and power alternation between the ruling party and opposition political parties in Nigeria and Ghana. The study found weak structure of election management body to account for the repression of opposition political parties by the ruling party more in Nigeria than in Ghana. The study equally observes that incumbent use of security operatives to intimidate opposition political parties give rise to electoral violence more in Nigeria than in Ghana. Finally, the study observes that the ruling party's manipulation of electoral processes undermine power alternation between the ruling party and opposition political parties more in Nigeria relative to Ghana. It, therefore, argues that the Nigerian state more than the Ghanaian state is characterized by limited institutional autonomy which undermined orderly transfer of political power by the ruling political party to the opposition political party with implications for democratic stability. Among others, the study is of the view that the Independent National Electoral Commission be structurally and institutionally repositioned to strengthen party politics in Nigeria by regulating the activities of political parties and other important stakeholders involved in electoral process as like in Ghana.

**Keywords: Opposition Politics, Democratic Stability, Election Management, Political Repression, Governance in Africa**

### **Introduction**

Democratic stability is marked by sustained efforts to transition away from authoritarian governance, creating systems that eliminate disloyal political actors while promoting sustainable, inclusive practices. Stable democracies are characterized by adherence to democratic norms and the protection of civil rights for all citizens (Schedler, 1998; Linz & Stephan, 1999). Fully institutionalized democracies differ from those that merely survive; weak democratic structures often lead to instability, as seen in Nigeria and Ghana. Effective democratic stability requires the removal of obstacles to marginalized groups' participation and

safeguarding citizens' rights (Diamond, 1996). In this regard, democratic norms and stable economies, along with functional bureaucracies and active civil societies, are key to a robust democracy (Diamond, 1999; Linz & Stephan, 1999). Africa's democratization wave in the 1990s saw a shift from autocratic regimes to multi-party systems, raising expectations for democratic progress across the continent (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). In West Africa, countries like Ghana and Nigeria moved toward democracy under similar regional pressures but experienced varying levels of democratic stability. This contrast offers an opportunity for comparative analysis, as Ghana's democratic progress stands in stark contrast to Nigeria's challenges with political violence, suppression of opposition, and inconsistent democratic practices. The 1990s marked a shift to constitutional governance across West Africa, introducing multi-party systems, regular elections, and the rule of law (Ojo, 2000; Diamond & Plattner, 2010). However, frequent electoral fraud and the manipulation of power by ruling parties continue to undermine democratic stability in countries like Nigeria.

Comparing Nigeria and Ghana reveals valuable insights into their political landscapes. Both countries have similar political and cultural characteristics, including colonial histories, diverse ethnicities, and religious divisions. Yet, while Ghana has gained recognition for credible elections and active opposition parties, Nigeria struggles with election manipulation and ruling party dominance (Boafo-Arthur, 2008; Achebe, 2012). A 2008 Skanning survey, cited by Majeed (2011), shows a stark contrast: Ghanaian citizens report high satisfaction with their democracy, while Nigerians show low democratic confidence. Freedom House (2015) further categorizes Ghana as "free" and Nigeria as "partly free," underscoring the disparities in political rights and civil liberties between the two countries. Since returning to democracy in 1992, Ghana has held multiple peaceful elections and strengthened its democratic practices, achieving regional acclaim as a model for stability (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2012). Ghana's opposition parties are active and competitive, fostering a balanced political landscape. Conversely, Nigeria's democracy faces recurring issues with electoral irregularities and violence. Despite having numerous political parties, Nigeria's opposition is often marginalized, with limited access to resources and influence, contributing to the overall weakness of its democratic process (Awopeju, 2011; Hounkpe & Fall, 2011). The differing democratic paths of Nigeria and Ghana highlight the significance of opposition politics in achieving democratic stability. Ghana's progress contrasts sharply with Nigeria's experience of opposition repression and electoral manipulation. This study explores the relationship between opposition politics and democratic stability in Nigeria and Ghana from 2011 to 2022, a period during which both countries held three multi-party elections. Focusing

on electoral violence, opposition suppression, and ruling party dominance, this paper examines how institutional structures and political culture influence the democratic stability and efficacy of opposition parties in these West African democracies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Democratic Stability and Opposition Politics**

Democratic stability refers to the ongoing stability of a democratic regime, which, as Schedler (2001) notes, requires as much effort to sustain as it does to establish. A stable democracy is one in which no political actors, institutions, or groups seek alternatives to the democratic process for gaining power or claim a right to veto democratically made decisions (Linz, 1978). Achieving stability requires dismantling authoritarian structures, fostering democratic culture, and institutionalizing best practices (Yagboyaju, 2007). Stable democracies avoid breakdown by eliminating disloyal actors and fostering sustainable systems that protect civil and political rights, particularly for marginalized groups (Schedler, 1998; Diamond, 1996). Such democracies distinguish themselves from those that merely endure without fully institutionalizing democratic norms. According to Diamond (1999), stability also depends on the conformity of political actors to democratic principles. Opposition parties are essential to democratic health, serving as a “government-in-waiting” that monitors and critiques ruling parties in preparation for potential leadership (Dolo, 2006; Adam, 2012). However, the effectiveness of opposition varies widely. In India, for example, opposition efforts are fragmented by the multi-party system, limiting their ability to counterbalance the ruling party (Bhadoria, 2010). Furthermore, the destructive tactics of some opposition parties diminish their credibility and make them less effective (Umar, 2011). In parliamentary systems like Britain’s, opposition has a formalized role with structural support, such as the shadow cabinet, which allows opposition leaders to provide alternative policies and critique government actions (Naanen, 2016; NES, 2005).

In African contexts, opposition parties often face significant challenges. State instruments are sometimes employed to weaken and intimidate opposition groups, as seen in Zimbabwe, where the ruling party has used biased electoral systems and other strategies to maintain power (Laakso, 2010). This pattern of suppression limits opposition effectiveness, leading to one-party dominance and a slower democratization process across several African nations (Rakner & van de Walle, 2009). While a vibrant opposition is crucial for democratic accountability, the political landscape in many African countries restricts opposition development, resulting in regimes where power rarely changes hands. Strong empirical

evidence indicates that active opposition parties, along with independent institutions, enhance electoral governance and accountability by providing checks on ruling powers (Rakner & van de Walle, 2009). In Nigeria, opposition politics has evolved from the First Republic, with parties like Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG) acting as the primary opposition in the Federal Parliament, to the more recent emergence of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) as an influential opposition force in 2015. However, opposition effectiveness has fluctuated, often hampered by internal party crises that prevent coordinated action. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) held power without substantial opposition until 2015, when the APC coalition won the national elections, marking a significant shift. This transition illustrated the importance of a strong opposition in maintaining democratic accountability and providing voters with viable alternatives (Oseni, 2014). In summary, effective opposition is essential for a stable democracy, fostering an environment where democratic norms can flourish and power transitions peacefully.

### **Election Management Bodies and Opposition Political Parties in Nigeria and Ghana**

Elections and electoral administration form the cornerstone of democratization processes. Electoral administration encompasses the activities, composition, mandate, and tasks of election management bodies (EMBs) dedicated to conducting credible elections within a democratic society. Ajayi (2007) describes electoral administration as covering the conduct and standards of election officials, the management of electoral procedures, and the enforcement of election rules. Similarly, Jinadu (1997) highlights that electoral administration entails the planning and execution of elections by a designated authority, encompassing all activities before, during, and after an election. Election management bodies are thus pivotal in overseeing elections, creating institutional frameworks that enable fair competition, and enforcing rules to ensure democratic integrity (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). The effectiveness of election management bodies in Nigeria and Ghana has been studied extensively. Research, such as the Conference on Comparative Politics and Electoral Systems (2021), underscores that EMBs play a multifaceted role that includes rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication. These processes are crucial to upholding democratic principles, as they establish the operational guidelines for electoral activities, enforce them during elections, and address conflicts that arise within the electoral framework (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). For example, independent EMBs in African countries, including Ghana and Nigeria, are often cited as integral to electoral integrity due to their autonomy from direct executive influence, as noted by Lopez-Pintor (2000).

The scholarly discourse further examines the autonomy of EMBs, highlighting the distinction between independent, government-controlled, and hybrid models of election administration. Lopez-Pintor (2000) categorizes the models based on EMBs' autonomy levels and their governance structures. For instance, Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) operate under the independent model, where EMBs function with substantial autonomy from executive interference. This independence is deemed critical for fostering public trust in the electoral process and reducing opportunities for election-related fraud (Kerr, 2013). However, issues such as funding constraints and political pressures still challenge these bodies. In Ghana, the EC's reputation has benefitted from support from key political and societal institutions, whereas Nigeria's INEC has been criticized for administrative inefficiencies and perceived biases, particularly in contentious elections like those in 2007 and 2011 (Kerr, 2011; Alao, Alao, & Nwogwugwu, 2013). In sum, the effectiveness of EMBs in Nigeria and Ghana underscores the essential role of electoral institutions in safeguarding democratic integrity. Studies on Ghana reveal a relatively higher public confidence in the EC, attributed to its perceived autonomy and broad mandate in managing electoral and party activities. Conversely, Nigeria's INEC has faced scrutiny over its procedural transparency and administrative capacity, reflecting broader challenges in the pursuit of credible elections. The comparative analysis highlights that EMBs' independence and operational capacity are critical to ensuring the legitimacy of elections and, by extension, the consolidation of democracy (Omotola, 2009; Hounkpe, 2011).

### **Intimidation of Opposition Political Parties and Electoral Violence in Nigeria and Ghana**

The political landscape in developing democracies often faces significant instability due to party defection and ideological inconsistency among politicians. Omotola (2008) highlights the frequent pattern of party-switching in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, a trend he attributes to politicians defecting whenever their immediate political goals are unmet. According to Simbine (2004), this habit of switching parties is largely driven by opportunism, greed, and an absence of long-term ideological commitment. Many politicians in Nigeria use internal party conflicts as a justification for leaving, revealing a deep-rooted apathy toward party ideology. This lack of commitment erodes the stability and integrity of party politics in Nigeria, and political repression further influences electoral dynamics across West Africa, as discussed in recent analyses (International Conference on Political Science and Public Administration, 2020). Party defection in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon; it dates back to the colonial period, where it became an entrenched part of political behavior. Mba (2011) observes that colonialism introduced and intensified this trend, which has been perpetuated by

the structural dynamics of the post-colonial Nigerian state. The incidence of defection is often influenced by two key factors: first, politicians often defect to the ruling party before elections to enhance their chances in primary elections. Second, when politicians fail to secure nominations within their parties, they frequently provoke internal crises as a pretext to leave, moving to other parties or even creating new ones. This lack of discipline and loyalty undermines Nigeria's democratic process, weakening the credibility of its political institutions (Aleyomi, 2013).

Opposition parties play a critical role in monitoring government actions, advocating for policies that align with national interests, and fostering accountability. Neelam (2005) argues that effective opposition helps maintain checks on the ruling party and brings pertinent issues to the fore, ensuring that national development remains on track. In a multiparty system, opposition parties serve as vigilant overseers of government policy and performance, creating public awareness on any perceived misdeeds by those in power. However, the role of opposition parties is often viewed negatively, as they are sometimes perceived as obstructionists rather than constructive participants in the democratic process. In India, the political class has faced criticism for a perceived lack of dedication to governance, with some politicians showing limited concern for serving the nation, a problem that remains unresolved (Neelam, 2005). This lack of responsible leadership has hindered the ability to maximize the potential of both the opposition and ruling parties in contributing to sustainable growth. Similar concerns are echoed by Wahman (2011), who posits that opposition coalitions, if strategically utilized, can provide an "alternation effect," potentially leading to electoral victories for coalition parties. By uniting around shared goals, opposition coalitions in democracies like Nigeria and Ghana could play a transformative role in creating competitive electoral environments, fostering accountability, and promoting political stability.

### **Electoral Processes and Power Alternation in Nigeria and Ghana**

Electoral malpractice is a prominent challenge to democratic processes in Africa, with Nigeria and Ghana providing key examples. Gambo (2006) notes that Nigerian elections are often marred by unethical practices, including the deployment of quasi-military groups, illegal possession of election materials, attacks on officials, campaigning on election day, and bribery. Such malpractices, according to Okolie (2005), significantly shape voters' behaviors and erode democratic stability in Nigeria. He suggests reforms, including the establishment of regional-based electoral bodies and a central coordinating body with representatives from regional electoral commissions, as well as allowing independent candidates to contest in elections. These measures could help counteract the adverse effects of electoral misconduct. In contrast,

Ghana has gained recognition as a stable democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Alidu (2014) notes that although Ghana's 2012 elections saw some violations, they were largely administrative errors and did not affect the overall results. Despite these issues, Ghana's electoral framework is often seen as more transparent and fairer compared to Nigeria. Nevertheless, Alidu recommends structural, legislative, and administrative reforms to further strengthen the electoral process in Ghana. Electoral violence in Nigeria has roots that extend beyond electoral competition, with socio-political factors exacerbating tensions. Orji and Uzodi (2012) argue that electoral violence in Nigeria is influenced by ethnic, regional, and religious divisions, a phenomenon dating back to colonial times. In Nigeria, political affiliations are frequently aligned with community identities, fostering deep-seated rivalries that fuel election-related violence. This violence is often driven by "prebendal politics," as defined by Richard Joseph (1991), where state power and resources become prizes in political contests. As a result, incumbents often cling to power by any means necessary, while challengers may resort to violence to attain their goals.

Such practices make the peaceful rotation of power a challenge, as incumbents use all available tactics, including violence, to maintain their positions. At the same time, those aspiring to power exploit ethnic, communal, and religious identities to galvanize support, transforming what should be a political competition into a communal conflict. This dynamic is evident in Nigeria, where political parties and candidates are often seen as representatives of specific ethnic or religious groups. Consequently, electoral violence is frequently triggered by attempts to defend "communal honor" against perceived threats. The historical perspective offered by Adesote and Abimbola (2014) highlights how colonial rule in Nigeria established the foundation for political unrest. They argue that colonial political experiments, such as the 1946 Richards Constitution and the 1922 elective principle, limited political participation through strict income and residency requirements, breeding resentment and, ultimately, violence. The flawed electoral system of the 1951 constitution, for example, led to widespread dissatisfaction, spurring political agitation by 1953 (Falola et al., 1991). Electoral violence persisted in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, particularly during elections from 1999 to 2011, undermining the democratic process. Adesote and Abimbola suggest that while democratic societies generally avoid electoral violence through adherence to democratic principles and impartial electoral oversight, Nigeria's experience has been different, largely due to weak enforcement of these principles. Comparatively, the literature primarily addresses the nature of electoral frameworks in both Nigeria and Ghana but often lacks an in-depth comparison of the two. Such a comparison could reveal whether Ghana's electoral framework has a greater

capacity to prevent electoral violence than Nigeria's. This gap underscores the need for further research to understand the structural and procedural differences that might make Ghana's elections less susceptible to violence than Nigeria's.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Dependency Theory**

This paper is anchored on Marxist Structuralist Theory of the State. The Marxist Structuralist theory of the state, as developed by Karl Marx and later expanded upon by theorists like Alavi (1973), Ekekwe (1985), Ake (1985), and Ibeanu (1998), provides a lens to understand the political dynamics of post-colonial states. Originating in 1848, Marx's theory counters liberal assumptions that the state functions autonomously, serving the interests of all society members impartially. Instead, the theory posits that the state is fundamentally an instrument that serves the dominant class, protecting their interests over those of the broader public (Okolie, 2006). In post-colonial contexts, scholars argue that the state's role extends beyond domestic governance, as it is also shaped by the demands of imperialist powers and local elites. Ekekwe (1985) describes the colonial state's primary purpose as establishing a system enabling wealth accumulation for the foreign bourgeoisie, in collaboration with the local elite, through exploitation of resources and labor. Thus, imperialist interests continue to influence post-colonial states like Nigeria, resulting in governments that prioritize the interests of political elites and foreign capital rather than those of the populace (Ekekwe, 1985). Ake (1985) furthers this argument, asserting that post-colonial states lack autonomy and are bound by structures that align them closely with the dominant social class. Consequently, these states are unable to mediate political conflicts effectively, often adopting policies that reflect the preferences of ruling elites. The theory elucidates the contrasting political paths of Nigeria and Ghana between 2011 and 2022. In Nigeria, public institutions are frequently manipulated to favor the interests of the ruling class, with state resources used to strengthen the ruling party's control, often at the expense of democratic stability (Ake, 2001). This manifests in electoral manipulation and suppression of opposition parties, diminishing the credibility of electoral institutions and threatening the peaceful transfer of power. By contrast, Ghana's political landscape has been relatively more stable, with institutions that better support opposition parties and democratic processes. According to Ibeanu (1998), Nigeria's post-colonial elites often employ clientele politics, amplifying power struggles and undermining democratic stability. In essence, the Marxist Structuralist theory of the state explains the divergent political dynamics in Nigeria and Ghana, highlighting how the institutional arrangements in Nigeria undermine democracy by prioritizing ruling elite interests over a fair political process. This framework underscores how the Nigerian state's low autonomy negatively impacts the effectiveness of electoral and governance institutions, contrasting with Ghana's more autonomous and stable democratic structure.



## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopted an ex-post-facto research design, leveraging pre-existing data to explore the relationship between opposition politics and democratic stability in Nigeria and Ghana. This design is appropriate for qualitative research as it enables analysis of independent and dependent variables after events have occurred, making it useful for cases where experimental control is not feasible. Data collection relies on the documentary approach, utilizing secondary sources that are publicly available. This method emphasizes the refinement, interpretation, and evaluation of documents from reliable institutions such as the Ghanaian Embassy in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Abuja, the Electoral Commission of Ghana, and organizations like the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Additional secondary sources include books, academic journals, conference papers, and magazines on the subject of opposition politics and democratization in Nigeria and Ghana. The paper employed qualitative content analysis to organize and synthesize data systematically, enabling the identification of trends and relevant themes. This method, grounded in deductive reasoning, is particularly suited to interpreting both explicit and implicit content within the data, thus providing valuable insights into the research topics (Krippendorff, 1980).

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Institutional Weakness and Opposition Repression in Election Management in Nigeria and Ghana**

A strong institutional framework is essential for election management bodies (EMBs) to ensure competitive elections and fair participation for opposition parties. Weak EMB structures, however, enable executive interference, allowing manipulation that represses opposition parties. This issue has been more pronounced in Nigeria than Ghana between 2011 and 2022, as structural weaknesses in EMBs impact their ability to uphold democratic principles and electoral integrity (Schedler, 2013). Institutional fragilities within EMBs create loopholes that ruling parties can exploit to limit opposition involvement, compromising the fairness of the electoral process. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), established by Section 153 (1) (f) of the 1999 Constitution, is responsible for organizing elections impartially. However, INEC has historically struggled with structural limitations that undermine its independence. During the 2011 and 2015 elections, INEC's dependence on the executive for resources allowed ruling party influence to seep into its operations, impacting opposition parties that accused INEC of resource bias (Akinboye, 2015;

Ekundayo, 2020). Despite attempts to increase INEC's autonomy, such as constitutional amendments, the Commission's reliance on executive budgetary approval continues to affect its neutrality. In 2019, accusations emerged that the ruling party influenced INEC's resource allocation, reinforcing perceptions of bias (Alao, Alao & Nwogwugwu, 2016). These limitations suggest that INEC's institutional weaknesses have hindered political competitiveness in Nigeria (Moveh, 2021). Conversely, Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) is recognized for its robust institutional structure and autonomy. Established by Article 43 (1) of the Constitution and reinforced by the Electoral Commission Act of 1993 (Act 451), the EC operates with financial and administrative independence, enabling it to conduct fair elections. For instance, the EC maintained equitable resource distribution during the 2012 and 2016 elections, enhancing the competitive balance between parties (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2018; Hounkpe, 2019). The EC's financial independence, unlike Nigeria's INEC, frees it from executive influence, promoting fair practices that prevent ruling party dominance and allow opposition parties to campaign openly (Interview in Ghana, 2021). Ghana's EC further enhances its credibility through transparent dispute resolution mechanisms, which bolster public trust and political stability. In the 2012 elections, swift and transparent handling of opposition complaints reduced tensions and reinforced perceptions of fairness (Kuenzi, 2018). Between 2011 and 2022, Nigeria's INEC has displayed structural vulnerabilities that expose it to executive influence and limit its impartiality, while Ghana's EC has maintained a robust framework with operational independence. The comparative strength of Ghana's EC underscores the significance of institutional autonomy for electoral fairness, highlighting the need for structural reforms within Nigeria's INEC to foster a more balanced democratic environment (Aiyede, 2018).

### **Appointment and Turnover of Members of EMBs in Nigeria and Ghana**

Election management bodies (EMBs) play a crucial role in ensuring electoral integrity and public trust, which are built on two critical factors: (1) clear, appropriate qualifications for EMB members' appointments, and (2) transparent, merit-based selection mechanisms (Adesola & Abimbola, 2014). In order to carry out their responsibilities impartially and effectively, EMB members must be highly skilled and committed. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) comprises a chairman and 12 National Electoral Commissioners, with each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) represented by one Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC). Appointments to these positions require Presidential approval and Senate confirmation. However, the frequent turnover of INEC members has been a

challenge to its stability. For instance, the 2011 elections were held by a newly appointed INEC leadership, with most members assuming office only months before the election, causing stakeholders to push for a law amendment to ensure adequate preparation time (Ekundayo, 2015). This turnover is illustrated in Table 4.1, showing the history of INEC chairpersons from 1960 to the present.

**Table 4.1: Electoral Commissions and their Chairmen in Nigeria, 1960 to Date**

Republic	Electoral Commission	Chairman	Tenure
First Republic	Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN)	Sir Kofo Abayomi	1960-1964
		Chief E.E. Esua	1964-1966
Second Republic	Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO)	Chief Michael Ani	1979-1983
		Justice Ovie-Whiskey	1983-1983
Third Republic	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	Prof. Eme Awa	1987-1989
		Prof. Humphrey Nwosu	1989-1993
		Prof. Okon Uya	1993-1994
		Chief Sumner Dagogo-Jack	1994-1998
Fourth Republic	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	Justice Ephraim Akpata	1999-2000
		Dr. Abel Guobadia	2000-2005
		Prof. Maurice Iwu	2005-2010
		Prof. Attahiru Jega	2010-2015
		Prof. Mahmood Yakubu	2015-present

*Source: Ekundayo, W.J. (2015)*

In contrast, Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) operates with a more stable structure. The EC comprises a chairman, two Deputy Chairpersons, and four other members, appointed by the President based on recommendations from the Council of State. This structure has facilitated continuity and impartiality in the management of Ghana's elections, as shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Leadership and Members of Ghana's Electoral Commission, 1992 to Present**

Office	Name	Term
Chairman	Jean Adukwei Mensa	August 2018 – present
Deputy Chairman	Eric Asare Bossman	August 2018 – present
Deputy Chairman	Samuel Tettey	August 2018 – present
Member	Mrs. Paulina Adobea Dadzawa	February 2004 – present
Member	Ebenezer Aggrey Fynn	March 2004 – present
Member	Sa-Adatu Maida	November 2010 – present
Member	Rebecca Kabukie Adjalo	November 2010 – present

Member	Adwoa Asuama Abrefa	August 2018 – present
Past Chairman	Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan	1993 – June 2015
Past Chairman	Charlotte Osei	June 2015 – June 2018

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com), Retrieved 25 May 2020

Table 4.2 highlights the relatively low turnover of chairpersons in Ghana compared to Nigeria, demonstrating Ghana's more stable election management system over the same period. This stability contrasts with the frequent changes seen in Nigeria, where turnover among key election officials has occasionally hindered effective election management.

### **Incumbent Use of Security Operatives to Intimidate Opposition Political Parties and Electoral Violence in Nigeria and Ghana**

In Nigeria, security forces, particularly the police, are often implicated in electoral violence, with instances of them assisting ruling party candidates in manipulating elections. Reports from the National Democratic Institute (2012) highlight police bias, excessive use of force, and inaction against election-related violence, leading to intimidation of opposition parties. The police's political partisanship, lack of operational independence, and involvement in voter suppression have contributed to the undermining of democratic processes (The Guardian Nigeria, 2022). Additionally, security forces' failure to control electoral violence has exacerbated the disenfranchisement of vulnerable groups, such as women. Studies, including those by Egwu (2007), Ayoola (2014), and the Electoral Reform Committee (2008), indicate that police actions, including harassment and arrests of opposition members, have helped maintain the dominance of the ruling party, further compromising the election process. In contrast, Ghana's security forces play a more professional and neutral role during elections. The country's electoral laws clearly define the roles of security personnel, including escorting election materials, maintaining order, and ensuring safety at polling stations (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2005). Ghana's security agencies, coordinated by the National Security Council and the Election Security Taskforce, have been praised for their professionalism, contributing to peaceful elections in 2004, 2008, and 2012 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). The lack of widespread violence in these elections contrasts with Nigeria's experiences, with Ghana's security forces ensuring safety through effective law enforcement and collaboration with political parties and civil society organizations (African Union, 2012; CODEO, 2012). This professionalism in Ghana underscores the importance of neutral and well-coordinated security forces in ensuring free and fair elections.

### **Electoral Processes and Power Alternation in Nigeria and Ghana**

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria commenced with hopes from both political elites and citizens for political freedom and improved living standards. In 1999, the military introduced a new constitution, and the presidential election saw Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) defeat Olu Falae of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), securing 62.78% of votes. The PDP also gained a majority in the Senate and House of Representatives with 59 and 206 seats, respectively. The 2003 election, overseen by a civilian government, was marred by irregularities, ensuring Obasanjo's reelection and a PDP majority in the National Assembly. In 2007, despite internal strife and Atiku Abubakar's departure to form the Action Congress (AC), the PDP won again with Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as Obasanjo's successor. Though marred by widespread criticism, this election-maintained PDP dominance with 263 seats in the House and 87 in the Senate. Yar'Adua's tenure was succeeded by Goodluck Jonathan after Yar'Adua's death. The 2011 elections marked a notable shift, with Northern elites opposing Jonathan's candidacy, feeling the North had yet to complete its leadership tenure. Although considered one of Nigeria's most credible elections since 1999, opposition parties criticized the PDP's continued control. In 2015, however, the All-Progressive Congress (APC), a coalition of opposition parties, defeated the PDP, marking Nigeria's first power alternation from the ruling party to an opposition party in 16 years. The APC has since retained power through consecutive elections, signaling a limited instance of power alternation in Nigeria's democratic history.

Ghana's Fourth Republic began with a flawed election in 1992, featuring significant electoral malpractice and repression of opposition by the PNDC, which transitioned into the NDC with Jerry Rawlings as its candidate. The NDC won the presidency and secured a majority in parliament. Despite these flaws, the Fourth Republic fostered political development, enabling political liberalization, greater transparency, and public confidence, as Baofor-Arthur (2018) notes. These developments laid the foundation for future power alternations in Ghana. A critical factor in Ghana's electoral integrity was the Electoral Commission (EC), which, under the 1992 Constitution, enjoyed autonomy and took decisive steps to ensure fair elections. The EC implemented key innovations, such as establishing a Political Parties Code of Conduct, partnering with the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), revising the electoral roll, and conducting extensive voter education. These reforms, alongside collaborative efforts with the media and civil societies, fostered public participation, acceptance of electoral outcomes, and ultimately successful power alternation in Ghana.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper analyzed the impact of opposition politics on democratic development in Ghana and Nigeria from 2011 to 2022, examining issues like electoral violence, security force involvement, and the structure of election management bodies. The study concluded that the underdeveloped structure of the electoral administration body is the reason the ruling party targets opposition political parties more frequently in Nigeria than in Ghana. Ghana's rule of law fell more than Nigeria's because of the ruling political party's suppression of press freedom and dissenting voices, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of political opponents, and the incumbent's blatant disregard for court rulings. Additionally, while Ghana faces democratic challenges with restrictions on media freedom and disregard for legal rulings, Nigeria's limited institutional autonomy poses a more significant threat to democratic stability. To address these issues, the study recommends the following:

- INEC should be structurally and institutionally reorganized to conduct free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria, similar to Ghana, and to efficiently regulate the activities of political parties and other stakeholders.
- State institutions, particularly security forces, should be strengthened to promote fair competition between the ruling and opposition parties, thereby ensuring that the electorate's votes have meaningful impact.
- All stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, should adhere strictly to existing electoral laws to facilitate the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria and Ghana.

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