

Enabling Factors for Peaceful Political Power Alternation and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana and Nigeria

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Abstract

This essay investigates the critical factors contributing to peaceful power alternation and, by extension, charts the path for democratic consolidation in Ghana and Nigeria. It adopts an exploratory research design which involves systematic collection, presentation, and analysis of data through relevant texts, observations, interviews, and documentary evidence. The essay relies on primary and secondary data from Ghana and Nigeria. The results show that, for Ghana, factors such as the country's transparent electoral management system and formidable democratic culture have been major contributors to the nation's democratic trajectory. Whereas in the Nigerian experience, an improved electoral management system; the perceptions of the electorate; pressure from stakeholders; and the personality of the incumbent president have had significant effects. The essay concludes that the transparent electoral management system and solid democratic culture in Ghana and the improved electoral management system and the personality of the incumbent president in Nigeria have been the greatest influences on power alternation and the democratic process. However, Ghana has fared better than Nigeria in these respects.

Keywords: Democratic consolidation, Ghana, incumbent, Nigeria, opposition government.

In Africa, the peaceful alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments has remained problematic and infrequent over the years,¹ owing

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¹ Wonbin Cho and Carolyn Logan, "Looking toward the Future: Alternations in Power and Popular Perspectives on Democratic Durability in Africa," *Comparative Political Studies* 20, no. 10 (2013): 1-25.

to the widespread manipulation of the electoral process by incumbents in their efforts to retain power. This has been so, despite claims of democratic practices within the continent since the 1960s. The lack of peaceful alternation has led to skepticism regarding the attainment of democratic consolidation and practice in Africa.² In some cases on the continent where power alternation between incumbents and their opposition have been realized, Harrison Adewale Idowu³ has observed that the power alternations have been mostly “forced” rather than peaceful. Prominent examples are those of President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Laurent Gbagbo of Cote d’Ivoire, and Yahya Jammeh of Gambia. Worthy of note is that most African incumbents have perpetuated themselves in power through continuous manipulation of the electoral process.⁴ Where manipulation has been pronounced, they have openly acknowledged their resistance to a peaceful and smooth alternation of power.

However, prominent African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mauritius, Comoros, Mauritania, Morocco, and Somaliland have broken the mold and, over time, have witnessed peaceful power alternation between incumbent and opposition governments.⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that these countries have experienced smooth alternation of power, in the West African sub-region, only Ghana and Nigeria subsist as exceptions, as power alternation has occurred where incumbent presidents, rather than just parties, have competed in elections and not contested the electoral outcomes. Instead, they have conceded defeat and peacefully handed over power. Other West African countries have witnessed sitting presidents never losing re-election bids (only the bids of incumbent

² Joshua Shola Omotola, “Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa: What Implications for Democratic Consolidation?” Discussion Paper 70 (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 2011), and Ibrahim Bukunle Sanusi and Rizzan Nassuna, *Emerging Trends in Africa’s Electoral Processes*, Policy Briefing 158 (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, January 2017).

³ Harrison Adewale Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria” (M.Sc. Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 2018).

⁴ Arnold Wehmhoerner, *Elections and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2014); Catherine Mungai, “The Real Democracy Rankings: Or Why African Presidents Rarely Lose Elections,” *Mail & Guardian Africa* (August 28, 2014), <http://www.mgafrica.com/article/2014-08-28-the-real-democracy-rankings-or-why-african-presidents-dont-lose-elections> (accessed May 12, 2017); and Judith Vorrath, *African Developments: Political Trends in Recent Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, German Development Institute Briefing Paper, no. 18 (Bonn: German Development Institute, 2011).

⁵ Mungai, “The Real Democracy Rankings”; Vorrath Songwe, “African Leadership Transitions Tracker,” *Brookings* (March 25, 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/interactives/african-leadership-transitions-tracker/> (accessed May 11, 2017); and Vorrath Songwe, “Africa’s Mixed Political Transitions in the 3 Gs: Gabon, the Gambia and Ghana,” *Brookings* (December 22, 2016), <http://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/12/22/africas-3-gs-gabon-the-gambia-and-ghana> (accessed May 12, 2017).

political parties seeking re-election via new candidates), whereas in Nigeria (2015) and Ghana (2017), the incumbent presidents have lost re-election bids. This step toward further democratization has made both countries special case studies for this essay. Ghana often has been cited as the pride of Africa when it comes to peaceful power alternation between the incumbent and opposition, having had three such experiences (2001, 2009, and the last in 2017, with the incumbent president's defeat in the 2016 election resulting in power alternation), thus it tops the list as the highest record holder for peaceful political power alternation on the continent in the most recent times. Although power alternation is not new in the West African sub-region, the 2015 and 2017 Nigerian and Ghanaian experiences are exceptions to the rule because both sitting presidents lost the elections, not just their political parties, as was the case in other countries within the sub-region.

Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world, had its first experience with power alternation in 2015. In Ghana, the 2017 power alternation is particularly interesting, as it was the first time an incumbent president competed in an election, lost, and conceded defeat to the opposition;⁶ thus, the event was comparable to the Nigerian experience in 2015. These 2015 and 2017 landmarks account for why both countries were selected for the study. Nigeria's peaceful power alternation came amid rumors and fear of possible imminent break up,⁷ exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency⁸ and an overheated pre-election polity.⁹ The essay draws from Samuel Huntington's postulation that democratic consolidation is supposedly attained when a group wins in a transition election, then loses the next election and concedes defeat to another winner—and the trend continues thereafter.¹⁰ While it can be said that Ghana has passed the test, this claim cannot yet be made for Nigeria. A comparison between the two democracies affords an opportunity to possibly glean Ghanaian lessons for Nigeria, regardless of the inherent challenges of democratic consolidation still besetting the country.

⁶ Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

⁷ Emmanuel Oladesu, "Will Nigeria Disintegrate in 2015?" *The Nation* (December 31 2014), <http://www.thenationonline.ng.net/will-nigeria-disintegrate-2015/> (accessed May 12, 2017).

⁸ Oluwashina Adebisi, "Kudos or Knocks: Assessing the Performance of INEC in the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria," paper presented at The Electoral Institute (TEI) Conference, Abuja, Nigeria, July 17-18, 2015.

⁹ Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, *My Transition Hours* (Houston, TX: Ezekiel Press, 2018), and "Tompolo: I Insist Nigeria Will Break if Jonathan Loses," *The Nation* (January 30, 2015), <http://www.thenationonline.ng.net/tompolo-insist-nigeria-ll-break-jonathan-loses-election> (accessed May 12, 2017).

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, "How Countries Democratize," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 31-69.

While earlier studies have focused on the general relationship between political power alternation and democratic consolidation¹¹ and the likely contributing factors, specific and comparative focus on what operates in both Ghana and Nigeria remains scanty—hence, this study. Again, where efforts have been made to study both countries,¹² the thrust has been on the role of election management alone. Elsewhere, Geoffrey Pridham,¹³ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan,¹⁴ and Harrison Adewale Idowu¹⁵ have identified the role of political parties in power alternation and democratic consolidation. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully¹⁶ have studied the role of the party system, while the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) has been highlighted by Mesharch Katusiimeh,¹⁷ Michael Bratton¹⁸ and Larry Diamond.¹⁹ Also, Pippa Norris,²⁰ Andreas Schedler,²¹ and Lawrence Whitehead²² have noted the role of the mass media in power alternation and democratic

¹¹ Michael Bratton, “The ‘Alternation Effect’ in Africa,” *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2004): 147-158; Cho and Logan, “Looking toward the Future”; Huntington, “How Countries Democratize,” 31-69; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Branko Milanovic, Karla Hoff, and Shale Horowitz, “Political Alternation as a Restraint on Investing Influence: Evidence from Post-Communist Transition,” Munich Personal RePEc Archive, Paper No. 11829 (2008), www.mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/11829 (accessed May 9, 2019); Devra Coren Moehler and Staffan Lindberg, “Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap: Turnover as a Cause of Democratic Consolidation,” *Journal of Politics* 71 (2009): 1448-1466; and Adam Przeworski, “Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy,” in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 47-63.

¹² Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria.”

¹³ Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization: A Comparative Approach* (London: Continuum, 2000), 20-24.

¹⁴ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Towards Consolidated Democracies,” in *Consolidating the Third Wave of Democracies*, ed. Larry Diamond et al. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14-33.

¹⁵ Harrison Adewale Idowu, “Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation: The Nigerian Experience,” paper presented at the First Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association, South West Zone, Nigeria, March 8-9, 2017.

¹⁶ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Mesharch Katusiimeh, “Civil Society Organizations and Democratic Consolidation in Uganda,” *African Journal of International Affairs* 7, nos. 1-2 (2004): 99-116.

¹⁸ Michael Bratton, “Civil Society and Political Transition in Africa,” *Institute for Development Research (IDR) Reports* 11, no. 6 (1994): 1-21.

¹⁹ Larry Diamond, “The Democratic Revolution: Struggles for Freedom and Pluralism in the Developing World,” *Perspectives on Freedom*, no. 12, Freedom House (1991): 7-11.

²⁰ Pippa Norris, “The Role of the Free Press in Promoting Democratization, Good Governance and Human Development,” paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2006.

²¹ Andreas Schedler, “What Is Democratic Consolidation?” *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 2 (1998): 91-107.

²² Lawrence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

consolidation. Idowu²³ and Kunle Animashaun²⁴ have demonstrated the role of election management.

The aim of this essay, therefore, is to empirically investigate critical factors contributing to peaceful and smooth power alternation in politics and, by extension, those factors that are contributing to democratic consolidation in Ghana and Nigeria. That Ghana has the most significant experience with democratization on the continent in recent times makes an inquiry into the process that produced such a feat, novel. The study becomes especially valuable as one gains fresh insights and identifies possible methods of adoption for Nigeria and other African states. Despite the significance of each of the three Ghanaian cases, emphasis is placed on the alternation of power in the 2016–2017 election because it is the most recent in the country's democratic process and marks the first time an incumbent president seeking re-election for a second term in office lost an election and conceded defeat willingly.

The next section of the essay presents a conceptualization of the alternation of political power, which is followed by a review of relevant literature concerning political power alternation and democratic consolidation. The fourth section of the essay compares the Ghanaian and Nigerian experiences of democratic transition and alternation of political power, while the fifth section explains the research methods adopted for the study. The sixth and seventh sections present the research results and a discussion of the research findings, respectively. The last section of the essay offers concluding remarks and recommendations.

Conceptualizing Alternation of Political Power

Political power alternation refers to the transfer of power from one democratically elected government to an opposition government. It is the process by which a new or incoming government formed by the opposition party emerges through the conduct of elections and the outgoing government (incumbent) hands over political power to the incoming leadership or government. In such political power alternation, emphasis is on the process leading to it (election). Netchy Mbaeze, Chukwuma Okoli, and Willy Okonkwo referred to political power alternation as a

situation where the opposition political party takes over power from the incumbent via a democratic election. Hence, where the incumbent party [or leader] loses an election to the opposition party [or candidate] and hands over power to the opposition, then the country has experienced alternation in power.²⁵

²³ Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

²⁴ Kunle Animashaun, "Regime Character, Electoral Crisis and Prospects of Electoral Reform in Nigeria," *Journal of Nigeria Politics* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1-33.

²⁵ Netchy Mbaeze, Chukwuma Okoli, and Willy Okonkwo, "Political Power Alternation and Electoral Violence in Post-Colonial Africa: Experiences in Nigeria and Kenya, 1999–2016," *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Science and Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2017): 18-32.

Alternation occurs when incumbent presidents and parties lose an election and they accept the will of the people by handing over power to the opposition leader.²⁶ Thus, political alternation of power upsets the status quo in state political power configuration and provides the prospects for political freedom. Alternation of power from incumbent to opposition also is referenced as the transfer of power from incumbent to opposition. Arguably, it can be said that political power alternation in Africa is readily achieved through a coalition of opposition political parties to displace the incumbent party through an electoral process.

Alternation of political power can be either peaceful or forced, and mirrors what Andrew Little, Joshua Tucker, and Tom LaGatta referred to as “democratic and semi-democratic” alternation.²⁷ Peaceful or democratic alternation occurs when incumbents immediately accept electoral outcomes, concede defeat, and willingly hand over power to the opposition. Prominent examples of peaceful alternation are those exemplified by George Bush of the United States (1992); Nicholas Sarkozy of France (2012);²⁸ John Dramani of Ghana (2017); and Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria (2015). Conversely, forced or semi-democratic alternation occurs when the incumbent loses an election and refuses to step down. In this scenario, the incumbent often is given a second opportunity to step down following citizen protests. Prominent examples of forced or semi-democratic alternation are those enacted by Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia (2003); Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia (2006);²⁹ Laurent Gbagbo of Cote d’Ivoire (2010); and Yahya Jammeh of Gambia (2016). It is noteworthy that the Ghanaian (2001, 2009, and 2017) and Nigerian (2015) transitions were peaceful.

Power alternation can be either from an incumbent leader or president to an opposition party or from an incumbent party to an opposition party. The former is a form of alternation which usually occurs when an incumbent president/leader competes in an election, loses, and hands over power to the opposition party candidate who won the election. The Nigerian and Ghanaian alternations of 2015 and 2017, respectively, aptly describe this type of power alternation. The latter (alternation from incumbent party to opposition party) occurs when an incumbent president/leader does not compete in the election, but the same incumbent party’s candidate loses the election. When this happens, the incumbent party is displaced. The Ghanaian alternations of 2001 and 2009, and alternations among most African states, typify this scenario in which most incumbent presidents do not compete in the elections leading to the loss of their parties.

²⁶ Cho and Logan, “Looking toward the Future,” 6.

²⁷ Andrew Little, Joshua Tucker, and Tom LaGatta, “Elections, Protest and Alternation of Power,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (2013): 1145.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1142.

²⁹ Little, Tucker, and LaGatta, “Elections, Protest and Alternation of Power.”

Political Power Alternation and Democratic Consolidation

There are several studies on political power alternation and democratic consolidation, including those highlighting factors responsible for peaceful alternation. The assumption is that alternation of power is a measure of a country's democratic consolidation and portrays the level of freeness and fairness of the electoral process. In addition, alternation demonstrates how political systems are democratized, in part by providing a level playing field for all.³⁰ Freedom and rule of law (supremacy of the law, equality before the law, and respect for human rights) are other indicators of democratic consolidation. This study investigates alternation of power (guaranteed by free, fair, and credible elections) because multiparty politics and elections are benchmarks for democratic determination and, through elections, legitimacy is conferred on a government.³¹ Furthermore, while peaceful transfer of power can easily take place between an incumbent president and another candidate of the incumbent's party who wins a transition election, the reverse is often the case when transfer of power is from an incumbent to an opposition government.

Huntington specifically links political power alternation to consolidated democracy.³² According to him, democracy is said to be consolidated when the group that wins power in a certain electoral period loses in a subsequent election and hands over power to another group that won that election; other times thereafter, the same cycle repeats itself. Political power alternation is a litmus for adaptability; it is a criterion for institutionalization regarding how a particular system successfully transfers power from one group to another in the face of changing social or political contexts. For power alternation to be successful and peaceful, it must be "anchored on a clear and unambiguous policy, laid down processes and procedures and guided by a culture of tolerance, accommodation and respect for fundamental human rights."³³ Wonbin Cho and Carolyn Logan³⁴ similarly observed that lack of political power alternation undermines popular confidence in societal commitment to democratic rules—a situation that undermines democracy and reduces the chances that democracy will endure. Ensuring periodic free and fair elections as guaranteed

³⁰ Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future"; Huntington, "How Countries Democratize," 31-69; Huntington, *The Third Wave*; Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo, "Political Power Alternation and Electoral Violence in Post-Colonial Africa"; and Moehler and Lindberg, "Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap."

³¹ Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Comparative Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Oluwafemi Mimiko, *Democradura: Essays on Nigeria's Limited Democracy* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2017), 200.

³² Huntington, "How Countries Democratize."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future."

in democracy provides the opportunity for the populace to change or retain regimes in power. This is made possible by votes in favor or against regimes, which in turn increase the chances or possibility for power alternation.

Any political system in which opposition is harassed, marginalized, and constantly repelled is an undemocratic one and the chances for political power alternation remain low.³⁵ An ideal democracy provides the opportunity for the expression of dissent and opposition, and lower incentives for both the incumbent and the opposition to deliberately hold on to state power and/or resources by any means, including through violence. This is made possible because a democratic system creates opportunities to change political leaders. To this end, Branko Milanovic, Karla Hoff, and Shale Horowitz³⁶ posit that political power alternation addresses the challenge of weak institutions and strong particular interests, a combination that could lead to violence. Also, political power alternation signals a competitive electoral system as the cornerstone of enduring democracy. For Adam Przeworski,³⁷ democratic development is characterized by institutionalizing electoral uncertainty, which leads to alternation in power. Also, Bratton³⁸ avers that alternation of political power has lasting positive effects on African democracy and that its absence results in decay of democratic practice.

More explicitly, Cho and Logan identified at least three benefits of the alternation of political power in any democracy. First, it increases the number of those with high political stakes within the system, as those in opposition today might be in government tomorrow. The second benefit is that alternation reminds incumbents that they can be held accountable by the electorate for all their actions and inactions; depending on what happens, they could face a serious challenge to their quest to remain in office once they fail to meet public demands and aspirations. This implies that citizens can check incumbents through their votes, ensuring the possibility of alternation of power. Awareness of the role of voters keeps the incumbent government on its toes concerning the quality of the delivered services. The third benefit is that peaceful alternation of political power demonstrates that the political elites are committed to a sustainable democratic process in the system of governance.³⁹

It is pertinent to note that political alternation of power does not automatically guarantee democratic consolidation and may even lead to electoral violence. Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo examined whether alternation of power had minimized the incidence of electoral violence or otherwise in post-colonial African societies. They established that power alternation as the result of the coalition of opposition political parties often

³⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

³⁶ Milanovic, Hoff, and Horowitz, "Political Alternation as a Restraint on Investing Influence."

³⁷ Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy."

³⁸ Bratton, "Civil Society and Political Transition in Africa."

³⁹ Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future," 2.

resulted in the determination of the ensuing regime to consolidate its hold on power and to obscure its opposition. According to Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo, determination to retain power can lead to a power tussle and an all-out dangerous battle for state power and resources, which, in turn, breeds electoral violence. The violent eruptions in Kenya after the December 2007 elections and in Cote d'Ivoire between 2010 and 2011 demonstrate the link between power alternation and violence.⁴⁰

Furthermore, referring to other African experiences, Michael Wahman has argued that alternation of political power does not necessarily guarantee a consolidated democracy. Rather than a newly elected government discarding skewed incumbent advantages, instead, it may preserve if not worsen them in its effort to stay in power and not lose its prospects for re-election.⁴¹ Moreover, strict adherence to Huntington's "two turnover rule" would imply that the dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) under relatively free and fair political environments in South Africa and Botswana, respectively, should be regarded as undemocratic or unconsolidated.⁴² Nonetheless, the central argument of this study is that although political power alternation may have a negative impact on democracy under certain circumstances, as argued by some scholars,⁴³ generally, it signifies a free system and engenders democratic consolidation. Political power alternation and its acceptance by outgoing incumbents reflect consolidated democracy.

A Comparison of the Ghanaian and Nigerian Experiences of Elections and Alternations of Power (1992–2019)

Since its return to democratic rule in 1992, Ghana has held seven general elections (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016) and experienced three alternations of power between incumbent and opposition governments, whereas Nigeria, since its return to democratic rule in 1999, has held six general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019) and experienced one alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments.⁴⁴ The Ghanaian alternations of power in 2001 and 2009 were from incumbent parties to opposition parties (that is, incumbent presidents did not compete in the elections); while in the 2017 alternation, the incumbent president

⁴⁰ Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo, "Political Power Alternation and Electoral Violence in Post-Colonial Africa."

⁴¹ Michael Wahman, "Democratization and Electoral Turnovers in Sub-Saharan Africa and Beyond," *Democratization* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-24.

⁴² Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future."

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

competed, lost, conceded defeat, and handed over power.⁴⁵ Same was the case in Nigeria in 2015, when the incumbent president competed in the election, lost, conceded defeat, and peacefully handed over power to the opposition.

The November 1992 election in Ghana was conducted barely six months after the constitutional empowerment of the Ghana Electoral Commission (EC). Thus, the commission was not prepared for the election, and consequently the process was marred by many irregularities.⁴⁶ Terrence Lyons noted,

As many observers recognized, the playing field was far from level. The Presidential election was marked by [a] hastily compiled and clearly bloated voter's register, an Electoral Commission appointed by Rawlings that the opposition regarded as partisan, and an electoral process open to manipulation.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Lyons continued that other reports, including those of the Commonwealth Secretariat⁴⁸ and the Carter Center,⁴⁹ concluded that these flaws probably did not greatly affect the outcome of the election, which Rawlings of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won. Consequently, the outcome of the election resulted in a lack of public confidence in the EC, and a boycott of the 1992 parliamentary elections by the opposition parties. The opposition compiled a long list of electoral complaints, widely circulated with the hashtag “the stolen verdict.”⁵⁰ These complaints were taken seriously by the EC in preparation for the next election.

To improve on the 1996 polls, the EC took two important steps in preparation for the election. The first was to set up the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) in 1994 (two years before the election). The IPAC's objective was to restore the confidence of the parties and the public in the EC. Thus, the IPAC involved parties in discussions concerning electoral procedures.⁵¹ To show how committed the EC was to conducting a freer, fairer, and more credible election in 1996, Lyons observed that, “even though some of the charges contained in ‘the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Terrence Lyons, “Ghana's Encouraging Elections: A Major Step Forward,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 2 (1997): 65-77.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸ Commonwealth Observer Group Report, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections* (Accra, Ghana: The Commonwealth, December 7, 2012), 9-10.

⁴⁹ Carter Center, *Report of the Carter Center Ghana Election Mission* (Atlanta, GA: Carter Center, Emory University, 1992), pp. 1-8, <http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/electionreports/democracy/finalreportghana1992.pdf> (accessed June 5, 2018).

⁵⁰ IDEA, “Electoral Management during Transition: Challenges and Opportunities,” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Paper, 2012 (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2012), 28.

⁵¹ Ibid.

stolen verdict’ document lacked credibility, the EC treated them all seriously and put in place multiple measures to reassure the opposition that any attempts at fraud on election day would be detected.”⁵² The EC also carried out major reforms of the voter register to ensure that voters were registered where they would vote, under the supervision of party agents, and made corrections where necessary. Also, the voter registration lists were presented to the parties, and Identity (ID) Cards were distributed to voters. Lyons reported that, as a result of these reforms, “by election day, the opposition had by and large, accepted the accuracy of the voter rolls, thus, removing a major controversy that had undermined the legitimacy of the 1992 elections.”⁵³ Technical improvements such as the use of transparent ballot boxes, voting screens, and indelible ink were introduced in the 1996 election,⁵⁴ increasing voters’ confidence in the EC. Consequently, the opposition ended its boycott and accepted the results of the 1996 election, even though the incumbent, President Rawlings of the NDC, won again.

As for the 2000 presidential election, the EC consolidated its 1996 success and achievements. To this end, the election was observed and declared free and fair by domestic and international observers.⁵⁵ The election was won by the opposition, John Agyekum Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the incumbent party (National Democratic Congress) and its presidential candidate, John Atta Mills, conceded defeat. This concession paved the way for the first power alternation between the incumbent and opposition parties in 2001.

The management of the 2004 election was not much different from that of the previous one and the incumbent, President John Kufuor of the NPP, won. During the 2008 election, the Commonwealth Report stated that the election had hitches such as delays in the EC’s “limited registration” exercise held every year to capture new or relocated voters and remove the deceased from the register.⁵⁶ This created great tension and incidents of violence among political parties. The EC claimed that the postponements were due to difficulties in procuring new equipment for registration (in particular, cameras) and a delayed start in registration. However, despite these challenges, the EC made frantic efforts to fix most of the problems before the run-off presidential election that year. The opposition candidate, John Atta Mills of the National Democratic

⁵² Lyons, “Ghana’s Encouraging Elections,” 72-73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Debrah, Kissi Asante, and Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, *A Study of Ghana’s Electoral Commission*, CODESRIA Research Reports, no. 2 (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa [CODESRIA], 2010), 16.

⁵⁵ Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), *Final Report on the December 2000 Elections in Ghana* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Center for Democratic Development [CDD-Ghana] and CODEO, 2001), and Commonwealth Observer Group Report, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections*.

⁵⁶ Commonwealth Observer Group Report, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections*.

Congress, won the election, and the incumbent party (the New Patriotic Party) and its presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, conceded defeat. This marked the second peaceful power alternation between an incumbent party and an opposition party in Ghanaian democratic history. Despite the few hitches recorded in the 2008 election, it was generally credible, free, and fair. The Commonwealth Report commented that the EC had taken steps that had helped to ensure that the electoral process was robust, credible, and had met the benchmarks for democratic elections to which Ghana had committed itself. The report went further to commend the professionalism and dedication of the EC, and expressed hope that the country would further consolidate her democratic gains as well as promote political inclusiveness and co-operation in the future.⁵⁷

During the 2012 Ghanaian elections, the stakes and tensions were extremely high, to the point that they threatened the country's reputation as a consolidating democracy.⁵⁸ The EC created forty-five new electoral constituencies and districts following the release of the 2010 census figures. Some stakeholders criticized the creation of new electoral constituencies and districts and took the EC to the Supreme Court. The charges against the EC were cleared by the Court,⁵⁹ and the criticism subsided. The Commonwealth Observer Group also reported that there were registration irregularities in the biometric voter registration exercise. It was claimed that these irregularities were corroborated by the EC and that they included the registration of minors; the registration of non-Ghanaian citizens and foreigners; compulsory registration of citizens in constituencies different from where they resided; double registration; and the assignment of incorrect ages and gender to voters. Shola Omotola identified the oil-rich economy and the desire of ruling class politicians to control it, as well as the erroneous application of a biometric voter verification system, as among the major challenges of the 2012 elections in Ghana.⁶⁰ These shortcomings notwithstanding, the election was largely peaceful, efficiently managed, and transparent to the effect that voters were free to exercise their franchise.⁶¹ The incumbent, President John Dramani of the NDC (who took over from John Atta Mills, who died in office), won the election.

In 2017, Ghana experienced its third alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments. This third case was unique, however, given that it was the first time that a sitting president competed, lost, conceded

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸ Joshua Shola Omotola, "Introduction: Ghana Defies the Odds Again—The December 2012 Elections in Perspective," *Journal of African Elections, Special Issue Ghana's 2012 Elections* 12, no. 2 (2013): 1-12.

⁵⁹ Commonwealth Observer Group Report, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections*.

⁶⁰ Omotola, "Introduction: Ghana Defies the Odds Again—The December 2012 Elections in Perspective."

⁶¹ Commonwealth Observer Group Report, *Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections*, 34-35.

defeat, and handed over power to the opposition leader who had won the election.⁶² Thus, this was Ghana's first power alternation between an incumbent president and an opposition party. The political atmosphere preceding the 2016 presidential election, which was the midwife of the 2017 power alternation, had been characterized by tense political intrigue.⁶³ The campaign period was dominated by the incumbent NDC and the main opposition NPP. The political stakes within the country were relatively high during the campaigns, due largely to widespread monetization of the campaigns and rallies and the blatant misuse by officials of incumbency powers and state resources across states as well as regional and district margins.⁶⁴ This aroused suspicion and fear of potential violence, especially with the rise in the deployment of political thugs by the major political parties.⁶⁵ Also, during voter registration, a series of violent protests were recorded. Efforts to douse the tensions culminated in a series of peace initiatives coordinated by the EC, the National Peace Council, and the IPAC, including the "Accra Declaration."⁶⁶

The Declaration was signed by all presidential candidates on December 1, 2016, with a commitment to ensure a peaceful process in the conduct of the election and events leading to it. This Declaration could not address some isolated incidents, however, such as the violent clashes between supporters of the two major parties, leading to the loss of lives.⁶⁷ The abuse of state resources and the power of incumbency also characterized the electioneering periods. The ruling NDC "district administration employees, vehicles, buildings and other assets were used for [the] NDC campaign."⁶⁸ There were reports of distribution of money and consumable goods to individuals and communities by the major parties.

On election day, the EC deployed a Biometric Verification Device (BVD) to determine eligible voters. Other forms of innovation were put in place to ensure the integrity of the process, such as voting in polling stations where voters' names appeared; the use of indelible ink; serial numbering of ballot papers and counterfoils; and customized polling station forms, with polling station name, code, and serial number.⁶⁹ During the counting of ballots and

⁶² Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

⁶³ European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2016*, Final Report on Ghanaian Election of the European Union Election Observation Mission (Accra, Ghana: EUEOM, 2016), and International Republican Institute (IRI), "Ghana: Statement of the Joint IRI/NDI Pre-Election Mission to Ghana," *International Republican Institute* (December 2, 2016), <http://www.allafrica.com/stories/201612020846.html> (accessed June 26, 2018).

⁶⁴ EUEOM, *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2016*, 5.

⁶⁵ Commonwealth Observer Group, *Interim Statement on Ghana's 2016 General Elections* (Accra, Ghana: The Commonwealth, December 9, 2016).

⁶⁶ EUEOM, *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2016*, 10.

⁶⁷ International Republican Institute, "Ghana: Statement of the Joint IRI/NDI Pre-Election Mission to Ghana."

⁶⁸ EUEOM, *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2016*, 19.

⁶⁹ Commonwealth Observer Group, *Interim Statement on Ghana's 2016 General Elections*.

collation of results, the EC ensured transparency of the entire process. The result forms for polling stations and constituency collation centers were distributed to party agents and made public. Nevertheless, the EC's system had several technical hitches resulting in the abandonment of the system for a manual collation process, which inevitably delayed the election outcome announcement.⁷⁰ The final results were declared by the EC on December 9, however, still within the seventy-two-hour ultimatum. This was a few hours after the incumbent, President John Mahama Dramani of the NDC, had conceded defeat to the NPP presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo.

Conversely, in Nigeria, the 1999 election was heavily compromised; the verdict was decided even before the election. Furthermore, the elections held in 2003 and 2007 were characterized by mass rigging and irregularities.⁷¹ These elections were so grossly rigged that Amadu Kurfi regards Nigerian elections and massive rigging as synonyms and inseparable.⁷² Furthermore, David Moveh⁷³ observed that in Nigeria, which he referred to as “Africa’s largest democracy project,” the election management process since the country gained political independence from Britain always has resulted in controversy and crises. The 2007 election, characterized by extensive wrongdoing, saw the introduction of the political diction, “Do or die affairs,” whose coinage was attributed to then incumbent President Olusegun Obasanjo.⁷⁴ The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was highly criticized both at home and abroad for perceived poor management and compromise of results of the election,⁷⁵ which the incumbent party (the People’s Democratic Party, or PDP) had won.

⁷⁰ EUEOM, *Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2016*.

⁷¹ Carter Center, “Post-Election Statement on Nigerian Elections,” *Report Issued in Response to the 27 February Presidential Election of 1999* (March 1, 1999), <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc891.html> (accessed May 11, 2017); Human Right Watch, “Nigeria: Presidential Election Marred by Fraud, Violence,” *Human Right Watch* (April 25, 2007), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/04/25/nigeria-presidential-election-marred-fraud-and-violence> (accessed May 11, 2017); Babatunde Oyekanmi, “2015 General Elections and the Role of INEC,” paper presented at The Electoral Institute (TEI) Conference, Abuja, Nigeria, July 17-18, 2015; and Transition Monitoring Group, *Do the Votes Count? Final Report of the 2003 General Elections by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG)* (Abuja, Nigeria: Transition Monitoring Group, 2003).

⁷² Amadu Kurfi, *Nigerian General Elections: My Role and Reminiscences* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2005), 34-36.

⁷³ David Moveh, “INEC and the Administration of Elections in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: The 2015 General Election in Perspective,” paper presented at The Electoral Institute (TEI) Conference, Abuja, Nigeria, July 17–18, 2015, 2.

⁷⁴ Oyekanmi, “2015 General Elections and the Role of INEC.”

⁷⁵ Human Right Watch, “Nigeria: Presidential Election Marred by Fraud, Violence,” and National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Final Report on Nigeria’s 2007 Elections* (Abuja, Nigeria: National Democratic Institute, 2008), 1-56.

The 2007 election, as conducted by the Maurice Iwu-led INEC, is regarded as the worst in the country's political history.⁷⁶ The process did not meet basic requirements for credible, free, and fair elections.⁷⁷ In preparation for the election, the INEC failed to release the voters' register and to disseminate information. Also, there was poor recruitment and training of ad hoc staff as well as a general failure on the part of the INEC to engage civil society organizations as legitimate stakeholders in the process—a situation which resulted in public unrest.⁷⁸ In addition, the INEC manipulated the process by disqualifying high-profile candidates seen as potential threats to the ulterior motive of the incumbent. This situation, according to the NDI's Report,⁷⁹ permitted the exclusion of Vice President Atiku Abubakar's name from the list of contestants. Furthermore, it gave vent to arbitrary replacement of candidates by party leaders. But based on the Supreme Court's ruling compelling the INEC to include the name of the presidential candidate of the Action Congress (AC) on the ballot, Atiku Abubakar's name was relisted.⁸⁰

On election day, there were reports of widespread electoral malpractice throughout all stages of the process. The chicanery ranged from late delivery of voting materials, to late commencement of voting exercise in most parts of the country, ballot box stuffing and snatching, allocation of votes to where voting did not take place, falsification of votes, and deliberate denial of election materials to perceived strongholds of the opposition, among other underhandedness.⁸¹ What played out in the 2007 process reflect an election whose results had been fixed prior to the contest. Furthermore, the report showed that in some states, such as Rivers, Ogun, Oyo, and Ekiti, the votes that were cast outnumbered the registered voters index. The 2007 election deviated from the 2003 election in going from "competitive rigging" to a vote allocation or "direct capture."⁸² All stages of the election were marked by high levels of political violence, leading to the death of at least fifty persons on election day, while the estimated number of casualties nationwide stood at over two hundred during the election period.⁸³ The foregoing suggest that the INEC had been devoted to the ruling, incumbent party, and *ipso facto*, lost public trust. The Transition Monitoring Group avers that the 2007 election project was

⁷⁶ UK Aid, *Elections in Nigeria in 2007* (London: Department of International Development, 2007), 1-4.

⁷⁷ NDI, *Final Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections*, 1-56, and UK Aid, *Elections in Nigeria in 2007*, 1-4.

⁷⁸ NDI, *Final Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections*, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ NDI, *Final Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections*, 33-38, and UK Aid, *Elections in Nigeria in 2007*, 2.

⁸² UK Aid, *Elections in Nigeria in 2007*, 2.

⁸³ NDI, *Final Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections*, 33-38.

slated to fail from its inception because the politically motivated activities of Obasanjo's regime, in close collaboration with the politically partisan INEC,⁸⁴ were palpable.

Management of the 2011 election witnessed little improvement from the 2007 episode, as the administration of President Musa Yar'Adua strove to improve the process. On assumption of office, Yar'Adua publicly declared that the election process that had brought him into office was marred by many irregularities and, thus, he was ready to carry out major reforms in election management throughout the country. He stated:

We acknowledge that our elections had some shortcomings... . Our [election] experiences represent an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Accordingly, I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process, and thereby deepen our democracy.⁸⁵

Thus, President Yar'Adua established the Justice Mohammed Uwais Commission in 2008 to reform Nigeria's electoral process. Though he did not live to implement the reports of the commission, his successor, President Goodluck Jonathan, began the implementation process. In preparation for the 2011 election, as part of these reforms, the INEC introduced a new biometric register of voters, a remodified open-ballot system, and security features for sensitive electoral materials (for example, serial numbering and color-coding of ballot papers and result sheets, as well as security coding of ballot boxes).⁸⁶ Other reforms included the use of ad hoc staff, transparent methods for collation of results and returns, transparent procedures and modalities on election day, closer collaboration and partnership with critical stakeholders, enhanced voter education and citizen engagement, staff training and retraining, and creation of an inter-agency consultative committee on election security to ensure the effective engagement of all security agencies during the election period.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ UK Aid, *Elections in Nigeria in 2007*, 2.

⁸⁵ NDI, *Final Report on Nigeria's 2007 Elections*, 8.

⁸⁶ David Oladimeji Alao, Emmanuel Olatunji Alao, and Ngozi Nwogwugwu, "A Critical Appraisal of the Management of 2011 General Elections and Implications for Nigeria's Future Democratic Development," *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 5 (2013): 109-121; International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), "Nigeria's Top Election Official Speaks on Effective Election Management," *International Foundation for Electoral Systems* (December 18, 2013), <https://www.ifes.org/news/nigerias-top-election-official-speaks-effective-election-management> (accessed September 5, 2019); and International Republican Institute (IRI), *Nigeria National Elections, April 2011* (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 2014), 11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

As a result of these reforms, the 2011 elections were more credible, free, and fair in some quarters, though not without some identifiable hitches in terms of management.⁸⁸ Such hitches included those related to voter registration. For instance, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) reported that, “In the first days of registration, INEC failed to deliver kits to registration units, country wide or delivered them late. Problems with software in collecting finger prints had to be adjusted and a number of citizens waited for hours to register.”⁸⁹ In a related development, a civil society organization, Project Swift Count (PSC), reported that underage registrations were more pronounced in the North-Central, North-East, and North-West areas of Nigeria. Also, there were notable discrepancies concerning the voter register held by the INEC at federal and state levels. The INEC admitted that there were inaccuracies regarding the numbers of registered voters.⁹⁰

In 2015, the political atmosphere leading to the historic power alternation was more tense in Nigeria than it had been in Ghana. The presidential election was preceded by the merger of several political parties, which culminated in the All Progressives Congress (APC). On January 14, 2015, the Abuja Accord, put together by the National Peace Committee (NPC), a private initiative by a former head of state, retired General Abdulsalami Abubakar, and a prominent Catholic, Bishop Kukah, was launched and signed by all presidential candidates to ensure peaceful elections.⁹¹

Although the 2015 presidential election, as observed by both international and local observers, has been referenced as “the best election so far in Africa,”⁹² there were some irregularities or setbacks. The management process, once again, was characterized by allegations from various quarters, such as various segments of civil society, the ruling party (PDP), as well as the opposition party (APC). Underage voting, especially in the North, was particularly a sore point, eliciting calls for outright cancellation of results in affected states such as Borno, Kaduna, and Kano.⁹³ The use of electronic card readers for

⁸⁸ European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), *Nigeria: Final Report of the Nigerian General Election of the European Union Election Observation Mission* (Abuja, Nigeria: European Union, 2011).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁰ Project Swift Count, *Interim Report on the Voter Registration Exercise for the 2011 General Elections*, Project Swift Count Report (Abuja, Nigeria: Project Swift Count, January 24, 2011).

⁹¹ Ladi Hamalai, Samuel Egwu, and Shola Omotola, *Nigeria's 2015 General Election: Continuity and Change in Electoral Democracy* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁹² Commonwealth Observer Group, *Nigeria Elections 2015: Interim Statement by Commonwealth Observer Group* (Abuja, Nigeria: The Commonwealth, 2015), and Economic Community of West African States Election Observation Mission (ECOWAS-EOM), “ECOWAS Poll Observation Mission Says Nigeria’s March 28 Elections Free, Transparent Despite Some Hitches” (March 30, 2015), <http://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-poll-observation-mission-says-nigerias-march-28-elections-free-transparent-despite-some-hitches/> (accessed June 12, 2018).

⁹³ European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), *Final Report, Federal Republic of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015* (Abuja, Nigeria: The European Union, April 11, 2015).

the election was equally contested, even prior to the election, on the grounds that the readers' credibility had not been ascertained. It turned out that readers were not deployed in many constituencies in the North (regarded as the opposition stronghold), eliciting claims of impartiality on the part of the INEC. In several constituencies in the South, including where the president voted, card readers malfunctioned, obviously precluding some voters from casting their ballots.⁹⁴ The Senate had argued that legislation should govern electronic voting, otherwise it would be illegal.⁹⁵ The ruling party's concern about the credibility of the electoral process and the alleged impartiality of the INEC was demonstrated dramatically on March 31, when the collation process of the national results was disrupted by an outburst from Godsdai Orubebe, a former minister and the PDP's representative at the results collation center.

There were other allegations from the opposition party, the APC. They included plans by the ruling party to deploy the military to intimidate and rig elections,⁹⁶ and excessive use of state resources and official media outlets to the detriment of the opposition, among other charges.⁹⁷ There also were accusations that there had been inflation of results in some parts of the country in favor of the ruling party.⁹⁸

Hostility, partisanship, and hate speeches between the leading contending forces (the APC and the PDP) characterized campaign rallies for the 2015 presidential election. For instance, on February 7, 2015, the INEC postponed the election for six weeks, citing security reasons to justify its action.⁹⁹ This drew criticism from opposition parties and civil society organizations, alleging that the postponement was a gimmick of the ruling party to perfect plans to rig elections. Also, during the campaign period, a former militant and leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, and other leaders from the Niger Delta region threatened bloodshed if President Goodluck Jonathan, whom he called his "Niger Delta compatriot," lost the

⁹⁴ Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*.

⁹⁵ Daily Trust, "Jonathan: No Plan to Sack Jega," *Daily Trust* (February 12, 2015), <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/index.php/daily-columns/4684-voa-hausa-organises-town-hall-meeting-on-choler> (accessed April 8, 2018).

⁹⁶ Hamalai, Egwu, and Omotola, *Nigeria's 2015 General Election*.

⁹⁷ EUEOM, *Final Report, Federal Republic of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015*, and Shola Omotola and Charles Nyuykongge, *Nigeria's 2015 General Elections: Challenges and Opportunities*, ACCORD Policy and Practice Brief (PPB) (Durban, South Africa: African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2015).

⁹⁸ EUEOM, *Final Report, Federal Republic of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015*, and Transition Monitoring Group, *Report of the March 2015 Presidential and National Assembly Elections* (Abuja, Nigeria: Transition Monitoring Group, 2015).

⁹⁹ EUEOM, *Final Report, Federal Republic of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015*; Hamalai, Egwu, and Omotola, *Nigeria's 2015 General Election*; and Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*.

2015 presidential election.¹⁰⁰ This statement was provoked, however, by an earlier one made by General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.), a presidential aspirant, that, “If what happened in 2011 [alleged rigging] should happen again in 2015... the dog and the baboon will be soaked in blood.”¹⁰¹

To off-set the tension, Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent president, sought peace for the country by cooperating with the Peace Committee in his agreement to meet with the opposition presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, to ensure calmness during and after the polls.¹⁰² He also stressed that his political ambition “and indeed the ambition of anybody, is not worth the blood of any Nigerian.”¹⁰³ Hence, despite palpable irregularities in the 2015 presidential election, the sitting president projected the spirit of sportsmanship by conceding defeat, even before the final tallying of results.

Given the challenges recorded during the election, the credibility of the process comes into question. There were instances of “over voting,” inflated voter turnout, and underage voting in Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Rivers states, among other irregularities.¹⁰⁴ In Rivers, reported results were “zero invalid ballots out of the 25,174 ballots cast in Omuma LGA, no difference between the number of accredited registrants and the number who actually voted in Emolua and Ogu/Bolo LGAs and a 90% turnout in Emohua LGA.”¹⁰⁵ The opposition party, APC, also complained of results collated from some other South-South states. The parallel vote tabulation (quick count) invented by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) found that in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers states, voter turnouts were inflated by about 10 percent and results altered in favor of the ruling PDP.¹⁰⁶ There were cases of violent post-election protests in parts of the country, including in Akwa Ibom, where protesters alleged they had been disenfranchised and therefore could not vote for their preferred candidate, Muhammadu Buhari of the APC.¹⁰⁷ Yet, these incidences were limited compared to previous experiences in Nigeria.

¹⁰⁰ Bassey Udo, “There Will Be Bloodshed if Jonathan Loses in 2015, Says Asari-Dokubo,” *Premium Times* (September 9, 2013), <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/144368-there-will-be-bloodshed-if-jonathan-loses-in-2015-says-asari-dokubo.html> (accessed August 22, 2017).

¹⁰¹ Vanguard, “2015 Will Be Bloody if...Buhari,” *Vanguard Nigeria* (May 15, 2012), <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/05/2015-ll-be-bloody-if-buhari> (accessed April 8, 2018).

¹⁰² Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*, and Oluwafemi Mimiko, “Trump, Tillerson and the Restructuring Agenda,” *Tribune Online* (2018), <http://www.tribuneonlineng.com/trump-tillerson-and-the-restructuring-agenda/> (accessed April 8, 2018).

¹⁰³ “2015: My Second Term Ambition Is Not Worth the Blood of Any Nigerian—Jonathan,” *Daily Post* (January 8, 2015), <http://www.dailypost-ng/2015/01/2015/second-term-ambition-not-worth-blood-nigerian-jonathan/> (accessed April 8, 2018), and Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*.

¹⁰⁴ EUEOM, *Federal Republic Final Report of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015*, and TMG, *Report of the March 2015 Presidential and National Assembly Elections*.

¹⁰⁵ EUEOM, *Final Report, Federal Republic of Nigeria General Elections 28 March 2015*, 29.

¹⁰⁶ TMG, *Report of the March 2015 Presidential and National Assembly Elections*, 44.

¹⁰⁷ Nigerian Eye, “In Pictures: Violent Post-Election Protest Rock Akwa Ibom,” *Nigerian Eye* (April 12, 2015), <http://www.nigerianeye.com/2015/04/in-pictures-violent-post-election.html> (accessed August 22, 2017).

For the third consecutive time following the 2011 and 2015 experiences, the INEC postponed the 2019 general election from April 16, 2019, to April 23, 2019, citing logistics challenges as the reason. Even with this postponement, the INEC suffered serious logistics setbacks across the country. Polling units were expected to open on or before 8 a.m. to permit accreditation and voting to commence on the hour, but neither was achieved until later in the day. For instance, some polling sites were not operational until 10:30 a.m. (some polling units in Lagos, the Wuse Zone 7 polling unit, and Kuje in Abuja); 11:30 a.m. (most polling units in Imo State); noon, and some even 1:10 p.m. (for example, the GVC polling unit in Lagos).¹⁰⁸ In some polling units, the INEC official stamp that was required to authenticate ballot papers was not available (such as in Amu Odofin, Lagos), and in several polling units across the country, card readers malfunctioned, leading to unfair disenfranchisement of some voters.

The task of conducting an election in Nigeria, a large country, remains an ongoing challenge for the INEC, in part because there have been contradictory and controversial cases of electoral litigation and court orders. For instance, during the 2019 general election, the INEC had to oversee 119,973 polling units across the country with over one million ad hoc staff.¹⁰⁹ The INEC's logistics challenge was worsened by violent and mysterious fire incidents at various INEC offices across the nation during the preparation phase for the election. For example, three prominent fire incidents were reported in INEC state offices in Isiala Ngwa, Abia State; Akwa, Anambra State; and the Qua'an Pan local government area, Plateau State, resulting in the destruction of over 4,600 smart card readers and other election materials.

The 2019 election challenges led the INEC chairman to publicly admit that the country needs a national convention focused on effective election management, following the experience of the 2019 general election.¹¹⁰ This suggests that the Herculean task of conducting an election in Nigeria is too great a burden for the INEC alone and that a number of issues must be addressed. The post-election assessments of the INEC's performance by both local and international observers identified some concerns with the election process, such as late opening of polls, violence, and vote buying, with some observers arguing that there had been retrogression from the progress the country had made in its electoral process in 2015.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, there is a

¹⁰⁸ *Channels Television*, Live Broadcast, February 23, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ *Channels Television*, Live Broadcast, February 16, 2019.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Eniola Akinkuotu, "INEC Had Many Operational Failures—EU Observers," *Punch Nigeria* (February 25, 2019), <https://www.punchng.com/inec-had-many-operational-failures-eu-observers/> (accessed March 18, 2019); Matt Hadro, "Just In: US Expresses Concern over Tampering of Votes in Nigeria Elections," *Republican News* (February 25, 2019), <https://www.therepublicannews.net/2019/02/25/just-in-us-expresses-concern-over-tampering-of-votes-in-nigeria-elections-rn/> (accessed March 20, 2019); and Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, "Third Interim Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Conduct of the 2019

general consensus that the process was credible.¹¹² At the end of the process, the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari of the APC, was declared the winner with a total of 15,191,847 votes, and Abubakar Atiku of the PDP came in second, with 11,262,978 votes of a total of 27,324,583 valid votes cast.¹¹³

Methodology

This essay uses primary and secondary data. The previous sections of the essay have relied mostly on secondary data to track peaceful power alternation in Ghana and Nigeria, derived from documentary analysis in the review of relevant literature and observers' reports. Subsequent pages focus on the perspectives of political actors in the two countries being reviewed. Primary data were sourced from Ghana and Nigeria through semi-structured interviews. A total of twenty key informant interviewees (KIIs), ten per country, were purposively selected from among top officers of election management bodies (EMBs), heads of election observer groups, principal officers of electoral institutes, and chieftains of major political parties in Ghana and Nigeria. The sample size and technique adopted was justified to the extent that, in qualitative research of this nature, respondents are selected based on their ability to provide useful data for the study rather than based on numerical or statistical strength.¹¹⁴ Thus, respondents were selected based on areas of specialization, expertise, experience, practical involvement, and participation or observation of the power alternation processes in both countries of study. While telephone and email interviews were conducted with Ghanaian respondents from November 5, 2017, to February 17, 2018, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the Nigerian respondents December 15–27, 2017. Interviews in both countries lasted between eighteen to fifty-four minutes. Data collected were analyzed systematically, using descriptive and content analytical methods suitable for qualitative study.

A major challenge for the researchers was their inability to access and speak directly with the incumbent presidents who lost elections in both countries of study. Nevertheless, efforts were made to speak with their (closest) aides. Also, the researchers' inability to travel to Ghana posed a challenge.

Presidential and National Assembly Elections on 23 February 2019," *Nigerian Civil Society* (February 23, 2019), www.placng.org/situation_room/sr//?s=Statement+on+2019+presidentia+l+election (accessed April 12, 2019).

¹¹² Samson Toromade, "Canada Says Nigeria's 2019 Elections 'Credible', Congratulates Buhari," *Pulse Nigeria* (March 14, 2019), <https://www.pulse.ng/news/politics/Canada-congratulates-buhari-says-nigerias-2019-elections-credible/5v4h1nn> (accessed March 19, 2019).

¹¹³ Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), *2019 Presidential Election, 23rd February 2019: Declaration of Results* (Abuja, Nigeria: Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019).

¹¹⁴ Michael Patton and Michael Cochran, *A Guide to Using Qualitative Research Methodology* (Paris: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2002), 9.

This would have given the researchers the opportunity to meet the Ghanaian respondents “one-on-one,” and possibly to visit the study areas. However, the researchers off-set this limitation by conducting extensive telephone interview sessions with the Ghanaian respondents. It is therefore pertinent to state that the inability to travel to Ghana does not negatively affect the findings of this study. Furthermore, because interviews reflect an independent reality (the interviewee’s account of specific behavior or events), which could be either truthful and reliable or misleading and distorting,¹¹⁵ the interviewees’ opinions and views on the research subject matter were either refuted, corroborated, or checked for credibility by comparing the information provided with official records and existing literature relevant to the study.

Results of the Study

There were unprecedented losses by incumbent presidents and subsequent alternations of power between incumbent and opposition parties and governments in Ghana in 2001, 2009, and 2017, and in Nigeria in 2015. Several factors that contributed significantly to the processes are presented below.

Significant Factors for Ghana

Transparent Election Management System

Interviewee #1 stressed the critical importance of a transparent election, noting:

The only way you can transfer power from one government to another democratic government is through elections, and a quality election or a well conducted election or a credible election is the basis for the legitimacy of any government. ...therefore, for a government in power, among other things, to hand over [power] to another government, [its leadership] should have confidence in the electoral processes and the outcome of the elections. So, if the election processes are credible and are genuine, and are transparent and it is fair and it is free, an incumbent government [leader], when he loses power through that process, will find it difficult to say, “I will not hand over power.” [He] will find it difficult not to hand over power. So, by and large, a good or a credible election has a role to play in government transition.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland, *What Is Qualitative Interviewing?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹¹⁶ District Electoral Director, Ghana Electoral Commission, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, December 3, 2017.

Reaffirming the above, Interviewee #2 described the situation which makes it possible for both incumbents and their opposition to accept likely electoral outcomes. It is one in which all stakeholders have played a part in invoking confidence that the results will be credible. Interviewee #2 opined that this was critical to ensuring power alternation in Ghana.¹¹⁷ Interviewee #3 supported this position, adding:

The [election management system] has an effect, but sometimes depends on the level of preparation of the opposition party in my country [Ghana], for instance. So, basically, election management influences transition as in the Ghanaian system, where transparency is ensured in the process.¹¹⁸

The Ghanaian electoral process is keenly contested, and due to the level of transparency and the measures in place to question electoral credibility, there is no reason any person or party that lost an election should hold on to power. Everybody knows the procedures of the electoral process and follows them; consequently, it is usually difficult for any candidate to say, “I will not accept the result.”¹¹⁹

Interviewee #5 observed that free and fair elections are better alternatives to civil war and oppression; such elections serve as the people’s voice and legitimize the government both locally and internationally. He maintained that for an election in Ghana to have a lasting effect on both the democratic process and power alternation, the Electoral Commission ensures strict adherence to the following: “respect for electoral laws, neutral[ity] and non-partisan[ship], transparency, accuracy, service to voters[,] and professionalism. The elections were conducted in a transparent, peaceful, free and fair manner [so] that both the opposition and incumbent governments had no reason to doubt the integrity of the process.”¹²⁰ Interviewee #6 agreed with Interviewee #5 that everybody is carried along in the electoral process, which further creates an environment for peaceful power alternation between the incumbent and the opposition.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, January 15, 2018.

¹¹⁸ Director of Research and Election for the Eastern Region of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, December 12, 2017.

¹¹⁹ Director of Research and Election for the Eastern Region of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, January 14, 2018.

¹²⁰ National Coordinator, Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, email interview by Harrison Idowu, November 24, 2017.

¹²¹ Research Officer at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana, and Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, November 5, 2017.

Citing cases in which peaceful alternation of power between the incumbent and the opposition have taken place in Ghana, Interviewee #7 noted:

For the periods that all the incumbents have accepted the results of the elections, it is because they have confidence in the process, it is because they understand the process is so transparent, that they know that the result...is nothing different, nothing far from what the people really want. In 2000, in 2008 and in 2016, it was clear. If a government in power loses elections [by a] one million vote difference, what can [it] do? You can't question that result.¹²²

Speaking generally about why effective election management is critical for peaceful alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments, Interviewee #8 shared his opinion:

As a matter of natural consequence, ...when a political process is managed by the key stakeholders, especially the EMB, the election management body...once [it is seen that] the process is well managed, it engenders confidence in the players who are the political parties. So, I think that on a general note, proper management of [the] election process... engender[s] confidence in the whole process.¹²³

Similarly, Interviewee #9 offered:

People will not accept results when they feel cheated in the process. When it comes to election management, people will not accept [the] results or will question [the] results when they feel cheated. So, if you feel you are not cheated, and you have been part of the process and know whatever has gone wrong, it is easier to accept whatever outcome from the elections.¹²⁴

Opinions such as those above have been corroborated in the literature: to a large extent, the quality of elections and election management determine how winners and losers react to election outcomes.¹²⁵

¹²² National Director of Elections, Electoral Commission of Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, January 24, 2018.

¹²³ Communication Specialist to President Dramani and member of the Ghanaian Parliament, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, January 18, 2018.

¹²⁴ Deputy Eastern (Region) Electoral Director, Electoral Commission of Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, December 7, 2017.

¹²⁵ Andreas Schedler and Shaheen Mozaffar, "The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance—

Democratic Culture

Another factor that influences peaceful alternation of power between an incumbent and the opposition in Ghana is the democratic culture which exists among Ghanaian citizens. In tracing the probable underlying foundation for this culture, Interviewee #2 maintained:

Given the transition we [Ghanaians] have had, starting with President Rawlings, a revolutionary leader and first president of the First Republic, people had speculated that he was not going to leave office; he [would] likely change the constitution to stay on, but he never did. So, most of the speculations were not true; he conceded defeat and facilitated the transition that set the tone.¹²⁶

Interviewee #3 also aligned with the historical narrative of the democratic culture in Ghana:

It is something that we have courted from 1992 till now and it has become like a habit here. If you could recall in 2008, we [the NPP] lost by just 40,000 votes; if this had been the case of other African countries, they would not have handed over. Election is not a do or die affair. That is what we have come to understand in Ghana.¹²⁷

Ghana has been able to “kick-start” its democratic heritage, according to Interviewee #8, because the people will not resort to violence or the power of the gun to choose who leads them.¹²⁸ This culture seems to have rubbed off quite well on the elites. Citing the 2016 power alternation between President John Dramani of the NDC and President Nana Akufof-Addo of the NPP, for instance, Interviewee #8 maintained that there was a commitment among members of the political class to ensuring that the democratic culture would be preserved. He noted that President Dramani did not want to cause the country to experience a period of instability and unrest. Rather, he preferred to do the right thing by handing over power to the opposition.¹²⁹

Introduction,” *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 1 (2002): 7-10; Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria”; and Animashaun, “Regime Character, Electoral Crisis and Prospects of Electoral Reform in Nigeria.”

¹²⁶ Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), Ghana, interview.

¹²⁷ Director of Research and Election for the Eastern Region of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Ghana, interview.

¹²⁸ Communication Specialist to President Dramani and member of the Ghanaian Parliament interview.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

In support of this view is the submission of Interviewee #1 that once a party in Ghana loses power and hands it over to another, it becomes necessary for others to follow suit. Thus, if an elected official loses power, he must give in.¹³⁰ The democratic culture dictates that if party A is in power, it must concede defeat and hand over power when it loses an election to ensure that power is alternated peacefully.

From another perspective, Interviewee #10 argued that the democratic culture which Ghanaians now enjoy or have assimilated is such that, should incumbents attempt to hold on to power, they will face resistance from the people. He argued:

It is the fact that there is a proper acceptance of democracy as a form of government in Ghana. Ghanaians have come to appreciate that there must be smooth transition of power between parties. But it is because the legal regime and the people of Ghana have accepted that the will of the people is supreme. And that “yes, we accept that you are president for now, but if there is an election, the decision of the people, the masses, is the ultimate.” The legal regime now supports democracy as the order of the day. Even if those people as presidents had rejected the will of the people, I presume that the will of the people would have prevailed against their personal interests. That is why they would have yielded to the constitutional arrangement.¹³¹

Following the same line of argument and referencing President John Dramani’s case, Interviewee #6 posited:

It happens also on the continent—people find it difficult to step down. But in the Ghanaian case, it is becoming difficult, and so, if Mr. Mahama himself had said he was not going to step down, I am not sure how things would have turned out for him. Because, clearly, he [would] lose majority support, especially those who voted in the election and this also has systemic implications.¹³²

The view of Interviewee #1 aligns with the submissions of Interviewee #6, as he avers that, by general acceptance, election is the only

¹³⁰ District Electoral Director, Ghana Electoral Commission interview.

¹³¹ National Director of Research and Elections, NPP, Ghana, telephone interview by Harrison Idowu, February 17, 2018.

¹³² Research Officer at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana, and Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, interview.

way a change of government in the country should be enforced and, therefore, the chances of a military coup or any other means of government that is void of elections is very slim in Ghana.¹³³ With respect to this solid Ghanaian democratic culture, Interviewee #6 expressed it aptly: “Increasingly, whether consciously or unconsciously, it is becoming difficult in Ghana for any party in power to lose an election and say, ‘I still want to hold on.’ Increasingly, it’s becoming difficult.”¹³⁴

Describing the democratic culture in Ghana more succinctly, Interviewee #11 observed:

Ghana has had stable democracy in the last two decades or so. And they also have a framework for peaceful transfer of power from one administration to the other. So, they have a very rich democratic culture in Ghana. Election in Ghana has become an entrenched culture that people [appreciate]; the citizens now resonate with every period—every time they are preparing for elections it is like a national festival that everybody resonate[s] with. And the process is so seamless.¹³⁵

It is pertinent to state that this democratic culture, so entrenched in Ghana, has been built over several years of democratic practice. Thus, by extension, it can be argued that the longevity of Ghanaian democracy is central to peaceful alternation of power.

The firm legal and constitutional frameworks guiding the electoral process and power alternation between the incumbent and opposition governments in Ghana demonstrate the democratic culture in the country. Interviewee #10 asserted that of all factors conducive to the successful alternation of power between incumbent and opposition in Ghana, the legal framework has been especially helpful. According to him, the legal framework ensures that “the election management body is independent of the executive..., that every four years, Ghana goes into an election phase, and if the people give you the mandate, you will rule, and if they do not, you will leave office.”¹³⁶ Supporting this position, Interviewee #6 cited the example of President John Dramani: “He [Dramani] knew he was operating within a constitutional framework, that is, if you lose an election, you hand over power—which was exactly what he did. So, for me, it was a matter of respecting the constitutional provisions.”¹³⁷ The legal provision made through the Transition Act which Ghana adopted in

¹³³ District Electoral Director, Ghana EC interview.

¹³⁴ Research Officer at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana, and Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, interview.

¹³⁵ Deputy Country Director, NDI, Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 18, 2017.

¹³⁶ National Director of Research and Elections, NPP, Ghana, interview.

¹³⁷ Research Officer at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana, and Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, interview.

2012 has been very significant in the peaceful alternation of power between incumbents and the opposition. Attesting to this fact is the argument that the 2017 power alternation was very peaceful because there is a political Transition Act in Ghana. Hence, Interviewee #11 posited: “They [Ghanaians] have a good Transition Act that is amended when necessary; even in 2017, some portions of the Act were amended. So, they are refining, just as the UN Transition Act, too, is undergoing some refinement.”¹³⁸

Another indicator of Ghanaian democratic culture is the role of stakeholders. Pressure from concerned stakeholders has contributed immensely to the peace that Ghana enjoys during alternation of power between incumbents and the opposition. Such pressure from other stakeholders, including strong insistence from several religious leaders, can compel an incumbent who is unwilling to concede defeat to relinquish power and look forward to another time.¹³⁹ Interviewee #3 explained the role of a prominent stakeholder, the National Peace Council, in the Ghanaian electoral and democratic process. He averred:

The National Peace Council...also play[s] a major role in our electoral processes. [It] act[s] as an agent within the various parties. Sometimes, [it] call[s] for [a] stakeholders’ meeting, [or] dialogue on issues that you don’t understand, issues [regarding which] you want changes So, all these processes contribute to our major transition, and even during the transition, they are part of the process.¹⁴⁰

Democratic culture, demonstrated via the role of stakeholders in Ghana’s peaceful alternation of power, is vital to the extent that, even if candidates are not satisfied with the electoral process leading to a loss, after their engagement with civil organizations, the candidates or incumbents are made to concede defeat and pave the way for a smooth and peaceful alternation of power.¹⁴¹ Concerning the role of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee, Interviewee #6 maintained:

It brings all political parties together to deliberate on issues related to the electoral process. This initiative has proved a useful vehicle for building consensus... . And through that, the parties are able to address some of their concerns [about] the electoral process.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Deputy Country Director, NDI, Nigeria, interview.

¹³⁹ Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), Ghana, interview.

¹⁴⁰ Director of Research and Election for the Eastern Region of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), Ghana, interview.

¹⁴¹ Director of Research and Election for the Eastern Region of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana, interview.

¹⁴² Research Officer at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Ghana, and Coalition of Domestic Election Observation (CODEO), Ghana, interview.

It is also noteworthy that international stakeholders such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the International Criminal Court work toward ensuring peaceful alternation of power in the Ghanaian system.

Significant Factors for Nigeria

Improved Election Management System

Ordinarily, elections are the major instrument for peaceful alternation of power in any democracy,¹⁴³ nevertheless, where the process is marred by irregularities, there is a potential for violence and truncation of the alternation process.¹⁴⁴ Hence, the system of election management is yet to become the sole determinant of the peaceful alternation of power in Nigeria because several irregularities associated with the process persist¹⁴⁵ that could serve as legitimate grounds for incumbent governments and parties to reject election outcomes if the results do not favor them. However, the significance of this should not be overemphasized. When people feel that the process is imperfect, once all political parties and the majority opinion suggest the election was credible, this overrides the objections of a few individuals.¹⁴⁶ Aligning with the above position, Interviewee #13 argued:

Our elections are getting better, and during the 2015 edition I think the progress made was quite okay. I am not saying we are there yet, but it was quite okay. And that was one of the reasons the incumbent then could concede defeat, because he saw the process as free and fair. If there were questions bordering on the very fundamental aspects of the process, the incumbent could have said no, he was not accepting the result and he [would] stay put.¹⁴⁷

Further portraying how the alternation of power could have played out if the electoral system had not been transparent, Interviewee #14 submitted:

But if there was a preponderance of opinion or thinking that the electoral process was flagrantly manipulated in favor of the opposition party, I doubt if there would have been peace. You

¹⁴³ Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo, “Political Power Alternation and Electoral Violence in Post-Colonial Africa: Experiences in Nigeria and Kenya, 1999–2016,” and Cho and Logan, “Looking toward the Future.”

¹⁴⁴ Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

¹⁴⁵ Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria.”

¹⁴⁶ National Publicity Secretary, APC, Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 20, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to President Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 19, 2017.

would have seen riots in different parts of the country. [The election in] 2015 was particularly significant in the sense that the new technologies that were not there in previous elections, the card reader, the PVC and all of that...[made] 2015... fairly fair... . There has been significantly less controversy because the electoral process is always transparent, almost self-accounting[,] and citizens were getting results sent out almost in real time.¹⁴⁸

Perception of the Electorate

The general perception of the credibility of the 2015 presidential election was key to the peaceful alternation of power between the incumbent and opposition governments in Nigeria. This is because the majority of the electorate believed that the process was trustworthy—thus, the peaceful atmosphere experienced during the period. Given this, Interviewee #15 observed:

The credibility of an election is important, but perhaps more important is the perception of that credibility among the electorate. If the electorate perceives the process to be credible, then it is easier for the candidate to concede. If the electorate perceives the process not to have been credible, and [it is] strongly enough [committed] for [its members] to fight for what they believe in, it's no longer in the hands of the candidate to accept or to reject [the election outcome]. ...the overall public on the aggregate believed that the [2015] election was credible.¹⁴⁹

The perception of the credibility of an electoral process is vital to peaceful alternation of power, because when the electorate has a perception that its votes do not count, there is bound to be violence and revolt once the outcome is declared. The post-2011 election violence in Nigeria is a vivid example, as most voters perceived that the results were manipulated to favor a particular candidate.

Pressure from Stakeholders

It is widely believed that pressure from various stakeholders played a role in the power alternation in Nigeria. The international community is one such stakeholder that mounted pressure on all critical actors, including the

¹⁴⁸ Senior Fellow, Centre for Democracy & Development (CDD), Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 15, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Special Assistant to the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 20, 2017.

incumbent president and party chieftains and leaders to accept the outcome of the election.¹⁵⁰ Interviewee #12 elaborated on this role:

The international community played a role... I knew the role that some of them played. ...not that they gave any assistance to the opposition party [the APC], but immediately after the election, the UK [and the] US issued a joint statement saying that the process had to be followed through to a clinical conclusion. That put pressure on President Jonathan.¹⁵¹

Interviewee #17 aligned with Interviewee #12:

The international community also issued a very strong statement, in the build-up and during the election. So, he [President Jonathan] could not be unaware of the expectations of the larger international community, and the need for peace to prevail in the country. He said it himself; he said that he did not want what happened in Rwanda to happen in Nigeria.¹⁵²

Interviewee #18 succinctly elaborated on the role of the international community and the resources it has if an incumbent president were to ignore its presence and capabilities. He argued:

But [among] all of these, I think we should also not forget the international dimension—the pressure that is mounted by international actors. With what has happened in Cote d’Ivoire, what has happened in Kenya, I think African leaders are beginning to realize that if you push the envelope too hard and you cause an implosion or the loss of human life or any form of disruption in your country, there is an institution like the International Criminal Court to which you can be taken.¹⁵³

It is important to state that international pressure does not always yield results as it did in the case of Nigeria. Nevertheless, it was important regarding the Nigerian election because, arguably, the incumbent was aware of the cases of Cote d’Ivoire and Kenya in which incumbents who resisted electoral defeats

¹⁵⁰ Deputy Director, Administration, TEI, Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 21, 2017.

¹⁵¹ National Publicity Secretary, APC, Nigeria, interview.

¹⁵² National Coordinator, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 15, 2017.

¹⁵³ Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to President Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 27, 2017.

were taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC); President Jonathan probably did not want to go through the same experience. Moreover, he did not want his desire to retain power to result in crises that would have claimed lives and property.¹⁵⁴ The National Peace Committee that was established to oversee the entire electoral and power alternation process has been identified as having played an important role, as well.¹⁵⁵ Interviewee #19 described the role of the National Peace Committee in the alternation of power. He stated:

We know that the role that was played by the National Peace Committee was very crucial. Before then, the Abdulsamis of this world, the Kuka center, the bishop, and the Sultan...mediated in the process and had reached out to President Jonathan, and advised that for the peace and security of this country, let both parties accept the outcome of the election.¹⁵⁶

Personality of the Incumbent President

The character of the incumbent president has been described as one of the most significant factors contributing to the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition in 2015.¹⁵⁷ Respondents aligned with the findings in the relevant literature. President Jonathan had made a commitment before the commencement of the election that “his personal ambition was not worth the blood of any Nigerian.” Owing to the ethnic and political tensions during the electioneering periods leading to his electoral loss, the incumbent president, given his personality, must have envisioned the crisis that would envelop the country should he decide to act otherwise; hence, his concession.¹⁵⁸ Comparing President Jonathan with most African leaders, Interviewee #12 argued that the situation could have been different, given another leader with a dissimilar nature:

But I think another factor is that the nature of Jonathan himself. Jonathan is not someone desperate for power. He was not a desperate person. He was not someone who wanted to desperately hold on to power. He wanted it, right, but when

¹⁵⁴ Segun Adeniyi, *Against the Run of Play: How an Incumbent President Was Defeated in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Kachifo Limited, 2017), and Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*.

¹⁵⁵ Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria.”

¹⁵⁶ Deputy Director, Election Monitoring Department, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 18, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Mimiko, “Trump, Tillerson and the Restructuring Agenda”; Idowu, “Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria”; Adeniyi, *Against the Run of Play*; and Akeem Araba and Joseph Braimah, “Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria,” *Global Journal of Human-Social Science* 15, no. 7 (2015): 48-54.

¹⁵⁸ National Publicity Secretary (2012-2017), People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria, interview by Harrison Idowu, December 15, 2017.

he had to choose between leaving and fighting, he is not a fighting person. You know, blood, killing, that's not Jonathan. So, it is easier for him to just say, "Let everything go, I beg." If it was Yahya Jammeh for example, or it was Laurent Gbagbo, or it was Raila Odinga, the story may have been different. So, ...if you ask me, for Jonathan, if the choice was open to him between not accepting the result and fighting, and accepting the result and going, I think a Jonathan would prefer to accept the result and hand over [the reins of power].¹⁵⁹

Discussion of the Findings

Based on the above analysis of data, the essay finds that several factors have accounted for the peaceful alternation of power between the incumbent and the opposition governments in Ghana and Nigeria. In the Ghanaian case, factors such as the transparent election management system and the Ghanaian democratic culture have been key to peaceful alternation of power. In line with the literature contending that the electoral process determines how critical actors in the process react to an election outcome,¹⁶⁰ the study finds that the electoral system in Ghana has produced free, fair, and credible elections, hence, there has been peaceful power alternation in the country.

The research also finds that the strong democratic culture among the Ghanaian populace and political elites makes it difficult for an incumbent president or party to attempt a hold on to power. Embedded in the democratic culture are firm legal and constitutional frameworks. Moreover, the influence of stakeholders in Ghana has played a critical role in the peaceful alternation of power between the incumbent and the opposition within the country. For instance, since 2012, the country has adopted a Transition Act to guide the transfer of power, which has proven very useful in ensuring smooth and seamless power alternations between incumbents and opposition governments.¹⁶¹ Also, the pressure applied by different stakeholders in the Ghanaian electoral and power alternation processes has been an important factor in shaping the peaceful alternation of power. Stakeholders such as the Inter-Party Advisory Committee, the National Peace Council, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and the international community have had very significant influences on the peaceful alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments. Given Ghana's achievement in peaceful power alternation, the study finds that Ghana seems to be on a favorable path toward

¹⁵⁹ National Publicity Secretary, APC, Nigeria, interview.

¹⁶⁰ Schedler and Mozaffar, "The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance—Introduction."

¹⁶¹ Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

democratic consolidation. This is in line with the findings of Huntington,¹⁶² Bratton,¹⁶³ Przeworski,¹⁶⁴ Cho and Logan,¹⁶⁵ and Moehler and Lindberg.¹⁶⁶

With respect to Nigeria, the study finds that the historic peaceful power alternation in 2015 was the result of a conglomeration of several interacting factors, including the improved, more transparent election management system; the electorate's generally favorable perception of the election and its outcome; pressure from stakeholders; as well as the personality of President Jonathan, the incumbent. The improvements and innovations recorded in the 2015 general election in Nigeria invoked an important level of credibility in the electoral process, and, consequently, the incumbent president could not have done otherwise than to step down, knowing that the system was largely transparent. The pressure from stakeholders also played a major role in the peaceful power alternation. International communities such as the United Nations, the United States, and Great Britain issued unequivocal statements regarding the need to ensure a peaceful process. Hence, it was difficult for the incumbent president and party leaders to refuse their demands and instead opt for the social unrest that might have followed; hence, the peaceful alternation in the control of power. The efforts of the National Peace Committee, headed by a former head of state, Abdulsalami Abubakar, also was crucial to ensuring alternation of power in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study finds that the general perception of the electorate that the electoral process was transparent and credible and its belief that the incumbent had lost the election fairly were key to the peaceful alternation of power. If the incumbent had attempted to hold on to power, he might have met resistance from members of the electorate themselves. Had the voters' perception of the electoral process been different, it could have led to post-election violence and a stall in the alternation process.

More than any other factor, the personality of the incumbent, President Jonathan, has been credited as largely accountable for the first alternation of power between the incumbent and opposition in Nigeria.¹⁶⁷ The study finds that if he had made an irrational decision concerning the electoral outcome, it is unlikely that there would have been a peaceful alternation in power. Despite the 2015 election having been marred by some irregularities which the incumbent could have used to hold on to power, he opted to be rational by conceding defeat.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Huntington, "How Countries Democratize," 31-69.

¹⁶³ Bratton, "The 'Alternation Effect' in Africa."

¹⁶⁴ Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy."

¹⁶⁵ Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future."

¹⁶⁶ Moehler and Lindberg, "Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap."

¹⁶⁷ Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*; Mimiko, "Trump, Tillerson and the Restructuring Agenda"; Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria"; and Adeniyi, *Against the Run of Play*.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan, *My Transition Hours*, and Idowu, "Election Management and Peaceful Democratic Transition in Ghana and Nigeria."

Hence, with respect to the relationship that has been established between the alternation of political power and democratic consolidation,¹⁶⁹ the study finds that it is applicable to the Ghanaian and Nigerian cases of power alternation. Ghana, however, is far ahead in terms of its movement toward the consolidation of its democracy. Although Nigeria has experienced peaceful power alternation, the country's move toward democratic consolidation cannot be tracked by a single test-case experience.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This essay has investigated factors responsible for the peaceful alternation of power between incumbent and opposition governments, and by extension, the level of democratic consolidation in both Ghana and Nigeria. The study finds several factors to be vital in Ghana, such as the country's transparent election management systems, the democratic culture that is undergirded by a firm legal framework, and the roles of stakeholders. Whereas in Nigeria, factors such as an improved and more transparent election management system; the general perception of the electorate concerning the election and its outcome; pressure from stakeholders; and the personality of the incumbent, President Jonathan, are identified as having been instrumental. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that a transparent election management system and solid democratic culture in Ghana and an improved election management system as well as the personality of the incumbent in Nigeria have been the most significant factors in aiding power alternation and the democratic process in these countries. However, Ghana has fared better than Nigeria. While the relevant important factors have played out in Ghana three times, they have been experienced only once in Nigeria. Thus, Ghana has surpassed Nigeria in its movement toward achieving democratic consolidation.

The essay maintains that both the Ghanaian Electoral Commission and the Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission must continue to make efforts to improve their respective country's electoral system in order to confer more credibility and transparency on the existing electoral process. Meanwhile, African leaders must learn to emulate the patriotic spirit of leaders such as President John Manama Dramani of Ghana and President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria. They must learn to be patriotic and to leave the seats of power when necessary. In Nigeria, both citizens and political elites must imbibe democratic tenets to the fullest to attain the strong democratic culture of its Ghanaian counterpart.

¹⁶⁹ Huntington, *The Third Wave*; id., "How Countries Democratize"; Bratton, "The 'Alternation Effect' in Africa"; Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy"; Cho and Logan, "Looking toward the Future"; Milanovic, Hoff, and Horowitz, "Political Alternation as a Restraint on Investing Influence"; and Moehler and Lindberg, "Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap."