



## **DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND ELECTION MANAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract**

The wider acceptability of democracy as a form of political system is predicated on some of its basic attributes that attempts to serve the interest of the majority in a liberal society. Transparency, equality, and peaceful means of political leadership selection underscore the irreducible minimum of democratic consolidation across the globe. However, there seems to be a serious quagmire in most of the countries in West Africa sub region when it comes to their experience with democracy. In order to scale the quagmire as experience in violence during the process of political leadership recruitment, the States established election management body with the objective of administering and serving as an unbiased umpire in the political system. This paper interrogated factors that influence election violence in ECOWAS countries. This paper relied on secondary source of data collection and was analyzed using phenomenological interpretative method. The Result revealed that attitude of political leaders; ethnicity and mode of appointment into election management bodies were responsible for most of the election violence. Given these findings, the paper recommends that the election management body should be a body separate from the executive and suggest a thorough and aggressive review of the laws establishing it.

**Key Words:** Challenges, Consolidation, Democracy, Election, Management, West Africa.

### **Abstrait**

L'acceptabilité plus large de la démocratie en tant que forme de système politique repose sur certains de ses attributs fondamentaux qui tentent de servir les intérêts de la majorité dans une

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société libérale. La transparence, l'égalité et les moyens pacifiques de sélection des dirigeants politiques soulignent le minimum irréductible de consolidation démocratique à travers le monde. Cependant, il semble y avoir un grave bourbier dans la plupart des pays de la sous-région de l'Afrique de l'Ouest en ce qui concerne leur expérience de la démocratie. Afin de transformer le bourbier en expérience de violence au cours du processus de recrutement des dirigeants politiques, les États ont créé un organe de gestion des élections dans le but d'administrer et de servir d'arbitre impartial dans le système politique. Cet article interroge les facteurs qui influencent la violence électorale dans les pays de la CEDEAO. Cet article reposait sur une source secondaire de collecte de données et a été analysé à l'aide d'une méthode d'interprétation phénoménologique. Le résultat a révélé cette attitude des dirigeants politiques ; l'origine ethnique et le mode de nomination dans les organes de gestion des élections étaient responsables de la plupart des violences électorales. Compte tenu de ces conclusions, le document recommande que l'organe de gestion des élections soit un organe distinct de l'exécutif et suggère un examen approfondi et agressif des lois qui l'établissent.

**Mots clés :** Défis, Consolidation, Démocratie, Élection, Gestion, Afrique de l'Ouest.

## **Introduction**

Elections constitute the most crucial ingredient of democracy (Omotola, 2017). Without doubt, one of the global approved criteria to measure the quality of democracy is the quality of elections being conducted by a political system. On a closer look, Diamond (1997) aptly noted that the scope of democratic progress in the world is partly deceptive and imaginary without a credible platform for political leadership recruitment. Mostly affected in this category are West African countries which largely became democratic in the 1990s as a result of -third waves of democracy. Generally, African countries have transited from outright dictatorship to a multi-party democracy (Reynolds, 2004). These countries include Senegal, Nigeria, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Ghana, Togo, Beni which have on one time or the other held multi- party elections. These countries have recorded a scenario where incumbents leaders Have conceded defeats and handed over power to the opposition. On a comparative note, Ghana has occupies a pride of place and stand perhaps as a model of democracy, especially in West Africa. There was peaceful handover of power in Ghana in 2008 and 2016 when the incumbents lost in the elections. Similarly, the same scenario played out in Nigeria in 2015 when the then incumbent president voluntarily handed over power after losing the election.

Ibrahim (2015) contended that, in spite of the periodic elections held in West Africa, leadership positions surprisingly remains unchanging, and democracy risks to be unachievable. Evidence suggests that 'electoralization instead of democratization' is a common phenomenon in most of the West African democracy, to corroborate this, Diamond (1997) argued that only a minimal percentage of new democracies are seen to be deeply established and secured due to elections irregularities. Democratic consolidation in the context of West Africa is contradictory. Findings revealed that the democratic system in the West Africa subregion still lack credibility and is prone to violence and instability. The state of democracy in the region seems make the accessibility of democratic dividends by the citizens illusionary.



In recent time, ECOWAS countries were confronted with a growing challenge of democratic retrogression with different attempts by leaders to alter the constitution in order to accommodate their interests (Africa center for strategic studies, (2020). Such countries like Togo, and Guinea Bissau, had made attempt to justify a bid for a third term. In a similar vein, Senegal in 2016, with its promising democratic stand was engrossed in electoral issues when the electoral law was amended less than six months before the actual election, a situation that dealt a huge blow on the country's democratic image.

Cheeseman (2017) opined that the wave of democracy that blew across African continent in the early 1990s revived democratic activities in most of the West African countries. But as germane as election is to democracy, the process of political leadership recruitment in the West Africa sub region has been flawed with irregularities thereby diluting the quality of democracy. The essence of democracy as it were is for people to participate in choosing their leaders especially through multi-party competitive elections. Instead of elections being a mechanism for citizens to choose their representatives, it is being transformed into a source of rivalry among contending parties with attendant conflicts and violence. (Maendeleo, 2016).

The current reality in West Africa democracy leaves a lot to be desired in the context of conduct of elections, a vital part of every democratic governance. This happened in spite of lot of rules and regulations that governs the conduct of elections. Evidences have shown that attitudes of political leaders is mostly at variance with the rules and regulations of election, the effects of which has often tinted politics as a 'dirty' game. The fact is that evidences have shown that politics is not actually a dirty game, only if the players are ready to play according to the rules.

Recognizing that a lot is at stake in complying with the rules and regulations guiding elections, this paper undertook the task of assessing the roles of election management in connection with democratic consolidation in West Africa sub region. However, The primary question, which this paper contends with, is what are the factors that influence election violence in West Africa? The paper is organized into themes, which include conceptual and theoretical framework, democratic consolidation in West Africa an evaluation, ECOWAS interventionist approach in election management, electoral commission in West Africa; and analysis of election administration and management. The paper ends with a discussion of findings as well as recommendation. The paper discovered, some countries within the sub region that have made appreciable steps towards democratic consolidation. However, unbridled attitude of political leaders, ethnic politics, and other modes of appointment/selection of top-ranking officers of election management body have combined to distort democratic processes and thus cause the backsliding some of the democratic states in the sub region. The paper thereby recommends that, the election management body should serve as an autonomous democratic institution, and serious efforts must be geared towards electoral reviews in order to accommodate it.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

In their influential study on election Nwozor and Oshewolo (2017) offered a robust explanation on how elections has constituted a strong pillar of democratic government. As a matter of fact the sustainability of democracy is anchored on a credible electoral process.



This implies that for democracy to transcend beyond the nascent state that is a common phenomenon in West Africa sub region, the platform for its actualization must be devoid of partisanship that could snowball into violence.

Conceptually speaking, electoral violence according to Egobueze (2017) can be categorized as all issues of violence carried out before, during and after elections in the form of the use of force either conventional or unconventional to suppress opposing political party/parties with the implication of eroding the credibility of the electoral process. In his conceptual analysis Hoglund (2020), opined that electoral violence possess the capacity to destabilize a country. This is evident in the 2010 political crisis in Cote d'Ivoire where lot of lives were lost, people were internally displaced and many were forced to the status of refugee in neighboring countries. In theory, the use of elections to select leaders ought to provide a non-violent means to the employment of force to adjudicate between opposing claim to rule, and it ought to be a medium that allows citizens to have greater say over how they are ruled. Yet in practice, these aspirations often fail to conform to reality. Many multi-party elections, specifically those in democracies not yet fully consolidated, are bedeviled with great levels of violence in the course of pre, actual and post-elections periods (Hoglund,2020).

Given the focus of the subject matter of electoral violence in West Africa struggle for democratic consolidation, the political economy approach as propounded by Karl Marx which hinged on dialectical materialism readily comes to mind. The main thrust of this approach as aptly noted by Milgate and Stimson (2009) is on economic aspects of society. In other word, this is based on the issue of man's motivation for economic goals and wants. However, man's strong beliefs and struggle to acquire control and retain political power by all means possible could result in the use of violence. Also, political economy theory offers a detailed explanation of economic aspects of causes of violence in electoral process in West Africa democracy.

For instance, Albert, Lagan, Chomsky *et al* cited in Hahnel (2003) gave a convergence view of the influence of human factor in understanding social stability. Political economic theorists attempts to find out the relationship between economic, and political activities, and the force behind social stability. This implies that, pockets of pre, actual and post- elections violence witnessed could be attributed to human factor because of their thirst for economic gains through access to political/state power.

Hahnel (2003) in his study of political economy catalogued three means through which people could acquire property in the society. Firstly, through inheritance which include political, economic or monarchical legacies bequeathed to heir of a family. On a second note, people acquire productive property through -good luck|| probably when one is inspired to invest in a lucrative business venture or secured a well-paid employment. The third categorization on how people acquire property is through -unfair advantage|| which could be rightly applied to this study. Major assumption of the aforementioned postulation is that, those who are stronger or are more willing to prey on the misery of others, have access to inside information can manipulate political institutions to their advantage at the expense of those that are not as privileged. Incumbency factor comes to mind in this regard, and as we know conflicts and violence can come to play as a result of interest contestation, ideology among others.



## **Democratic Consolidation in West Africa: An Evaluation**

Democratic transition and consolidation is a topic that is of major interest to academics but which has received little attention among West African scholars (MacLaren, 2008). The process of transition from dictatorial to liberal democratic regime in this context is perhaps an illusion. Democratic consolidation is not achievable without a credible and transparent process of leadership selection, a vital aspect of consolidated democracy which greatly informed this study. Democratic governance in West Africa is seen most time as a mirage due to a prolonged post-colonial military rule that was a common experience among the states within the sub-region. The attitude of most of the previous authoritarian leaders was reflective of unwillingness to adapt to the popular culture of government that is obtainable through a free and fair multi-party election. In a similar vein, the behaviour of the masses that constitute the polity suggest that they are at home with a popular government, but this could be a mere wish if the authoritarian governments are not willing to transmit power in the case of electoral defeat.

In the same manner Juan and Stephan (1996), submitted that consolidated democracy is a function of proper transition from totalitarian rule to democratic regime. They went further to argue that a democratic state must be governed by rules and laws, implying that all the democratic institutions must carry out their functions within the confine of the constitution and laid down regulations, it could then have the possibility to deepen democracy and offers the benefits that it carries to the majority in the society.

O'Donnell (1996) in his own view contended that, authoritarian rule is the one that is very opposed to, stable government, institutionalized and enduring democracy. What this means is that, for democracy to survive in such a situation it must contend with a lot of anti-democratic factors, this suggest why most of West African leaders needlessly stay glued to power. This stand was corroborated by Schedler (1998) in his assessment of new democratic states. He revealed that, the fragility of democratic government in a new democracy has inhibited the growth and entrenchment of liberal democracy in West Africa. For instance, some states in the sub -region had suffered democratic summersault, a situation where a democratic regime retrogressed into dictatorial rule like evidenced in Mali and Guinea-Bissau (Gberie, 2012). A country known to be repressive of press freedom, multi-party elections, and intolerance of the opposition, intolerance of civil organizations, and pre or post - election violence/disputes as also evidence in Benni Republic, exhibits indices that are at variance with democracy (Financial Times, 2019). The focus of states striving to be consolidated democratically is to avoid either a collapse of democracy, or a relapse to old ways of dictatorship characterized by a gradual resurgence of anti-democratic force. In attempt to consolidate, new democracies have faced this critical impediment. For instance, findings reveals that Benni-Republic a tiny country in West Africa, had a robust and promising democratic experience in the 1990s until when the wind of sit tight syndrome that is a major feature in Africa hit the country's president Talon resulting to the abysmal display of anti-democratic tendencies.

Undoubtedly, much of the study on democratic transition and consolidation has tended to aim on factors within the country undergoing regime change that are likely to have an impact on whether the country becomes a consolidated democracy or not. Democracy in West Africa sub region is viewed as a liability, contempt to the rule of law, disregard to



Constitution and democratic institution. It is also discovered that, most of the developing democracies of the world have little or no respect for democratic ethos and principle (Venter 2014, p.247). This implies that electoral fraud, irregularities, violence and disputes are common phenomenon in most of West African democratic governance.

The unfolding democratic experience for instance, in the context of West Africa elicit question of whether there is anything about the sub region that makes it intrinsic hard to uphold free, fair and lasting multi-party election. Democratic consolidation must address the issue of electoral system, since democracy could be seen as a competition within a political space through periodic elections, so the platform for political leadership recruitment must be void of disputes if such a political system will have a place among the consolidated democracies of the world.

In his own comparative evaluation of democratic consolidation Hopkin (1999) opined that, the ability of political system to transit from one administration to another through a fair competitive election is a model to gauge the success of any democracy. Countries such as Italy, United State of America, and Spain are categorized among the committee of consolidated democracies because they had over times overcame the shock of transition. Ojo (2006) in his exposition on democratic consolidation contended that, the component parts of free and fair elections are not easy to come by, but it is a major requirement for a consolidated democracy. Democracy can only thrive and blossom when a state has an improved and strong electoral system. West African states fall into the -third wave of democracy, it is perhaps difficult to know and determine when a regime has moved from transition to consolidated democracy. It should be noted that if there are challenges such as electoral flaws, weak democratic institution, attitude of political leaders, political inequality that render a regime autocratic it shows that such regime is yet to be consolidated and still in transition (MacLaren,2008). This implies that democracy as noted earlier is bedeviled by serious challenges since most of the states in West Africa are in the category of -third wave of democracy, to this end; democratic consolidation seems to be a far cry in the sub region when juxtaposed with elections management and administration.

### **ECOWAS Interventionist Approach in Election Management**

Perhaps, experiences in democratic election administration in ECOWAS is tainted, empirical study such as Ojo (2007) revealed that, lot of countries overturn the process through the electoral commission in favour of the incumbent there by eroding the credibility of the whole system. This, no doubt was part of the reason for the establishment of Economic Communities of West African States, a sub-regional body that among other functions see to the successful administration, monitoring and observation of elections within the component states. Against the backdrop however, the legal frame work for ECOWAS in election management which is well captured by the ECOWAS hand book on election observation (2008) emphasizes the importance of credible, free and fair multi-party election as a recognized platform for political recruitment at all levels of government. This implies that, the onus is on the states within the sub-region to inculcate the outlined democratic ethos in their respective Constitution for a seamless power transition. Ascension to power through undemocratic and unconstitutional means that is a common scene through coup in some of the West African countries is considered an aberration and contempt of the electoral principle



(ECOWAS Hand Book on Election Observation, 2008). Strict adherence to democratic principles such as freedom of press, rule of law, independence of the judiciary and respect for human dignity and fundamental human rights are encouraged by the sub-regional organization. Membership of the sub-regional body has placed a moral burden on each state to align with all the provisions of the organization. It has been revealed that most of the states in West Africa contravened some of these laid down procedures that would have deepened democracy (Siegle & Cook, 2020).

The -principles of democratic elections- is seen to be a strong factor in any serious election. It has been discovered that not every election is democratic, incidences such as shifting of election dates days before the actual election without the inputs of stake holders, inaccurate voters list, inequality are some of the issues limiting the credibility of the ballot box (ECOWAS, 2008) from this. In the ECOWAS handbook, it is observed that fraudulent voters list, inability of electorates to access voters register, compromised election results and dependence of judiciary on the executive are factors that have infringed on states elections.

Another way through which ECOWAS intervenes in election management among her member states is through election observation (IDEA, 2008). The --International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance has provided the vital meaning of election observation as -the purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process and the making of informed judgements about the process on the basis of the information collected.

This implies that the focus of election is not an event per se, but a process, this could be pre-election issues, actual election issues and post- election issues. The tripod are what constitute elections process. For example, the component parts of pre- election issues may include; recruitment and training of Ad hoc staff, voter's registration, collection of voter's card, and delimitation of polling booth, political party campaigns, while actual election issues could be casting of ballot, counting of ballot, announcement of results, security of voters and election materials. In a similar vein, post- election issues majorly revolves around court litigation. Jega (2011) aptly noted the significance of international election observation groups, which according to him are meant to provide reports that would help in direction, dependable discreet work that would mitigate the incidence of errors and irregularities during and after elections. Corroborating this stand is Miezah (2018), who observed the crucial nature of elections observation among the developing democracies of the world. In this regard, election observation has become germane to democratic process in order to give credence to it. Organizations that championed this as captioned earlier are, but not limited to; United Nations Organization, European Union, African Union and Economic Community of West African States. In spite of the presence of these global, regional and sub-regional bodies during elections, cases of electoral sanctity are still very uncommon in West Africa. It is important to state that international election observers more often than note had criticized election flaws, they had also condemned election violence in strong terms, taking the lead in this regard was the United State Democratic Institute (Padan, 2011) a global recognized election monitoring body that has independently observed most of the executive and parliamentary elections conducted in Africa in general and West Africa in particular.



## **Electoral Commission in West Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Election Administration/Management**

There seems to be a very sharp division among scholars on the universality of election management model (Miezah,2018). To this end, election is conducted and organized based on the peculiarity and –aspirations –of countries that could be traceable to value identity, nature of electoral law, rules and regulations and mode of appointment of officers of election management bodies. What can be deduced from this is, based on the principle of sovereignty which greatly restricts external interference in the affairs of independent state. In this regard, there is convergence of thoughts on what election frame work should be. Conversely, Miezah agreed on the universality of minimum election ethos such as the credibility of choosing among competitive political parties, integrity of the process and openness in an environment and atmosphere that is devoid of harassment and intimidation. However, in this context the study shall be interrogating two means of election management appointment, such as election management body which is constituted based on political party affiliation and electoral commission that is neutral/independent of political parties. The reason for this categorization is to make sense on how the performance of the two can cause electoral disputes in some states under investigation.

The essence of election management commission principally is to make electoral process independent of state control and influence without which such commissions could either becomes the extension of the ruling party or serving the interest of some few elites in a political system. The administration of elections no doubt should be the constitutional duty of an autonomous body, it is on this note that Omotola (2017) captured the importance of election management body in electoral studies and democratization, he indicated the importance of the categorization of election administration in to three main stages within which they perform there functions; making of regulations, application of the regulations, and adjudication. Making of regulation in this sense connotes setting out standard for all political actors in the political space; application could suggest the implementation of the established standards and regulations for the election while, adjudication revolves around dispute resolution. In all, election management commission is seen as an umpire among different parties contending to capture state power and its activities are performed by people appointed by government authority. As such, the role of election management in ensuring election probity and integrity and the attitude of the personnel's involved in the discharge of the responsibilities are germane to democratic consolidation. Unfortunately, in a developing or evolving democracy with weak democratic institutions their role in that regard is always obvious, and their stand determine to a great extent their impact on voter's opinion and the credibility of the election.

In their detailed comparative analysis on the mode of appointment and composition of electoral management body Hounkpe and Fall (2010) revealed a situation where in some countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire appointments into the electoral bodies were purely based on political consideration and patronage, a scenario that seems to stand at variance with the principle of free and fair election. Such appointments conforms to the adage of –he who pays the piper dictates the tone! which is indicative of some of the irregularities witnessed in Benin Republic parliamentary election held on April, 2019. The BBC reported that no single opposition party was allowed to partake in the



election due to sudden changes in the electoral law. The ugly development greatly distorted the country's democratic journey. Pener (2019) offered a similar view on Côte d'Ivoire on how the incumbent president with connivance with the electoral commission was asking for a third term in office, an attitude that was against the electoral laws of the country. Afro barometer survey cited in (Pener, 2019) observed that 81% of the population had supported two-term limits for the president while, 52% were totally dissatisfied with the way and manner that democracy was being managed in the country. This mismanagement was not unconnected with a weak and biased election management body that is largely populated by the dominant ruling party members, the -Houphouëtist Rally for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). Burkina Faso and Niger democratic experiences are not totally different from the two previously discussed. Evidence revealed that the appointment and membership composition of electoral commission are deeply rooted in political instinct (Hounkpe & Fall, 2010), driven by agenda to weaken and muzzle political opponents. The effects of this most often time, is electoral disputes and erosion of democratic norms which thrives on multi-party elections. Democratically, electorates should be provided with different choice in order to choose or vote for a party or, candidates of their preference so as to deepen democracy. The absence of authoritarianism, a situation that is a common trend among the francophone countries of West Africa, is needed for democracy to thrive.

Moving away from the electoral commission that is partisanship based, to a commission that is independent of political party or a neutral commission in the words of Hounkpe and Fall is what Anglophone countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia need. It is important to note that the election management bodies in these countries are constitutionally recognized, with organizational structure, rules, regulations and mode of appointment of members always secured by parliament approval, but are rarely independent. Scholarly findings such as Nwozor & Oshewolo (2017) have proved that most of the issues and challenges faced in election management in Francophone ECOWAS were because of political party connectedness to election management commission. On a comparative note therefore, the same scenario seems to play out in Anglophone and Francophone countries. The history of election in Nigeria as an Anglophone ECOWAS state, is one that is characterized with violence and maneuvering (Moveh, 2009). The narrative has made the country to experience lots of democratic setbacks, and the military often sees this as a veritable platform to usurp power as witnessed in the aborted first republic. Importantly, for elections to be considered free and fair it needs to be conducted and administered according to the rules and regulations guiding it as stipulated in the electoral law. Arguing along this line of thought was Saliu (2007) who submitted that, Nigeria as a country is adequately sufficient in electoral laws but, what is indeed inadequate are players that are ready to play according to rules and also, an independent electoral commission that would serve as an unbiased umpire in managing the process. The submission however, sufficiently captures the reality of Nigeria's electoral system that is bedeviled with barrage of challenges. The election management of Nigeria seems not to have lived up to its expectation in spite of its acclaimed independence. The behaviour of the electoral management body in the country confirms that the independence is just in theory and not in practice.

From the foregoing, the narrative of Nigeria's election management body is quite similar to those of the Francophone countries as revealed in various findings. Worthy of note, is the



staggered tenure of office of INEC senior officers and the method of their appointment by the federal executive. The implication of these two expositions is that, since no rational human being would easily let go of his paid job, the senior officers have no option than to succumb to executive control. Secondly, as appointees of the federal executive; they could easily be susceptible to presidential control, thereby giving electoral favour to the incumbent at the expense of opposition parties in particular and democracy in general. On a comparative note, Ghana EMB senior appointees legally enjoy a fixed tenure of office that is secured on till their mandatory retirement age, an indication that suggests Ghana as a leading light in African democracy in terms of successful conduct of elections that began in the early 1990s when multi-party election was kick started. Since then the country has had a smooth sail towards democratic consolidation, because it had on two different occasions transmitted from the incumbent to opposing parties.

Taking a contrary stand on the foregoing is, Danso and Lartey (2016) in their influential study of electoral violence in Ghana, contended that democratic consolidation may remain in limbo and elusive without a strong and virile political institution such as the election commission. It implies that, legal and structural framework of those institution remain very weak to face the stiff intimidation from the federal executive to secure electoral favor. In the same study, the authors dwelled elaborately on the importance of political institution appointments as a vehicle for a free and fair election which is the main crux of this study.

Sierra Leone an ECOWAS country has a similar electoral commission with the previous ones in this category. The appointment of members of National Electoral Commission as prescribed by the country's Constitution was done directly by the president (International Foundation for Election System, 2018). The country political history is characterized with crises and turbulence occasioned by military coup and civil war. The National Electoral Commission is legally responsible to conduct, administer elections, while the onus of implementing those rules and regulations lies within the jurisdiction of political actors. Though, the country has witnessed two transition of power from incumbent to opposition party, it also has its own share of electoral disputes in the form of intimidation, harassment of the opposition political parties, and the biased tendency of the political institutions. Of recent was the multi-party election that was conducted on March 2018. Although the opposition party won, it cascaded into three different run-offs. The implication of this according to Human Rights Audit of Sierra- Leone 2018 election was the enormous pressure on the National Electoral Commission by the country's national executive to extract electoral favour from them.

In Gambia, the Independent Electoral commission is the election management body with membership appointment by the president. The national election administered in 2017 by the country's independent electoral commission was far from being free of electoral disputes, a situation that attracted global, regional, and sub – regional response. In his report on Gambia election, European Union Elections Observation Mission (2017) revealed the barrage of tension and stalemate that characterized the process of the 2016 Gambia presidential election. Empirical evidence indicated that the unstable attitude of the then incumbent president Yahaya Jammeh to back down on his earlier acceptance of electoral defeat suffered in the hand of the opposition and, his firm grip on the country's democratic institution threatened the peace and stability of the country. It was on this note that, the



Freedom House report on the Gambia 2016 presidential election observed how, the election was near being rigged because of the weak government institutions in the country facilitated by top notch of those institutions. The reason for this according to the freedom house report was because of the undemocratic attitude of the president and sit tight syndrome that is common among African leaders.

## **Discussion**

The study examined the effects of election management on democratic consolidation in West Africa, with specific reference to factors influencing election disputes in some of the countries understudied. In agreement with findings from other studies (e.g Anna et al, 2006), the study found that one of the factors influencing election disputes in West Africa was the attitudes of the political leaders. Attitudes, in the view of the scholars were seen as deliberate efforts made by politicians in order to remain in power. These attributes do not seem to reflect the wishes of electorates who more often desire leadership change and, it is also at variance with democratic ethics.

Furthermore, consistent with findings, (e.g Milgate and Stimson, 2009), this study found that one of the factors influencing election disputes in West Africa is political leaders insatiable appetite for State resources. This is a factor that most politicians used for their selfish political ambition. Corroborating this assertion in his influential study on –ethnic politics and election campaigns in contemporary Africa: evidence from Ghana and Kenya, Taylor (2016) gave a robust analysis of how politicians had engaged in ethnic based campaigns in the countries understudied to win elections with a promise of offer of juicy and lucrative appointments against other ethnic groups in those countries. It was discovered that, the isolated ethnic groups largely reacts to this form of injustice by resulting to self-help of protest which usually leads to unimaginable level of violence.

Importantly, in consonance with empirical findings, (e.g Omotola 2017; Venter 2014; Hounkpe and Fall 2010; Juan and Stephen 1996), discovered that one of the major factors that enhances election disputes in West Africa that is germane to this study is the mode of appointment of members of election management bodies. Omotola (2017) concluded that despite all pretenses by the executives to masquerade election management bodies as independent, the bodies seem not to be independent in actual sense, in most cases the body is seen as an extension of the ruling party. Scholars had maintain a common ground on the obvious irregularities recorded in 2007 national elections in Nigeria. The then President Olusegun Obasanjo had embarrassingly declared that the victory of \_PDP‘ the ruling party at the poll was a -do or die affair and, the instrument employed to achieve that end was the country’s election management body INEC. From such utterances, It can be concluded that whenever election management bodies fall to the bait of the ruling authority it could attract condemnation from the opposing party that could lead to disputes among the various political actors.

## **Conclusion**

The study examined scholarly views of the factors influencing election disputes in West Africa. The result revealed that the attitudes of our political leaders in some of the countries investigated were responsible for the cases of election disputes witnessed in the political



system of West Africa. Our confirmed the basic assumptions of political economy theory. It emphasizes the attitudes of humans and not necessarily state institutions as a major cause of election disputes/violence. The study also found that, desire for material wealth which, masquerade in ethnic politics is a serious barrier to a peaceful electoral process in West Africa. Politicians have used this undemocratic means to attain their political end. Our result also underscores the relevance of political economic theory in our understanding of electoral process in West Africa. Although this study has provided evidence concerning the phenomenon investigated, the study has its own limitation. The study undertook a qualitative approach and could not infuse the quantitative method which should have sample more opinions on the field and addressed other issues under the subject. Given these short comings the study could not allow for a wider generalization of the findings. Future research should address these gaps. In the context of West Africa, we recommend that policies and laws on the appointment of top membership of election management bodies be courageously reviewed in order to curtail the uncontrolled and abysmal interference of the parliament or executive in their operations.

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