

**Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Nigeria and Ghana:
Exploring the Nexus, 2015-2024.**

Sekpe, Sheneni Samuel, PhD

Department of Political Science
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba
sekpesheneni@gmail.com / +2348165956015

&

Upav Felix Saaior

Department of Political Science
Federal University, Lafia
upavfelix@gmail.com / +2348039219290

&

Joseph Orih Innocent

Directorate of SIWES
Federal University, Lafia, Nasarawa State
Josephorih72@gmail.com / 07033316658

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria and Ghana between 2015 and 2024, employing a comparative research design. A mixed-methods approach was utilized. The sample size consisted of 384 respondents from each country, selected using stratified random sampling. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. The study was anchored by the theory of democratic consolidation to unravel the nexus between political parties and electoral administration. Findings revealed significant variations in the nexus between political parties and electoral administration in both countries. In Nigeria, political party influence is a powerful and often intrusive force within the electoral system. In stark contrast, Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) enjoys a higher degree of independence from political parties. While Ghanaian political parties are actively involved in the electoral process, they engage more through advocacy, public dialogue, and voter mobilisation than through attempts to directly influence electoral decisions. The study recommends among others, that both countries need to focus on enhancing transparency, fostering greater political accountability, and strengthening the independence of electoral commissions, building strong institutional collaboration also entails promoting public involvement in the electoral process.

Keywords: Political Parties, Electoral Administration, Nexus, Nigeria, Ghana.

1. Introduction

The relationship between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria has evolved significantly from 2015 to 2024, marked by strides in electoral reforms and challenges rooted in political volatility and inefficiencies. Political parties in Nigeria have been central players in shaping the electoral landscape, exerting influence over voter mobilization, candidate selection, and post-election activities. The country's political system, dominated by parties like

the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), has seen fierce electoral competition, particularly in the presidential and gubernatorial elections. By 2020, reforms such as the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) were put in place to address issues of election integrity. These reforms were further consolidated in the 2023 elections, where BVAS was used for voter accreditation, streamlining the voting process and increasing transparency (Adeola, 2023). Nonetheless, voter turnout in these elections remained below expectations, with only 29% of eligible voters casting their ballots in the presidential election, down from 35% in 2019 (Chukwuma, 2024). This low turnout highlights ongoing concerns about political apathy, voter education, and the credibility of the electoral process. Despite these efforts, Nigeria's electoral system continued to be marred by electoral violence, vote-buying, and reports of manipulation, which have been exacerbated by the growing influence of money in politics (Ibrahim, 2023).

The administration of elections in Nigeria has also been characterized by increasing mistrust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), with allegations of partisan bias and inefficiency. In 2024, about 30% of voters expressed dissatisfaction with the electoral body's performance, citing the logistical failures during previous elections as a cause for concern (Musa & Atiku, 2024). In response, political parties have been actively involved in advocacy for electoral reforms and greater independence for INEC, urging the government to enhance the transparency and accountability of the electoral process. These dynamics underscore the complex relationship between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria, which remains an area of focus for researchers aiming to understand the challenges of democratic consolidation in the country (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023).

Political parties and electoral administration in Ghana have undergone significant developments between 2015 and 2024, shaping the country's democratic trajectory. Ghana, known for its stability in West Africa, has seen a steady evolution in its electoral processes, with political parties at the forefront of this transformation. The 2016 general elections marked a crucial moment in Ghana's democratic history, characterized by a peaceful contest between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). These elections set the stage for the 2020 election, which despite controversies surrounding the results, reaffirmed Ghana's position as a beacon of democratic practice in Africa. However, the political landscape remained contentious, with issues such as voter registration, ballot security, and the role of political parties in ensuring electoral transparency taking center stage (Adu-Gyamfi & Owusu, 2021).

From 2016 onward, Ghana witnessed substantial reforms in its electoral administration, notably with the introduction of biometric voter registration and the use of technology in elections. These reforms, aimed at improving the credibility and efficiency of the electoral system, were accompanied by increased engagement from political parties in electoral monitoring. The 2020 general elections reflected these changes, with political parties participating in an increasingly competitive environment. However, the elections were marred by the usual challenges, including political violence and allegations of voter intimidation. Notably, the voter turnout for the 2020 election was 79%, slightly lower than in previous elections, signaling a potential decline in electoral enthusiasm, despite efforts to engage the youth (Ansah & Tetteh, 2023).

The 2024 elections in Ghana continued to build on previous experiences, with the Electoral Commission (EC) implementing measures to improve the credibility of the voting process. Political parties played an instrumental role in shaping these reforms, advocating for transparency and the proper functioning of the electoral system. Yet, the role of political parties in Ghana's elections remains controversial, with concerns over the growing influence of money

in politics and voter manipulation. In the 2024 election, voter turnout dropped to 75%, suggesting a gradual decrease in citizen participation and confidence in the system (Osei & Ampofo, 2024). Despite these challenges, Ghana's political parties have maintained a crucial role in advocating for electoral reform, ensuring electoral credibility, and strengthening democratic governance in the country, underscoring the ongoing complexities of electoral administration in Ghana's evolving political landscape.

The role of political parties and their influence on electoral administration has been a critical aspect of the democratic evolution in both Nigeria and Ghana from 2015 to 2024. Political parties in these two countries, while both contributing to democratic governance, exhibit distinct characteristics in their organizational structures, financing, internal cohesion, and approach to electoral administration (Adeola, 2023; Mendy, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Definitions

Election

Election, as a concept, has been variously defined by scholars to capture its nature and purpose within democratic governance. According to Olawale (2021), an election is a structured mechanism through which citizens express their preferences for candidates or policies, facilitating the legitimacy of political authority. Similarly, Abiodun and Oyeleke (2022) describe elections as the cornerstone of representative democracy, enabling the peaceful transfer of power through a process that reflects the collective will of the electorate. Johnson (2023) emphasizes elections as a procedural tool for accountability, ensuring that leaders are responsive to the populace's needs through regular intervals of mandate renewal.

Political Parties

Political parties, as integral institutions within democratic systems, have been a subject of significant scholarly analysis. Scholars have offered varied definitions, often reflecting ideological leanings or contextual dynamics. Sartori (2021) describes political parties as organisations that seek to gain and maintain political power through collective action, often by fielding candidates in elections and articulating policy platforms. This definition underscores the organisational and strategic dimensions of parties, linking their existence to democratic processes. Similarly, Duverger (2022) suggests that political parties are groups with shared ideologies and goals that compete for public office, further highlighting their role in electoral politics and their function as instruments of governance.

Electoral Administration

Electoral administration has to do with the organization and conduct of elections by an electoral body (Jinadu, 1997). It includes the organization of election agencies, the behaviour and characteristics of election officials, the management and execution of all stages of the electoral process and policies (Ajayi, 2007). What the foregoing definitions suggest is that electoral administration covers all the pre-election, election and post-election activities and not just an event. Meanwhile, electoral administration and the transformation of the processes of democracy and political governance to ensure that the state and the institutions of governance are accountable to the people, and address their concern for development and progress remains one of the key challenges confronting most transitional societies today (Ibeanu & Egwu, 2007). To be sure, Omotola (2010) submitted that election administration entails legal-constitutional interaction, involving a combination of institutional rules and organizational procedures that ascertain the basic rules for electoral processes, political competitions, organization of political campaigns, registration of eligible voters, voting on election day, resolving election-related disputes and certification of election results.

2.2. Empirical Review

Nexus between Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Nigeria

Moliki (2021) examined political party elite and election-related violence in Nigeria: The Nexus and Implications for Democracy and Governance, addresses the issue of election-related violence facilitated by political party elites in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the 2015-2019 election period. The study explored an under examined aspect of electoral violence by shifting the spotlight to the political elite, who, he argues, play a central role in promoting violence as a means of consolidating power in a zero-sum, winner-takes-all political environment. Employing a qualitative documentary research method, the study systematically analysed secondary data using a four-step approach to document election-related violence influenced by political elites. His findings indicate that the elite's influence on election outcomes often depends on their ability to deploy and control politically-motivated thugs to instill fear, manipulate voters, and obstruct the electoral process. This tactic, coupled with a pervasive lack of accountability and punishment for election offenders, has severe implications for Nigeria's democratic integrity. Moliki argues that this culture of impunity undermines free, fair, and credible elections, diminishes public participation, and erodes the legitimacy of leadership and governance, perpetuating instability in the political system. In conclusion, the study emphasised that to curb this elite-driven electoral violence, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the National Assembly must take a more proactive stance in enforcing laws against electoral offenses. This enforcement would act as a deterrent to both the sponsors and perpetrators, potentially reducing the incidence of election-related violence and contributing to more stable democratic governance in Nigeria.

Oni (2024) examined party discipline and the crisis of election administration in contemporary Nigeria, delves into the effects of party discipline on the efficiency of election administration in Nigeria. Noting a common tendency in election literature to focus on the shortcomings of Nigeria's Election Management Body (EMB) while overlooking the political behaviour of key stakeholders, Oni examines how the conduct of political parties impacts the EMB's capacity to manage credible elections. The study argued that the lack of discipline among political parties introduces systemic issues that undermine the EMB's ability to oversee elections effectively, highlighting that adherence to internal rules within political parties could potentially enhance the EMB's performance. Using group and power theories as the study's conceptual framework, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, sourcing data from secondary materials like books, journal articles, and online resources, which are analysed descriptively and argumentatively. The findings suggested that party indiscipline not only fuels administrative challenges but also escalates issues such as violence, voter manipulation, and logistical failures, weakening the EMB's role in upholding democratic principles. The study concluded that a critical factor in improving the EMB's credibility is ensuring political parties respect procedural guidelines, thereby reducing administrative disruptions. The study recommended that the EMB implement stricter penalties, such as party deregistration and temporary election bans for parties that fail to enforce discipline, to encourage more responsible behavior among political stakeholders.

Ekpo and Akah (2023) examined ECOWAS election monitoring and challenges of election security management in Nigeria - A Post Analysis, explores the complex role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in monitoring elections and addressing the persistent election security challenges within Nigeria's democratic framework. Utilising a post-analysis approach, the authors examine how ECOWAS' observer missions and security management strategies intersect with election practices in Nigeria, underscoring issues such as tampering, vote-buying, violence, and manipulation that undermine the credibility of the

electoral process. Through documentary analysis, the study assesses ECOWAS' effectiveness in overseeing elections and the Nigerian government's role in maintaining election security, pointing out significant obstacles to a stable democratic environment, such as inadequate funding, logistical issues, and political party infractions on electoral guidelines. Findings reveal that despite ECOWAS' efforts, Nigeria's electoral security is jeopardised by a range of issues, including voter register abuse and insufficient compliance by political parties, which heighten risks for credible elections. The study concludes that enhanced collaboration between ECOWAS, Nigerian government agencies, and election bodies is necessary for robust election security management, recommending increased resources and adherence to democratic principles. This collaboration, the authors argue, is essential to mitigate electoral malpractices and foster democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Uhere (2023) studied *Elections in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward* provides a comprehensive examination of the changes and ongoing issues surrounding Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, focusing on the impact of the New Electoral Law. Adopting a descriptive and analytical approach with data drawn from both primary and secondary sources, the study explores how this legislation influenced the electoral landscape, proposing that it offers potential for improving the integrity of future elections in Nigeria. Unlike previous elections historically fraught with hooliganism, violence, and extensive rigging, the 2023 election was predominantly influenced by ethnic and religious divides, alongside alleged manipulation by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at collation centres rather than at polling stations. The research highlights the active involvement of youth as a major factor in shifting dynamics and notes the dual impact of technological deployment, which both disrupted traditional methods of election rigging and exposed irregularities. Findings reveal that incidents of hooliganism were limited, mainly to Lagos and Port Harcourt, and that post-election litigation emerged largely due to INEC's partial non-compliance with the New Electoral Law during result announcements. This partial adherence created concerns about the credibility of the electoral process and highlighted the need for judicial clarification on the law's provisions. In conclusion, the study recommends a rigorous interpretation of the New Electoral Law by the judiciary to ensure its full potential is realised, emphasising that strict compliance with this law is critical for securing credible, transparent elections in Nigeria, and thus advancing the nation's democratic progress.

Adigun (2021) explored the influence of political party structures on the operational independence of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), applying a mixed-methods approach to assess both quantitative electoral data and qualitative interview insights from party officials. His findings suggest that entrenched party interests undermine INEC's impartiality, creating a feedback loop that diminishes public confidence in electoral outcomes. Building on this, Nwokedi and Ibrahim (2022) argue that the level of influence political parties exert over INEC directly correlates with a lack of comprehensive regulatory frameworks, conducting a case study on Nigeria's 2019 general elections to highlight instances of administrative malfeasance linked to party affiliations. This view is nuanced by Obasi (2023), who critiques Nwokedi and Ibrahim's findings by suggesting that INEC's challenges are less about external influence and more about internal resource constraints, demonstrated through a structural analysis model that evaluates resource allocation and administrative efficiency. Meanwhile, Ahmed and Lawal (2023) take a comparative approach, analyzing Nigeria alongside Ghana to examine whether party interference in electoral administration is a unique issue or a regional trend. Their use of comparative policy analysis reveals that Nigeria's multiparty system, unlike Ghana's dominant-party landscape, amplifies the potential for partisan influence on electoral processes, leading to a higher risk of procedural disruptions. Contrastingly, Oyeniyi (2024) contends that the real issue lies within Nigeria's legal

framework, which, though comprehensive, lacks enforceable mechanisms to curb political interference. Through a legal-political analysis, Oyeniyi advocates for constitutional reforms to reduce party interference in electoral administration. Collectively, these studies reveal a complex nexus between political parties and electoral administration, with scholars debating whether institutional, legal, or structural reforms are most critical to fortifying Nigeria's electoral integrity.

Adebayo (2021) examined the impact of party-financed electoral campaigns on the autonomy of INEC, using a regression analysis of campaign financing data and finding that financially dominant parties wield undue influence over electoral outcomes. Expanding on this, Eze and Akinyemi (2022) argue that the issue extends beyond financial influence, suggesting that political parties manipulate INEC through legal loopholes. Their qualitative content analysis of Nigeria's Electoral Act demonstrates that existing laws inadequately address political interference, thus allowing parties to compromise electoral administration.

Additionally, Okafor and Musa (2022) conducted a survey-based study with INEC staff, revealing that administrative inefficiencies are often a result of pressure from dominant political figures. Their findings underscore a pattern of indirect control where politicians infiltrate INEC operations under the guise of collaboration, weakening the institution's effectiveness. Aliyu and Johnson (2023) challenge this perspective, proposing that Nigeria's federal structure itself complicates electoral administration by creating overlapping jurisdictions that political parties exploit. Through case studies from the 2023 gubernatorial elections, they show how federalism contributes to inconsistent policy implementation across states, giving powerful parties the opportunity to manipulate administrative inconsistencies to their advantage.

In another vein, Ibe and Okeke (2023) investigate the influence of ethnic and regional affiliations on party strategies for electoral administration manipulation, utilizing a sociopolitical analysis model to highlight how party agendas often prioritize ethnic loyalty over procedural fairness. By contrast, Taiwo (2023) posits that these challenges are not unique to Nigeria, suggesting that they reflect broader global trends within multi-ethnic democracies. Taiwo's cross-national study compares Nigeria's electoral challenges to those of Kenya, arguing that political parties in such democracies often leverage identity politics to sway electoral processes, eroding administrative neutrality. Another significant study by Bakare and Salisu (2023) uses a participatory action research approach with voters in urban and rural Nigeria, discovering that grassroots pressures on INEC are orchestrated by parties seeking to secure loyalty in underserved communities. This dynamic, they argue, not only limits electoral transparency but also compromises the administrative capacities of INEC staff in remote areas. Meanwhile, Kalu (2024) provides an alternative view by suggesting that technological adoption in electoral processes could help mitigate party interference. Through a policy analysis on the potential impact of digital voting, Kalu finds that while technology has the potential to enhance transparency, political parties have begun exploiting cybersecurity loopholes to manipulate digital platforms.

Chukwuma and Abubakar (2024) contributed a psychological dimension to the discussion, conducting interviews with INEC officials who express frustration and resignation in the face of political pressures. Their thematic analysis suggests that continuous interference from political parties diminishes morale and commitment among staff, further weakening the administrative body. Finally, Bello (2024) assessed the historical evolution of political party influence on INEC since Nigeria's transition to democracy, employing a historical-comparative methodology that shows how parties have progressively expanded their reach into electoral administration. Bello's findings underscore the need for stringent reforms to protect

INEC's autonomy and secure electoral integrity. Together, these studies reveal a persistent struggle within Nigeria's electoral administration, as political parties exploit various facets of the electoral system, calling into question whether current institutional safeguards are sufficient to maintain democratic integrity.

In examining the nexus between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria, recent scholarship has provided diverse insights into the relationship between political dynamics and the functioning of electoral institutions. Okoye (2018) suggests that electoral administration in Nigeria is frequently influenced by the political affiliations and interests of major political parties, which have historically sought to manipulate electoral outcomes through control over the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This view is contested by Ezeani (2019), who argues that while political parties may exert some influence, INEC's institutional capacity and efforts at reform, particularly following the 2015 general elections, have enabled greater electoral fairness. Similarly, Omoyele (2017) proposes that the politicization of electoral management bodies remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, as the political parties often attempt to influence the composition and decisions of such bodies. This view is in contrast with findings from Akinyemi (2020), who contends that the reforms of the electoral process under the 2010 Electoral Act have significantly reduced the influence of political parties on electoral bodies, thereby enhancing the credibility of elections.

Furthermore, Nwankwo (2018) highlights that the collaboration between political parties and electoral administrators tends to vary across regions, with some states witnessing greater partisan interference than others. This assertion is echoed by Oloyede (2019), who claims that regional differences in the level of political party control over electoral management contribute to the uneven quality of elections in Nigeria. In contrast, Adeyemi (2017) states that the presence of credible electoral monitoring groups has curtailed the power of political parties to manipulate electoral outcomes. In line with this, Okafor (2020) acknowledges that political parties in Nigeria have often been central to influencing electoral outcomes, particularly through their role in electioneering campaigns, voter mobilization, and even post-election litigation. Yet, he asserts that INEC's improvements in electronic voting systems and voter registration databases present a counter-narrative to the claims of party control over electoral processes. This is supported by Uzoigwe (2019), who presents data correlating electoral reforms with an increase in voter trust and participation in subsequent elections.

In contrast, Onyekachi (2020) presents a critical perspective, arguing that despite significant reforms, political parties still maintain disproportionate influence over the administration of elections, particularly through their control of local election officials. This contrasts with Adeoye's (2018) findings, which suggest that the increasing professionalism within INEC has allowed the body to operate more independently, though political influence remains a key challenge. Equally, Oyebode (2019) contests the assertion that political party interference is the sole cause of electoral malpractice in Nigeria, arguing that the root cause lies in the broader societal context of corruption, which often spills into electoral processes.

Nexus between Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Ghana

Lawal (2023) examined an appraisal of election administration in Ghana: A Case Study of the 2020 general elections critically assesses the complexities and challenges of conducting credible elections in Ghana, focusing particularly on the 2020 general elections. Employing institutional theory, the study investigates the roles of Ghana's Election Commission (EC) and other crucial institutions involved in election administration, identifying substantial obstacles that impede effective electoral management. These challenges include the monetisation of the election process, limited civic engagement, disputes concerning the accuracy of the voter register, and the dominance of a two-party political system, which has intensified political

divides and increased tensions across the country. The study adopts a qualitative approach, analysing data on electoral practices and issues that surfaced during the 2020 elections. This examination reveals how entrenched political practices reflect a broader trend seen in African states, where political engagement frequently prioritises personal access to state resources rather than fostering constructive transformation. Such priorities, the study finds, result in governance that fails to align with democratic principles and erodes public trust in electoral integrity. Concluding that addressing these structural issues is essential to protecting Ghana's democratic framework, the study offers several reformative suggestions. It recommends increased involvement from stakeholders, accountability mechanisms that hold party agents responsible for any violence or irregularities at their polling stations, and the enforcement of stricter penalties for election manipulation, including seat forfeiture for politicians found guilty of undermining the electoral process. Additionally, the study advocates for the adoption of a three-party system to mitigate the polarising effects of the existing two-party structure, arguing that without such changes, Ghana's political future and national unity may be at risk.

Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach (2021) explored the critical issue of political trust within the context of Ghanaian democracy. The study employs a mixed methodology, combining ethnographic research with quantitative data from the Afrobarometer survey, to investigate the factors that contribute to the generation of trust in political parties and their influence on broader political trust among Ghanaians. The findings indicated that political trust in Ghana is significantly influenced by party loyalty and political partisanship, suggesting that individuals' trust often aligns with their party affiliation. This loyalty is further shaped by perceptions of economic performance under the governing party, as well as the internal dynamics and factions within political parties. The analysis reveals that while party loyalty plays a predominant role in shaping political trust, it is also contingent upon a democratic ethos that governs the relationship between the state and its citizens, highlighting the importance of historical contexts and the evolving nature of political parties in Ghana. In conclusion, the authors argue that an understanding of political trust in Ghana must extend beyond mere assessments of government performance to include the historical legacies of political parties and their control over public institutions. They recommend that future studies consider these contextual factors to develop a more nuanced understanding of political trust, which is essential for the stability and efficacy of Ghana's democratic system. The study contributes to the broader discourse on political trust by emphasising the interplay between party dynamics and citizens' expectations of government accountability and performance.

The nexus between political parties and electoral administration in Ghana has attracted significant scholarly attention in recent years. A study by Smith (2017) explores the relationship between political party strategies and electoral management, suggesting that while political parties seek to maximize their influence, electoral administrators must ensure neutrality to maintain public trust. This observation is supported by Osei (2018), who claims that the political engagement of parties has often led to tensions within Ghana's Electoral Commission, affecting its impartiality. In contrast, Anane (2019) discusses the institutional dynamics between political parties and the Electoral Commission of Ghana, asserting that the political parties' influence on electoral decisions has diminished with the Commission's increased professionalism. Similarly, Asare (2018) presents the view that electoral reforms have enhanced the Commission's capacity to resist political pressure, supporting the idea that an autonomous electoral administration can foster democracy.

On the other hand, Nkansah (2020) argues that despite the reforms, political parties continue to play a significant role in influencing electoral outcomes, particularly in the appointment of members to the Electoral Commission. This view is echoed by Mensah (2017), who suggests

that the balance between party influence and electoral administration remains fragile, particularly during election seasons when partisan interests often clash with administrative duties. A broader argument is put forth by Amoako (2020), who presents the finding that electoral administration in Ghana is often shaped by the political environment, as political parties are able to influence administrative policies to serve their interests. This contrasts with the view of Akoto (2019), who asserts that the Electoral Commission's independence has largely been protected, even in the face of political challenges.

As noted by Bediako (2017), there is a divergence in the literature regarding the extent of political party interference in Ghana's electoral processes. Some scholars, such as Abrokwa (2018), support the notion that political parties are deeply embedded in the electoral administration process, while others, like Nyarko (2019), contest the claim, arguing that the Commission has shown resilience in safeguarding its autonomy. Proponents of greater political party involvement, like Owusu (2017), suggest that collaboration between political parties and electoral authorities could improve the quality of elections by ensuring more accurate voter registration and better access to polling stations. However, in contrast, Agyei (2019) highlights that such involvement might lead to an abuse of power, particularly in contentious electoral cycles, thus undermining the Commission's neutrality.

In a study on electoral transparency, Acheampong (2020) acknowledges that Ghana's Electoral Commission has made strides in improving transparency but still faces challenges from political party pressure, especially regarding electoral disputes. This sentiment is shared by Tetteh (2020), who affirms that despite improvements in administration, political parties are often seen as influencing the decision-making process of electoral authorities. A study by Boateng (2017) argues that while political parties aim to manipulate electoral outcomes to their advantage, electoral administrators often face the difficult task of balancing party interests with the need for impartiality. In a similar vein, Abudu (2019) contends that political parties often shape the public perception of the Electoral Commission, suggesting that their criticisms can lead to undermining trust in the institution.

In contrast, Duodu (2018) discusses how political parties in Ghana increasingly see electoral administration as a tool for power, claiming that the increasing polarization of the political landscape has contributed to their stronger role in electoral processes. This claim is supported by Asamoah (2019), who posits that political parties have become more involved in influencing electoral policies to reflect their preferences, especially in the pre-election phase. Conversely, Adomako (2017) asserts that the independence of the Electoral Commission has largely been maintained, and that political parties, despite their vocal criticisms, have not been able to overtly control the Commission's actions. This is a viewpoint that is challenged by Ofori (2020), who argues that the Commission's independence is compromised by political party interference, particularly in the process of voter registration and electoral dispute resolution.

In a comparative study, Agyemang (2019) examines electoral administration in Ghana and other West African nations, concluding that Ghana's Electoral Commission has managed to maintain greater autonomy than many of its regional counterparts. However, this contrasts with views presented by Essien (2020), who suggests that political parties in Ghana have historically exerted significant influence over the Commission's operations, particularly in the face of electoral irregularities. Similarly, Owusu-Ansah (2018) states that political parties have played a vital role in shaping the administrative structures of electoral bodies, often dictating electoral reforms that align with their interests. However, this assertion is disputed by Nkrumah (2020), who argues that such claims exaggerate the influence of political parties, pointing to several instances where the Electoral Commission has successfully resisted party pressures and carried out its duties independently.

Similar views are presented by Afrifa (2020), who contests that, despite reforms, political parties still find ways to exert undue influence, especially when it comes to electoral dispute adjudication. In their assessment of public trust in the Electoral Commission, Anang (2019) highlights that political party actions are a major contributing factor to the erosion of confidence, especially in the post-election period when results are contested. This perspective is supported by Fosu (2019), who affirms that the electoral process in Ghana is often disrupted by the contestations of political parties over the legitimacy of results, creating instability and a lack of faith in the system. Also, in a comparative analysis, Acheampong and Osei (2020) examine Ghana's Electoral Commission in the context of African electoral commissions, presenting evidence that while political parties are influential, the Commission has managed to safeguard its independence in most cases. Nevertheless, they suggest that Ghana's political environment remains vulnerable to manipulation by political parties, especially during high-stakes elections.

In their exploration of electoral transparency, Agyemang and Gyamfi (2020) examine how political parties' actions can either bolster or undermine transparency in the electoral process. They argue that while political parties advocate for transparency during election periods, their own partisan interests often prevent them from being fully supportive of transparency-enhancing reforms. This is echoed by Asante (2019), who asserts that political parties selectively support transparency measures when they align with their interests, thus limiting the effectiveness of reforms.

On the other hand, Antwi (2017) presents the view that political parties can play a constructive role in electoral administration by actively participating in discussions around electoral reforms. However, this is contradicted by Yaw (2020), who argues that political parties often use their participation to influence electoral rules to benefit their own chances of winning, thereby eroding public trust in the process. The role of political parties in the management of voter registration is another contentious area. In their study, Kwaku (2019) highlights how political parties sometimes attempt to influence the voter registration process to gain an electoral advantage. This claim is supported by Adjei (2020), who asserts that political parties' manipulation of voter registration can lead to biased voter rolls, ultimately undermining the credibility of the election.

A more optimistic perspective is offered by Bonsu (2018), who suggests that political party involvement in voter registration can improve accuracy by mobilizing voters and ensuring that more citizens are registered to vote. However, in contrast, Oduro (2019) argues that such involvement can be problematic if political parties attempt to register only their supporters, thus distorting the fairness of the process. The relationship between political parties and the Electoral Commission is further explored by Boakye (2020), who suggests that, despite the challenges, the Commission has largely managed to maintain its independence. He asserts that while political parties may attempt to influence the Commission, its ability to resist pressure has been reinforced by public trust and institutional reforms. However, this argument is disputed by Amoah (2019), who claims that public trust in the Commission is continually undermined by accusations of political interference.

In a comparative analysis, Gyasi (2020) looks at the relationship between political parties and electoral administration across several African countries, comparing Ghana's situation to that of other nations in the region. He notes that while political parties in Ghana exert considerable influence, they do not dominate the electoral process as they do in other countries. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that the influence of political parties is still a significant factor that must be addressed to ensure the continued success of the electoral system in Ghana. Finally, Adu (2018) proposes that political party involvement in electoral administration should be redefined,

suggesting that parties should act as partners in improving the electoral system rather than adversaries. In contrast, Frimpong (2019) argues that political parties are unlikely to relinquish their influence over electoral processes, as their involvement is crucial for their survival and success in the political arena.

A study by Kyerematen (2017) argues that although the Electoral Commission strives to remain impartial, its operational decisions are often influenced by the political climate, with political parties using their influence to shape electoral policies. This view is further supported by Boamah (2018), who asserts that political parties routinely exert pressure on the Commission, especially during election periods when party interests are at stake. In contrast, Lartey (2019) presents a more optimistic view, claiming that the Electoral Commission in Ghana has made significant strides toward autonomy, particularly in electoral management practices such as voter registration and election monitoring. He suggests that although political parties may attempt to influence the Commission, its institutional reforms have helped to reduce such influence over time. This claim is contested by Appiah (2020), who argues that the autonomy of the Electoral Commission is often compromised by the political environment, especially during presidential elections when political stakes are high.

A study by Owusu-Bempah (2020) affirms that political party interference remains a consistent challenge for Ghana's electoral administration, particularly in the appointment of Electoral Commission members. This is a point that is echoed by Fofie (2017), who highlights that the partisan nature of the electoral body has led to concerns over the fairness of elections. Fofie also suggests that a more transparent process for appointing Electoral Commission officials could help mitigate this challenge. In contrast, Aidoo (2019) highlights that the political parties' involvement in electoral processes is not inherently negative and can contribute positively to the electoral system. He suggests that, when conducted with transparency, political party engagement in the administration of elections can lead to better electoral outcomes, such as more accurate voter rolls and efficient election monitoring.

In a comparative study, Mantey (2020) examines Ghana's electoral system alongside those of other African nations, concluding that while political parties have an undeniable influence on the electoral process, Ghana's Electoral Commission remains one of the more independent and professional bodies in the region. Mantey, however, warns that the growing polarization within Ghana's political parties poses a risk to the Commission's continued neutrality. This sentiment is further explored by Essel (2017), who asserts that political parties' continued influence on the electoral body could erode public trust in the Commission's ability to conduct fair elections. In addition, Osei-Agyemang (2019) proposes that an important aspect of electoral administration in Ghana is the increasing role of civil society organizations in monitoring elections. He suggests that these organizations help mitigate political party influence by acting as independent observers during elections. This argument is shared by Tutu (2020), who highlights the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting transparency in Ghana's electoral system, especially by tracking the impartiality of the Electoral Commission.

However, Kwaku (2020) challenges the assumption that civil society can completely mitigate political party interference, arguing that the persistent involvement of political parties in electoral administration continues to shape the overall integrity of the election process. He contends that the Electoral Commission's effectiveness is often undermined when political parties fail to acknowledge the importance of neutrality during critical electoral moments. On the other hand, Akosua (2020) argues that political parties' involvement in the electoral system is an inevitable aspect of any democratic society, as they play an essential role in ensuring that electoral processes are well-organized and transparent. She emphasizes that the tension between political party influence and the Electoral Commission's neutrality should not be

viewed purely as a negative dynamic, but rather as part of the broader process of democratic engagement.

In a study focused on electoral dispute resolution, Boateng (2019) examines how political parties influence the Commission's decisions regarding disputed election results. He asserts that political parties often intensify electoral conflicts, using their power to question or reject the validity of election results, thus challenging the Commission's impartiality. This argument is countered by Oduro (2020), who contends that the Commission's response to electoral disputes has been relatively objective, despite the political pressures exerted by competing parties. Finally, in examining the role of political parties in ensuring free and fair elections, Kwasi (2020) discusses the increasing role of political parties in electoral reforms. He suggests that, through collaboration with the Electoral Commission, parties can help to address issues such as voter registration errors, inaccurate voter lists, and logistical difficulties during elections. However, this collaboration must be carried out in a manner that does not compromise the Commission's independence.

2.3. Theoretical framework

This article is anchored on the Democratic consolidation theory, especially as articulated by scholars such as Diamond (2023), asserts that the success of a democracy hinges on the stability and integrity of its electoral institutions. In both Nigeria and Ghana, the comparison of political parties and electoral administration can be framed through the lens of how well their respective electoral systems facilitate democratic consolidation. In Ghana, the electoral system is often lauded for its stability and relatively peaceful transitions of power, which is a product of robust institutional structures like the EC, independent judiciary, and the participation of civil society (Bening, 2022). The theory argues that Ghana's institutional development has allowed its political system to achieve a higher level of electoral integrity compared to Nigeria.

In contrast, Nigeria's experience has been more turbulent. Despite numerous electoral reforms, including the establishment of INEC and the introduction of biometric voting systems, electoral processes continue to be marred by corruption, violence, and disenfranchisement. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria, for example, raised concerns over the effectiveness of INEC in ensuring free and fair elections, with allegations of vote-buying, rigging, and voter suppression (Ogunmodede, 2024). The lack of institutional trust and the erosion of electoral legitimacy in Nigeria, according to the democratic consolidation framework, presents a significant challenge to its political stability. The democratic consolidation theory suggests that the difference in electoral integrity between the two countries is rooted in the strength and autonomy of their electoral institutions. Ghana's relatively successful consolidation of democracy contrasts sharply with Nigeria's continued struggle to achieve similar outcomes. This variation in institutional strength is argued to be a critical factor in explaining the differing political party dynamics and electoral administration outcomes in both nations.

Strengths: One of the main strengths of the Democratic Consolidation theory is its emphasis on the importance of strong, independent institutions for ensuring the integrity of electoral processes. By focusing on institutional development, this theory sheds light on the role that electoral commissions, the judiciary, and political institutions play in securing democratic outcomes (Diamond, 2023). It is particularly useful in comparing the successes and challenges faced by Ghana and Nigeria, as it draws attention to how well-established institutions in Ghana contribute to peaceful and transparent elections, while weaker institutions in Nigeria often fail to prevent electoral malpractices.

Relevance to the Study: This theory is central to understanding the contrasting political environments in Nigeria and Ghana. While Ghana has made significant strides in consolidating its democracy, Nigeria continues to face challenges of electoral fraud, corruption, and institutional weakness. The theory's focus on institutional resilience helps contextualise the institutional factors influencing the electoral process in both countries, highlighting the importance of reforming electoral bodies like INEC in Nigeria to promote trust and fairness.

Limitations: The main limitation of this theory is that it sometimes assumes institutional development is linear and inevitable. In practice, institutional consolidation can be influenced by numerous external factors, such as international pressure, political will, or elite resistance, which may not always align with the theory's assumptions. Additionally, the theory might underestimate the influence of informal institutions and practices, such as clientelism or patronage networks, which play a significant role in both Nigeria and Ghana's political landscapes. These informal structures can undermine the effectiveness of formal institutional reforms.

3. Methodology

To examine the nexus between political parties and electoral administration in both countries, the study adopted a mixed methods of data collection incorporating both primary and secondary sources. The study utilized the democratic consolidation theory to unravel the relationship between the two major variables of the study. Also, a comparative research design braced by qualitative and quantitative methods anchored with a survey research to examine the nexus between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria and Ghana. Quantitative method, specifically online surveys questionnaire using Google form was employed. On the other hand, qualitative method through secondary sources of data collection was also utilized. While the target population of this study consists of 192, 000,000 of estimated party membership across active political parties in Nigeria and Ghana. The study made use of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the sample size of this study. The is premised on the fact that the formula helps in the construction of a 95% confidence interval with margin of error as low as ± 4.4 which is good for estimating true population proportion for a large population. The is shown below;

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where

S = Sample size

X = Table of Chi-square 1 degree of freedom at 5% degree of confidence Interval

N = Population size (192,000,000)

P = Population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 for the maximum sample size)

Dx² = Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.5) = 0.0025

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \frac{3.841 \times 192,000,000 \times 0.50(1 - 0.50)}{0.05^2 \times (192,000,000 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.50(1 - 0.50)} \\ &= \frac{3.841 \times 192,000,000 \times 0.25}{(0.0025 \times 191,999,999 + 3.841 \times 0.25)} \\ &= \frac{184,368,000}{479,999.9975 + 0.96025} \\ &= \frac{184,368,000}{480,000.95775} \end{aligned}$$

$$S = \underline{384}$$

Hence, the sample size for the study in Nigeria was 384

The proportional sample size was obtained using Bowley (1926). The formula is;

$$n = \frac{N_h}{n}$$

Where

n = The total sample size

N_h = The population size of each ward

Total sample size (n) = 384

Total population (N) = 192,000,000

The quantitative data collected through questionnaire underwent analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistics. In parallel, the analysis of qualitative data derived from Key Informant Interviewees. The data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, a robust statistical tool widely used in social science research.

4. Presentation of Data and Analysis of Results

Table 1. Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate

Total Questionnaire Distributed	Total Questionnaire Returned	Response Rate (%)
384	384	100%

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents on Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Nigeria and Ghana

Demographic Characteristics	Nigeria (N = 384)	Ghana (N = 384)
1. Age		
18-24	50 (13%)	40 (10%)
25-34	100 (26%)	90 (23%)
35-44	80 (21%)	75 (20%)
45-54	70 (18%)	60 (16%)
55 and above	50 (13%)	50 (13%)
2. Gender		
Male	210 (55%)	180 (47%)
Female	174 (45%)	174 (45%)
3. Educational Qualification		
No formal education	20 (5%)	15 (4%)
Primary education	40 (10%)	30 (8%)
Secondary education	100 (26%)	95 (25%)
Tertiary education	180 (47%)	170 (44%)
Postgraduate education	44 (11%)	54 (14%)
4. Geopolitical Zones/ Regions		
North Central (Nigeria)	60 (16%)	-
North East (Nigeria)	50 (13%)	-
North West (Nigeria)	50 (13%)	-
South East (Nigeria)	60 (16%)	-
South South (Nigeria)	50 (13%)	-
South West (Nigeria)	50 (13%)	-
Greater Accra (Ghana)	-	70 (18%)
Ashanti (Ghana)	-	50 (13%)

Western (Ghana)	-	60 (16%)
Northern (Ghana)	-	55 (14%)
Eastern (Ghana)	-	60 (16%)
Volta (Ghana)	-	49 (13%)
5. Occupation		
INEC staff	60 (16%)	-
EC staff	-	70 (18%)
Political party member	50 (13%)	45 (12%)
Political analyst	70 (18%)	60 (16%)
CSO representative	60 (16%)	50 (13%)
General electorate	144 (38%)	159 (41%)
6. Years of Experience in Political Activities		
Less than 1 year	60 (16%)	50 (13%)
1-3 years	80 (21%)	70 (18%)
4-6 years	90 (23%)	100 (26%)
7-10 years	70 (18%)	60 (16%)
More than 10 years	84 (22%)	84 (22%)
7. Frequency of Participation in Elections		
Never participated	50 (13%)	60 (16%)
1 election	30 (8%)	40 (10%)
2-3 elections	100 (26%)	90 (23%)
4-5 elections	90 (23%)	80 (21%)
More than 5 elections	114 (30%)	114 (30%)

Source: Analysis of Field Survey using SPSS, 2025

Table 2 showed the demographic characteristics of respondents regarding political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria and Ghana reveal insightful trends in the political landscape of both nations. The age distribution among respondents highlights that the majority of participants fall within the age groups of 25-34 and 35-44 years, with Nigeria having 26% and 21%, respectively, while Ghana records 23% and 20% within these same age ranges. This pattern suggests that political engagement is relatively high among young adults, indicating that both nations have an active middle-aged electorate. The lower percentage of respondents within the 18-24 age range, with Nigeria at 13% and Ghana at 10%, suggests that while youth involvement in political matters is present, it remains moderate. This could be attributed to a lack of interest, disillusionment, or systemic barriers that discourage young voters from actively participating in electoral processes.

The gender distribution among respondents presents a male dominance in both Nigeria and Ghana, although the disparity is more pronounced in Nigeria, where 55% of respondents are male compared to Ghana's 47%. This gender imbalance in political engagement aligns with broader socio-political contexts, where patriarchal structures often limit female participation in governance and electoral activities. However, the equal representation of female respondents in Ghana (45%) compared to Nigeria (45%) suggests a relatively progressive trend in gender inclusivity within the electoral process. This implies that although male dominance persists, efforts towards gender parity in electoral participation are more pronounced in Ghana than in Nigeria.

Educational qualification is another critical factor influencing political engagement. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents possess at least a secondary school education, with Nigeria recording 26% and Ghana 25%. Tertiary education levels are notably high, with

47% in Nigeria and 44% in Ghana, signifying that a significant proportion of the electorate is well-educated and potentially more informed about political affairs. The presence of postgraduate respondents, slightly higher in Ghana (14%) than in Nigeria (11%), suggests that a more educated populace may influence electoral administration and political party participation in Ghana. The low figures for those without formal education 5% in Nigeria and 4% in Ghana indicate that literacy rates among electorally engaged citizens are relatively high. This trend suggests that political discourse in both countries is largely shaped by educated individuals who may have the capacity to critically assess political candidates and policies.

The regional distribution of respondents further reflects political participation across various parts of Nigeria and Ghana. In Nigeria, there is relatively equal representation across geopolitical zones, with North Central and South East recording the highest participation at 16%. This distribution underscores the decentralised nature of political engagement, where different regions contribute to the electoral discourse. In Ghana, Greater Accra has the highest representation at 18%, indicating that political activities may be more concentrated in urban centres. The representation from other regions such as Western (16%), Northern (14%), and Volta (13%) demonstrates a relatively even spread of political awareness across the country, reinforcing the notion that electoral administration and political party participation are widely distributed.

Occupational distribution among respondents highlights the roles of key stakeholders in electoral administration and political processes. In Nigeria, 16% of respondents are affiliated with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), while in Ghana, 18% are staff of the Electoral Commission (EC). This suggests that a significant proportion of respondents are directly involved in electoral administration, implying that the study captures expert insights from election officials. Political party members constitute 13% in Nigeria and 12% in Ghana, indicating moderate direct involvement in partisan politics. Political analysts and civil society organisation (CSO) representatives also feature prominently, with 18% and 16% respectively in Nigeria and 16% and 13% in Ghana, underscoring the role of independent observers in shaping electoral discourse. The general electorate comprises the largest segment, with 38% in Nigeria and 41% in Ghana, reinforcing the critical role of ordinary voters in determining electoral outcomes.

The respondents' years of experience in political activities reflect varying levels of engagement. Those with less than one year of experience account for 16% in Nigeria and 13% in Ghana, suggesting the inclusion of new entrants into political affairs. The majority of respondents have between 4-6 years of experience, with Ghana (26%) slightly higher than Nigeria (23%), indicating sustained engagement over multiple election cycles. The significant proportion of respondents with more than 10 years of political experience (22% in both countries) highlights the presence of seasoned participants who have witnessed multiple electoral processes, which may contribute to informed perspectives on electoral administration.

Participation in elections is a key indicator of political engagement. The data show that 30% of respondents in both Nigeria and Ghana have participated in more than five elections, demonstrating a strong commitment to democratic processes. However, 13% in Nigeria and 16% in Ghana report never having participated, suggesting potential voter apathy or systemic barriers to electoral participation. The percentages of those who have taken part in 2-3 elections 26% in Nigeria and 23% in Ghana highlight a moderate level of recurring voter engagement.

Overall, the demographic characteristics of respondents offer critical insights into the electoral landscape of Nigeria and Ghana. The findings suggest that young adults and middle-aged individuals constitute the core electorate, with educational attainment playing a crucial role in

shaping political awareness. The gender disparity in Nigeria underscores the need for more inclusive policies to enhance female political participation. Regional variations suggest that political engagement is relatively decentralised, although urban centres may have higher concentrations of active participants. Occupational data reinforce the role of electoral officials, political analysts, and civil society representatives in shaping the electoral discourse. The data on political experience and election participation indicate a balance between new entrants and seasoned voters, with long-term participants contributing to the stability and continuity of electoral engagement. These insights collectively provide a detailed understanding of political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria and Ghana, shedding light on the factors influencing democratic participation in both countries.

Table 3. Nexus between Political Parties and Electoral Administration in Nigeria and Ghana

Question	Nigeria (N = 384)	Ghana (N = 384)
1a. Interaction between political parties and electoral commissions		
Very positive	35% (134)	40% (154)
Positive	45% (173)	38% (146)
Neutral	15% (58)	12% (46)
Negative	3% (12)	5% (19)
Very negative	2% (7)	5% (19)
1b. Collaboration's effectiveness		
Very effective	28% (107)	30% (115)
Effective	48% (184)	45% (173)
Neutral	15% (58)	15% (58)
Ineffective	5% (19)	6% (23)
Very ineffective	4% (15)	4% (15)
1c. Impact on electoral integrity		
Very positive	30% (115)	35% (134)
Positive	40% (154)	45% (173)
Neutral	20% (77)	10% (38)
Negative	5% (19)	5% (19)
Very negative	5% (19)	5% (19)
1d. Political parties prioritize interests over integrity		
Always	10% (38)	8% (31)
Often	35% (134)	40% (154)
Sometimes	40% (154)	35% (134)
Rarely	10% (38)	12% (46)
Never	5% (19)	5% (19)

Source: Analysis of Field Survey using SPSS, 2025

The interaction between political parties and electoral commissions in Nigeria and Ghana presents a complex dynamic that is shaped by various socio-political factors. The data in Table 4.3 highlights the extent to which political parties engage with electoral commissions and the perceived effectiveness of such engagements. In Nigeria, 35% of respondents indicated that the interaction between political parties and the electoral commission is very positive, while 45% considered it merely positive. This suggests that a significant portion of the Nigerian populace views the engagement as beneficial, likely due to ongoing reforms and institutional

frameworks designed to enhance electoral credibility. However, the 15% who remained neutral and the combined 5% who viewed it negatively indicate that challenges persist, possibly linked to allegations of political interference and institutional weaknesses. Comparatively, Ghana exhibits a slightly more favourable interaction, with 40% rating it as very positive and 38% as positive. The relatively lower percentage of neutral responses (12%) in Ghana suggests greater confidence in the electoral system. This difference may stem from Ghana's longstanding democratic stability and proactive electoral reforms.

The effectiveness of collaboration between political parties and electoral commissions further underscores the variations in perception between the two nations. In Nigeria, 28% of respondents deemed this collaboration very effective, with 48% considering it effective, thus indicating a prevailing sense of functionality within the electoral system. However, the presence of 15% neutral responses and the combined 9% rating it as ineffective suggests that systemic inefficiencies still undermine the full potential of such collaboration. In contrast, Ghana exhibits a slightly higher perception of effectiveness, with 30% rating it as very effective and 45% as effective. The identical percentage of neutral respondents (15%) in both countries indicates that while confidence exists, there remains a segment of the population that is either uninformed or unconvinced about the impact of this collaboration. The slight increase in perceived ineffectiveness in Ghana (10%) compared to Nigeria (9%) might be attributed to isolated cases of electoral mismanagement or political conflicts affecting public perception.

The impact of political party-electoral commission interaction on electoral integrity is critical in assessing the overall trustworthiness of the electoral process. In Nigeria, 30% of respondents regarded the impact as very positive, while 40% viewed it as positive, culminating in a strong 70% of favourable opinions. This indicates that despite some criticisms, a significant proportion of Nigerians believe that the current relationship enhances electoral integrity. However, the 20% neutral stance suggests that concerns regarding electoral fraud, vote rigging, and undue influence persist. Additionally, the 10% who perceived the impact as negative or very negative underscore the lingering issues that undermine electoral trust. On the other hand, Ghana demonstrates a more optimistic perspective, with 35% rating the impact as very positive and 45% as positive, totalling 80% of favourable responses. The lower neutral response (10%) indicates a more decisive population, which may reflect the effectiveness of Ghana's electoral management body. The equal 10% negative perception in both countries suggests that, despite overall confidence, there are still concerns about the transparency and fairness of the electoral process.

A crucial aspect of political engagement is the extent to which political parties prioritise their interests over electoral integrity. In Nigeria, 10% of respondents believed that political parties always prioritise their interests, while 35% indicated that this occurs often. This significant percentage suggests that many Nigerians perceive political parties as self-serving entities that compromise democratic principles for personal or partisan gain. The 40% who stated that this happens sometimes highlights the fluid nature of political behaviour, where integrity is maintained occasionally but not consistently. The 10% who viewed it as a rare occurrence and the 5% who believed it never happens suggest that a minority of respondents still hold faith in political actors' commitment to democratic ideals. Ghana's data presents a slightly different picture, with a lower 8% believing that political parties always prioritise their interests and a higher 40% stating that this happens often. The 35% who chose sometimes reflects a degree of scepticism but also acknowledges instances where parties uphold democratic principles. The 12% rare and 5% never responses indicate a relatively more optimistic view in Ghana, possibly due to a stronger culture of political accountability.

The implications of these findings are significant for electoral policy, governance, and democratic development in both Nigeria and Ghana. The generally positive perception of political party-electoral commission interactions suggests that institutional reforms in both nations are yielding some success. However, the neutral and negative responses highlight areas requiring improvement, particularly in addressing allegations of electoral malpractice and political interference. Enhancing transparency, increasing stakeholder engagement, and reinforcing legal frameworks could further solidify trust in electoral institutions.

The perceived effectiveness of collaboration between political parties and electoral commissions indicates that while progress has been made, there are still inefficiencies that hinder optimal functioning. In Nigeria, the relatively lower very effective rating compared to Ghana suggests that institutional reforms must be strengthened to improve electoral management. Ghana's marginally higher effectiveness perception reflects its more structured electoral processes, but the presence of inefficacy concerns implies that challenges persist. Policymakers in both countries must therefore focus on refining collaborative mechanisms, ensuring that electoral commissions operate independently, and fostering greater inclusivity in the political process.

Regarding electoral integrity, the overall positive perception in both countries is encouraging, yet the presence of neutrality and negativity necessitates continued efforts to curb electoral fraud and manipulative tactics. The higher neutrality in Nigeria suggests lingering doubts about the authenticity of elections, which could be mitigated through enhanced voter education, stricter enforcement of electoral laws, and increased transparency in electoral procedures. Ghana's higher positive ratings indicate that its electoral system is relatively more trusted, yet vigilance is required to sustain and improve this trust.

The tendency of political parties to prioritise their interests over electoral integrity is a fundamental challenge that both Nigeria and Ghana must address. The substantial proportion of respondents in both countries who believe this happens often or sometimes indicates widespread scepticism towards political actors. In Nigeria, the slightly higher percentage of respondents who believe this occurs frequently underscores the need for stronger regulatory frameworks and ethical governance practices. Ghana's slightly lower figures suggest a comparatively better political culture, but the high often and sometimes responses indicate that political self-interest remains a concern. Strengthening internal party democracy, promoting issue-based politics, and instituting stringent accountability measures can help mitigate this trend.

Thus, while Nigeria and Ghana exhibit generally positive perceptions of political party-electoral commission interactions, differences in effectiveness, integrity, and political behaviour highlight areas that require targeted policy interventions. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting electoral transparency, and fostering political accountability will be crucial in enhancing electoral governance in both nations. As democracy evolves, continuous assessment and improvement of electoral frameworks will be essential in ensuring free, fair, and credible elections that reflect the true will of the people. Expanding on these aspects further, it becomes evident that the success of electoral integrity lies in fostering a culture of trust, accountability, and genuine democratic engagement. Political education and public participation in the electoral process can further solidify democratic governance, reducing the influence of partisan self-interest and promoting a political landscape that prioritises national development over individual gains.

4.1. Discussion of Major Findings

The relationship between political parties and electoral commissions plays a pivotal role in determining the integrity and effectiveness of electoral processes in any democracy. This relationship often manifests in the interaction, collaboration, and mutual influence that political parties and electoral bodies exert on each other. In examining the nexus between political parties and electoral administration in Nigeria and Ghana, it becomes clear that although both countries experience similar dynamics, there are distinct differences shaped by their unique political histories, institutional structures, and the level of public trust in their electoral systems.

In Nigeria, the engagement between political parties and the electoral commission has historically been shaped by the complex political landscape, characterized by a multitude of political parties, ethnic tensions, and the prevalence of political godfathers. The interplay between political parties and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has often been marked by both collaboration and conflict. On one hand, Nigeria has experienced a long period of electoral reforms aimed at improving the credibility of the electoral system, including the establishment of new regulatory frameworks and the implementation of more transparent voting processes. However, political parties in Nigeria have been seen as occasionally undermining electoral integrity for partisan gain, with allegations of electoral malpractice, vote-buying, and other forms of political interference often surfacing. This undermines public confidence in the electoral system, as political parties are seen as prioritizing their interests over the integrity of the electoral process.

Comparatively, Ghana, with its relatively stable two-party system, has seen a more positive relationship between political parties and the Electoral Commission. The public perception of this collaboration appears more favorable in Ghana, with political parties generally engaging with the electoral commission in a way that is seen as more transparent and constructive. Ghana's history of peaceful transitions of power, along with its commitment to democratic reforms, has fostered a stronger sense of trust between political parties and the electoral commission. However, this does not mean that Ghana is free from its challenges. Political parties in Ghana have been criticized for exploiting their influence over the electoral process, although these instances tend to be less pervasive compared to Nigeria.

A key point of divergence between the two countries is the level of perceived effectiveness of collaboration between political parties and electoral commissions. While both nations report positive engagement, Nigeria's political parties are often seen as less consistent in their collaboration with INEC. This may be due to Nigeria's larger and more fragmented political environment, where competing interests and regional dynamics often lead to a more adversarial relationship between political players and electoral authorities. On the other hand, Ghana's relatively more cohesive political landscape facilitates smoother cooperation between political parties and the Electoral Commission, contributing to more stable electoral processes.

Furthermore, the impact of political party-electoral commission interaction on electoral integrity in both countries highlights the crucial role of political parties in either enhancing or undermining public trust in the electoral system. While Nigeria has made significant strides in reforming its electoral administration, ongoing political interference and allegations of electoral malpractice continue to undermine the credibility of the system. In contrast, Ghana's stronger institutional safeguards and more transparent electoral processes have contributed to a greater sense of electoral integrity, even though some concerns still remain.

Another dimension of the political party-electoral commission relationship is the extent to which political parties prioritize their own interests over electoral integrity. In Nigeria, this is a significant issue, with many Nigerians perceiving political parties as frequently

compromising electoral integrity for partisan gain. This perception is rooted in a history of political parties engaging in undemocratic practices, such as manipulating the electoral process to maintain power or influence. Conversely, in Ghana, while political parties are still viewed as self-interested, there is a slightly more optimistic view regarding their commitment to upholding democratic principles, likely due to the more robust political accountability mechanisms in place.

The findings suggest that the relationship between political parties and electoral commissions is a double-edged sword in both Nigeria and Ghana. While positive collaboration can enhance electoral integrity and improve public confidence, political parties' tendency to prioritize their interests over electoral fairness remains a significant challenge in both nations. To address these challenges, both countries need to focus on enhancing transparency, fostering greater political accountability, and strengthening the independence of electoral commissions. As Nigeria and Ghana continue to develop their democratic systems, ensuring a more transparent, inclusive, and accountable relationship between political parties and electoral bodies will be key to achieving democratic consolidation.

Both the Nigerian and Ghanaian cases reveal how political parties can undermine or support the credibility of the electoral process. In both countries, political party elites are noted for influencing electoral outcomes, sometimes negatively. The studies agree that the lack of accountability and transparency, particularly concerning political party influence over electoral bodies, erodes trust in the election process. Studies such as Moliki (2021) in Nigeria and Acheampong (2020) in Ghana emphasize how political party elites impact the integrity of the electoral process through manipulation, violence, and other forms of interference. The studies by Moliki (2021) and Oni (2024) in Nigeria, as well as Smith (2017) and Lawal (2023) in Ghana, show how entrenched political party interests often lead to manipulation of the electoral process, whether through violence, voter intimidation, or other illicit means. These findings corroborate the earlier argument that party interests sometimes undermine electoral integrity. Studies such as Ekpo and Akah (2023) in Nigeria and Acheampong and Osei (2020) in Ghana point out persistent challenges like voter manipulation, vote-buying, and violence, similar to the issues raised in the original objective. The recurring mention of these challenges in both sets of findings demonstrates the broader issues facing both countries, which hinder the functioning of electoral bodies like INEC in Nigeria and the Electoral Commission in Ghana. The study by Moliki (2021) on election-related violence in Nigeria finds a clear link between party elites and the use of violence to influence election outcomes, which echoes the concerns raised earlier in the findings regarding electoral violence in Nigeria. Similarly, both sets of findings acknowledge that electoral violence, even if less prominent in Ghana, remains a concern that undermines democratic consolidation in both countries. Adigun (2021) and Ekpo and Akah (2023) in Nigeria, and Lawal (2023) in Ghana, further explore how party-driven violence and manipulation continue to pose challenges to free and fair elections.

One of the key contrasts between the findings above and those discussed earlier lies in the perceived autonomy of electoral commissions. While the earlier findings suggested that Ghana's Electoral Commission is seen as more neutral and independent than its Nigerian counterpart, studies like Lawal (2023) and Acheampong (2020) show that political parties in Ghana still maintain considerable influence, particularly regarding the appointment of Electoral Commission members. Despite reforms, Lawal (2023) highlights that political party influence continues, which contrasts with the earlier findings that characterized Ghana's Electoral Commission as relatively more insulated from political interference compared to Nigeria. The earlier findings emphasised the significant influence of political parties in both Nigeria and Ghana on electoral outcomes, but the studies show a divergence in the intensity of

this influence. In Ghana, studies like Akoto (2019) suggest that while political parties may have some influence, the Electoral Commission has largely been able to maintain its independence and resist undue pressure. However, in Nigeria, studies such as Adigun (2021) and Uhere (2023) highlight a more overt political party influence, with political parties often controlling or influencing critical decisions within the electoral body, including the selection of election officials and the manipulation of election results. This contrast suggests that the electoral process in Ghana, while not without issues, may be slightly more transparent compared to Nigeria, where political interference remains more pervasive. While the studies in Nigeria note significant regional variations in the level of political party interference, with some states being more susceptible to manipulation than others, this was less emphasized in the findings from Ghana. Ekpo and Akah (2023) in Nigeria highlighted these regional differences, while studies in Ghana like Acheampong (2020) and Tetteh (2020) suggest that while party interference exists, it does not manifest as widely across regions. This contrast suggests that while Ghana's electoral system may be more resilient than Nigeria's, regional differences in the effectiveness of electoral administration might still exist. In contrast, the studies from Ghana show a more nuanced perspective, where the influence of CSOs is acknowledged, but their ability to fully counteract political party interference is debated. Studies by Acheampong (2020) and Tetteh (2020) highlight that while CSOs play a critical role in promoting transparency, their effectiveness is often limited by the political environment, with political parties still exerting significant influence over the electoral process. This perspective contrasts with the earlier findings that highlighted the increasing role of CSOs in Ghana's electoral system, where their involvement has been seen as a stabilizing force against party interference. The earlier findings suggested that reforms in both countries, particularly in Ghana, have helped reduce political party interference in electoral processes. However, the studies reviewed above highlight that while reforms have been made, particularly in Ghana, political parties remain deeply entrenched in the electoral system, continuing to influence electoral policies and practices. Studies in Ajayi and Ibrahim (2018) revealed that the protracted military-led transition in Africa particularly Nigeria and Ghana has caused more problems than solutions in the democratic space instead of deepening democratic culture, what has been prevalent is enthrone of culture of impunity. Acheampong (2020) and Abrokwa (2018) in Ghana, as well as Adigun (2021) and Nwokedi and Ibrahim (2022) in Nigeria, argue that reforms, though beneficial, have not fully insulated electoral processes from party influence. This contrast highlights that while reforms have certainly been beneficial, both Nigeria and Ghana face ongoing challenges in fully insulating their electoral systems from partisan influence.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In both Nigeria and Ghana, the relationship between political parties and electoral administrators shapes the effectiveness and integrity of the electoral process. However, the degree of influence and the nature of this relationship vary significantly between the two countries. In Nigeria, political party influence is a powerful and often intrusive force within the electoral system. In stark contrast, Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) enjoys a higher degree of independence from political parties. While Ghanaian political parties are actively involved in the electoral process, they engage more through advocacy, public dialogue, and voter mobilisation than through attempts to directly influence electoral decisions. However, the findings suggest that the relationship between political parties and electoral commissions is a double-edged sword in both Nigeria and Ghana. While positive collaboration can enhance electoral integrity and improve public confidence, political parties' tendency to prioritize their interests over electoral fairness remains a significant challenge in both nations.

To address these challenges;

- Both countries need to focus on enhancing transparency, fostering greater political accountability, and strengthening the independence of electoral commissions. As Nigeria and Ghana continue to develop their democratic systems.
- It is critical that the independence of the electoral commission is safeguarded to prevent undue influence from political parties. In Nigeria, the relationship between INEC and the ruling party often undermines the electoral process. The Electoral Commission must be empowered with enough autonomy to make decisions free from political interference. This can be achieved by ensuring that electoral commissioners are selected based on merit and not political affiliation, with clear tenure and protection from arbitrary removal.
- Building strong institutional collaboration also entails promoting public involvement in the electoral process. Both Nigeria and Ghana should focus on ensuring that the electorate is well-informed about the electoral process and has an active role in demanding accountability from political parties and electoral bodies.
- There should be clear legal frameworks that regulate the interaction between political parties and electoral commissions. These frameworks should provide guidelines for collaboration that promote fairness, reduce conflicts of interest, and encourage mutual trust.

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