

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN WEST AFRICA: A SYNTHESIS OF ISSUES

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Abstract

The third wave of democratization resulted in transition from authoritarian rules to democratic governance in West African countries when elections became the bedrock for contesting political power. Since then, elections have remained the cornerstone and one of the most important ingredients of democratic governance due to its capacity to regulate the dynamics of political power. However, elections in the West African sub-region seem to have been characterized by high grade fraud and malpractices that tend to undermine democratic governance in the sub-region. This paper is therefore set to examine elections and democratic governance in West Africa: a synthesis of issues. The paper posits that inability of some countries in West Africa to conduct credible elections has led to the failure of democratic governance to engender legitimating of governmental powers, transparency, participation and accountability. Relying on secondary sources of data and elite capture theory, the paper argues that most elections in the West African region have failed to meet the minimum benchmark for credible, free and fair elections. It uncovers the inherent ethno-religious and cultural plurality seems to have made elections a major stake among political competitors resulting to colossal rigging and elite manipulations. This has continued to hinder democratic governance in Africa. It is therefore recommended that Africans should embrace credible elections as indispensable mechanism for facilitating democratic governance that can propel socio-economic development of the African societies.

Key words: Election, Democracy, Democratic Governance, Participation, Accountability

Introduction

Shortly after political independence, most West African countries were engulfed by political instability, economic stagnation and authoritarian rule. Incidentally, the emergence of Liberal democracy that occasioned the third wave of democratization in the 1990s resulted in transition from authoritarian rules to democratic governance in the sub region. This follows the recognition of elections as the bedrock for contesting political power. In this sense, representative democracy appears to have assumed the most preferred form of government and generally accepted as a prerequisite for social cohesion and national development in West Africa. Fundamentally, a functioning democracy entails an informed and active public that realizes how to voice its collective interests and hold government officials accountable through credible electoral process anchored on equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law and liberty of individuals (Jega, 2007).

The adoption of electoral democracy in most countries of the West Africa came with high hopes and aspirations for improved governance due to the opportunity to overturn the widespread developmental and political problems associated with colonialism and prolonged military rule. However, many years after the return to democratic rule, the huge expectations of many West Africans appear to have been largely undermined by poor governance, with its attendant socio-economic and political challenges. For instance, the sub-region is still characterized by the problems of poverty, widening income inequality

between the rich and the poor, disinvestment, inflation, deindustrialization, mass unemployment, economic retrogression and debt crisis. All these are attributable to poor leadership occasioned by skewed electoral processes that tend to engender massive rigging and manipulation of elections in West Africa.

It is in the view of the above that Omotola, (2014) avers that elections are the first and most basic indicator of democracy because of their presumed capacity to guarantee political participation, competition and legitimacy which, in turn, are pivotal to democratic governance. Election depicts the social contract between representatives and the represented (David, Manu & Musa 2014). Also, Teshome, (2008) points out that critical functions of election underscore its significance as bedrock and critical framework of the democratic process. Through elections, the legitimate power which rests with the people could be invested into political office holders.

Thus, Elections are crucial in ensuring political stability and providing alternation of political power. Indicatively, there is an inextricable link between elections and democratic governance in any polity. Separating election from democratic governance is nearly impossible due to their organic functional relationship. This tends to suggest that the level of transparency of electoral processes constitutes primary condition for effective democratic governance.

Incidentally, regardless of the emphasis on the potency of election as a vital instrument of democratic governance, elections in West Africa seem not have fared so well. This is because elections have frequently been a sour point of political contestations in the sub-region. Most of the elections conducted in West Africa are characterized by irregularities; manipulations and abuse of electoral processes. In fact, most countries in Africa are facing the problems of qualitative decline in the conduct of elections and low or declining level of electoral participation (Adejumbi, 2000).

The existing literature on elections and democratic governance tend to focus more on electoral process, electoral violence, incumbency factors and the election management bodies that play dominant roles in deciding electoral outcomes and horrendous violence accompanying elections (Azom, & Nwosu, 2017, Omodia, (2007), Adejumobi, (2011). Other studies such as Ibeanu, (2007); Jega, (2007); Omotola, (2014) have separately argued that opposition intolerance and crises of governance; poor, uncoordinated and confusing voter education affect the outcomes of elections in West Africa.

Similarly, Omotola, (2014) blame the tragedy of elections and its impact on democratic governance on the political leaders. This position aligns with the assertion of Nnadozie (2005 , p. 112) that the different factions of the dominant class have made election periods the occasions when ethnic and other primordial differences among the people are played up and brought to the fore. These have continued affect the outcome of elections and thus tend to undermine democratic governance in West African states.

Although, extant literature on elections and democratic consolidation abound, yet there is still yearning scholarly gap, hence the need to examine the link between elections and democratic governance in West Africa. It is against this backdrop that this paper, therefore interrogates elections and democratic governance in West Africa: A synthesis issues. The essence is to interrogate the trajectories of elections in Africa and x-ray the factors that tend to hinder elections from advancing democratic governance in African states.

Conceptualization of Democracy, Democratic governance and Elections

The popular definition of democracy offered by Abraham Lincoln as “government of the people by the people and for the people” gives the impression that all citizens have the opportunity of participating or influencing the process of governance. The most basic idea in a democracy is that political power comes from the people and that government is legal when the governed consent. Democracy makes rulers become accountable and answerable to their people because it offers a platform for participation of

citizens in the electing their leaders and regulating their activities (Ogbonna 2012). Nnoli (2003) explains that democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of individuals in various aspects of political life, equality among citizens and justice in the relations between the people and the government. Appadorai (2004) observes that democracy as the system, either of government under which the people exercise governmental power directly or through representatives periodically elected by them.

In view of the above, democratic governance is the bedrock of democratic values and standards. It is a system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions. Democratic governance consist of the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced as well as the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies. Ogbonna (2012) states that act of providing democratic governance calls for a political system where leaders become accountable and answerable to the people as electorates decide by voting for people who understand their needs periodically (Norris, 2011).

Democratic governance facilitates the establishment of democratic institutions that enhance the separation of powers; the rule of law; transparency and accountability of a responsible civil service, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It encompasses a wide scope of political participation embracing a pluralistic system of political parties, a vibrant civil society and media. In this sense, Martinez and van Ham (2015), note that democratic governance hinges on the platform for the people to choose their leaders through periodic elections.

The concept of election refers to the process through which adults and qualified citizens are allowed to participate in determining who pilots the affairs of a particular state or organization either by voting or standing as candidates. It is a process that begins from political campaign and ends at the emergence of an individual or group to represent the public in government. Ibeanu, (2007) states that election entails the process by which citizens choose preferred candidates to run their government at all levels in an episodic framework for a specific tenure of office. It entails the process of selecting the people who would be saddled with the responsibility of determining who gets what, when and how in a polity through ballot and making choice between alternatives (Lasswell, 1936). This is to say therefore, that election is a formal group decision making process by which a population chooses an individual or group to hold public office in their collective interests.

Theoretical Framework: Elite capture theory

This paper adopts the Elite capture theory as its theoretical anchorage. The elite capture theory is anchored on the assumption that most societies are dominated by elites of unprecedented power and unaccountability, free from popular control, pursues its own concerns which are power and self-aggrandizement. This creates a situation where a fraction of the society has the power to take decisions which affect society and these decisions usually reflect the interest of the elite rather than the wishes of the majority. The theory emphasizes personal attributes of leaders, which aid their hold or dominance in power positions and the institutional framework of society (D'Exelle, & Ridle, 2008; Ademola & Adenuga, 2015).

Political elites are usually located within the political process of any nation-state and are responsible for managing the political and administrative affairs (Platteau, 2004). The theory argues that the elite possess some qualities necessary for their accession to political power, such as consciousness, coherence, conspiracy and organisation. Members of the elite are thus not only aware of their status, but work determinedly to protect it with the use of exclusionary factors in the electoral process.

In this regard, the political power of elites is perpetuated through manipulation of elections to win and retain power (Platteau, 2004). The elites in West African politics tend to have kept virtually all the state apparatus at hostage through skewed electoral process in the various countries. This suggests that

what makes elite capture so powerful is that elites exert their influence less often by coercion, and more by moral claims and symbolic power (Dasgupta & Beard, 2007). The dynamism of elite domination manifest in 'elite continuity, transformation and replacement' through which elites cooperate, compete and reconcile their differences from time to time (Norris, 2011).

In fact, the Democratic institutions such as the legislature, executive, judiciary, and regulatory agencies have been captured by the elites thereby weakening the capacity of the state to ensure rule of law and credible elections. This is because the elites focus on control of political and state power for protecting and promoting the interests of their clique at the expense of the masses. The consequence is very inimical to the tenets of democratic rule and tends to negate the critical attributes of democratic governance which are embedded on accountability, responsiveness and transparency.

Election has remained the cornerstone of democracy due to its capacity to regulate the dynamics of political power especially in Africa (Genyi & Ortom (2017). The ethno-religious plurality often used as a dividing tool by the elite class in Africa makes election to assume high stake among political competitors. The control of state power is the preoccupation of the elites for them to retain access to wealth and influence because the consequences of losing power are the loss of wealth and influence (Awojobi, 2014). As a result, the unrelenting quest for control or access to the state

This explains the high premium placed on elections and the attendant manipulation of the electoral process by the elites to retain power in Africa states. As such, elections in West Africa are daunted by high rate of manipulation and fraudulent process (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997). This manifest in churning out confusing voters' register, ballot rigging, vote buying, disenfranchisement and manipulation of election results amongst others. This trajectory accounts for the inability of elections to engender democratic governance capable of promoting socio-economic development and thus responsible for democratic deficit in African societies.

Overview of Elections and Democracy

Election remains unquestionably very cardinal to the survival of any democratic political system. This is premised on the fact that election provides the most peaceful and visible means through which citizens routinely select their leaders in or out of government. Thus, elections provide a platform by which policy-makers are encouraged to act attentively and considerably to needs and interests of their citizens' (Berouk, 2008). Powell, (2000) describes election as the litmus test of democracy in all societies. The implication is that election determines the quality of democracy in all societies because it is the winners at the poll; that eventually form the government. In this vein, Johari, (2011) avers that election is one of the most significant ways people can participate in decisions that affect their lives and hold their elected representatives responsible. Reilly (2003, p. 12) points out that elections serve three major functions in every democratic society which include; a means for people to choose their representatives; a means of choosing governments and a means of given legitimacy to the political systems.

The above shows that election is central for effective democratic governance. In West Africa, there are several electoral democracies as seen in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Liberia and Mali amongst others that are multi-party states. Though successive multi-party elections have been conducted in the sub-region, it is indicative that the quality of the elections has been on the decline over time. Some of these elections have failed the acid test of democracy of peaceful regime change in free and fair elections. For instance, Teshome (2008) argues that the 2001 elections in Zambia ended up in maintaining the same ruling party in power despite the country's visible devastated economy and poverty. Also, Nigeria experienced a similar scenario until Peoples Democratic Party lost power to All Progressive Congress in 2015. This means that the politicians are skillful in manipulating the electoral system to retain power.

Election depicts a social contract between representatives and the represented and also provides opportunity for transition from particular sets of representatives and office holders to another (David, Manu & Musa 2014). It is a method of selecting a few people from a large group such that the few

people become a representative of the large group. Nnadozie (2005) posits that election is a medium through which individuals or groups are chosen in order to represent their constituencies in the context of governance.

Omotola (2014) notes that elections have the capacity to guarantee political participation, competition and legitimacy which, in turn, are pivotal to democratic governance. This implies that competitive elections provide a framework quintessential to organizing democratic uncertainty in order to produce legitimate change, rebirth, and renewal and power alternation (Przeworski 1997). As a mechanism for democracy, elections serve the function of recruiting representatives by popular vote or ballot. Election constitutes a basic institution of democratic control, which enables the establishment of popular sovereignty. Arguably, elections are the central concern and determinant of democratic process.

Democracy enables people to govern themselves through constant interactions and discussions of common issues, voting in elections and running for public office. A democratic government is propelled or powered by the collective ideas, energy, wisdom, understanding, knowledge and perceptions of the people rather than the mystical construct swinging and wriggling in the mind of the holders of political offices (Igbuzor, 2005). In this sense, Diamond, (2002, p:14-15) states that:

democracy is system of government that meets three essential conditions: an extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially and political parties) for all elective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies at least through regular and fair election, so that no major (adult) social group is excluded, and a level of civic and political liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

This suggests that there is a strong correlation between elections and democracy. However, the elections in West Africa are mostly marred by intimidation of voters: causing confusion at voting stations, falsification of voters' lists, deliberate miscalculations, compromising polling agents, compromising electoral offices, ballot snatching and assassinations (Alemika, 2007). Implicitly, the notion of government of the people, by the people and for the people associated with democracy entails that through periodic elections, public officials could be held accountable for their activities and those who are deemed not to have performed credibly are defeated at the polls. The most important elements encapsulating the democratic agenda are popular participation, equitable representation, and accountability.

Thus, democracy provides opportunities for the citizens to have inputs in the policy process or contribute in the making of decisions that affect their lives and environments through elections. In other words, election represents the defining characteristics of modern democracy to the extent that representatives of the people could only be chosen through such means. It is in this regard that election is seen as an important starting point for the existence of democracy. This means that in the absence of election, it would be difficult to gauge, understand and appreciate the will of the people, which Democracy is, therefore, not conceivable outside of the context of election as election supplies the essential platform for the building of democracy. The important contribution of election to the making of democracy feasible in its providing the basis for government to reflect the will and rights of the people is thus, the signification of the link between election and democracy.

The prospects and challenges of Elections: The implications for democratic governance in West Africa

The prospects of election are numerous. Elections constitute one of the most important ingredients of democratic governance. The electoral process helps to institute a representative government, bestow legitimacy and credibility, activates accountability and institutionalize democratic transition and succession of governments. In this manner election tends to strengthen, entrench and institutionalize

democratic ideals. Where there is lack of accountability in governance due to corruption, widespread election manipulation and fraud, democratic governance will be tented (Alemika, 2007). This implies that credible elections produce popular leadership which in turn engenders democratic governance as illustrated in the figure 1 below:

Figure 1:
The Nexus Between Credible Elections and Democratic Governance

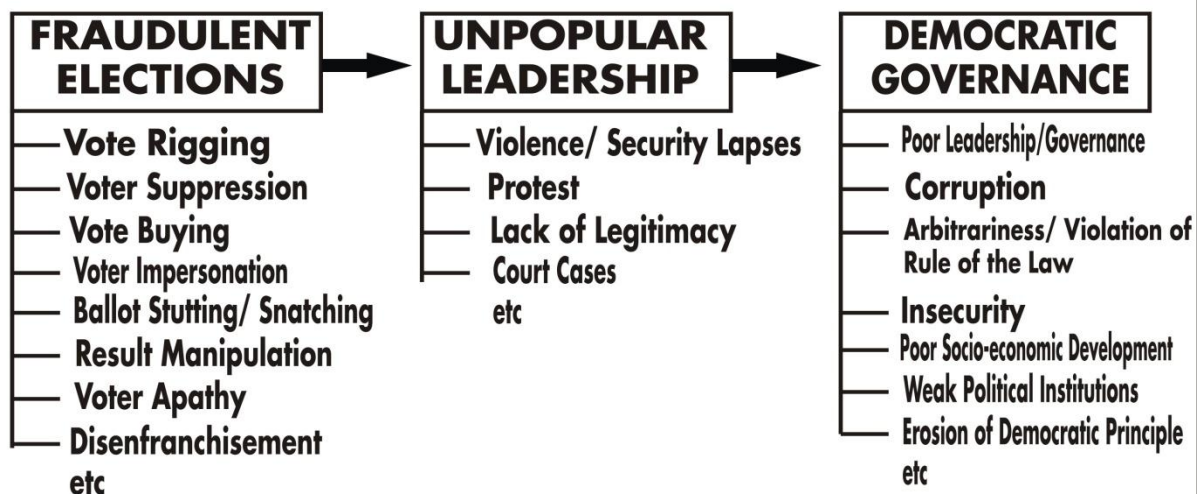


Source: Authors' compilation from sundries, (2022)

The above indicates that credible elections allow for competitiveness, popular participation, declaration of correct results etc. This produces popular leadership that is legitimate, accepted by the people and is transparent, accountable and responsible to the people. Such leadership engenders democratic governance by strengthening participatory democracy, good governance, improved security, socio-economic development and rule of the law etc. This shows that credible elections remain the cardinal tenets of democratic governance.

However, the above has not been the case in West Africa as elections are often manipulated in favor of certain individuals and political parties. Elections in the sub-region are confronted with several challenges. This tends to hinder the capacity of elections to facilitate democratic governance as captured in the figure 11 below:

Figure II
Fraudulent Elections and Democratic Governance



Source: Authors' compilation from sundries, (2022)

From the above, it is evident that fraudulent elections are inimical to democratic governance. This can be instantiated by the manifestations electoral malpractices witnessed in Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, Liberia and Ghana amongst others where elections are characterized by vote rigging, suppression, ballot snatching and stuffing, voter apathy etc. The result is unpopular leadership that features violence, protest, lack of legitimacy, manipulative court cases etc. As a result, democratic governance manifests poor leadership, corruption, arbitrariness and violation of rule of the law, insecurity, poor socio-economic development and erosion of democratic ethos or principles.

Elections have been aggressively contested owing to its strategic place a means to gaining access to the control of state power which is considered to be the prime source and/or sustainer of material wealth and livelihood security (Fadakinte 2013). The greatest worry is that the pattern of politicking in Africa involves desperate competition for power, making pursuit of state power a matter of ‘a do or die affair’ where the winner takes all and the loser loses all. This situation is complicated by the character of the political elites which is not in tune with the ideology of liberal democracy. There are indications that the dominant political elites do not possess the requisite democratic ethos, such as tolerance, discipline and democratic temper to engage in credible elections (Fadakinte 2013). Due to the desperate desire by politicians to win elections at all costs in order to enjoy the perquisites of power, elections in Africa have often been marred by irregularities, violent confrontations and other negative outcomes that negate democratic governance (Jega, 2007).

Factors that constitute challenges to democratic governance in West Africa

Over the years, elections in West Africa have been dented with excessive manipulation, monetization and structural emasculation of the electoral processes, with widespread irregularities and violence. This history of problematic and controversial elections threatens the viability of democratic governance. The monumental irregularities and malpractices tend to increase with every election. Electoral irregularities and malpractices, inter-and intra-ethnic rivalries, religious crises and insecurity, poverty, inadequate and weak democratic institutions and institutionalized corruption amongst others tend to have marred elections in West Africa. The following and other factors seem to challenges to democratic governance in West Africa.

i. Flawed elections and Electoral violence

Flawed elections and electoral violence are the most prominent challenges of democratic governance in West Africa. For instance, elections in Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Gambia etc. have been marred with violence and fraud (Awojobi, 2014). Also, Burkina Faso, elections have been marred by excruciating violence. There are instances where institutions of the state such as the police, the military, and even the electoral body, the Election Management Bodies tend to collude to manipulate the electoral process in favor of certain candidates. Thus, situations where individuals have won elections from prison custody are rampant in West Africa as in the case of Senator Omisore of Osun State and Governor Ahamafuna Orji of Abia State, contrary to the provisions of the Electoral Act, in Nigeria. This breeds persistent crises of legitimacy in governance.

ii. Legitimacy crisis

Legitimacy crisis is a major feature of West African politics and constitutes a problem to democratic governance. Legitimacy simply connotes wide acceptability of the government in power by the entire citizens. In Africa, rules governing electoral competition are not often followed, elections, are not free and fair, the performance of most governments are abysmal, while the freedom and welfare of the people are not guaranteed. A government that lacks legitimacy is prone to have its policies misinterpreted, creates communication gaps between the government and the governed and may not enjoy the benefits of feedback on its policies that can assist in policy re-evaluation, and re-formulation. In the extreme, an illegitimate government imposes a reign of terror on the citizens to force them into submission or acquiescence. Such instances in Africa include regimes of Idi Amin Dada of Uganda. As a result of the dominance of a few individuals in the politics of West African states, politics has always been based on personalized leadership. Rather than institutions driving the political process the personal

attributes of the leaders, either to hold the state together, or cause crises, are more important than the form of government, or the institution of checks and balances.

iii. sit-tight syndrome

Another challenge to politics in West Africa is the sit-tight syndrome. This is the desire and consistent refusal of rulers and leaders in Africa to leave office at the end of their tenure; even when they had become unpopular. For this reason in most African states the electorates have lost faith in the ballot box as the only legitimate means of changing a bad government. Instances include, Omar Albert-Bernard Bongo of Gabon, Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, Blaise Campore of Burkina Faso, and Yahaya Jamel amongst others (Jega, 2014). Similarly, until the plan was frustrated by the National Assembly, it was no secret that President Olusegun Obasanjo nursed and pursued a self succession bid that would have entailed an amendment of the constitution to enable him contest for a third term in office. Also, Laurent Gbagbo in the 2010 presidential election in La Cote D'Ivoire failed to accept his defeat by not accepting the election result which led to a civil war (Jega, 2014).

iv. Institutionalized Corruption and Monetized Politics

Political and institutionalized corruption constitutes one of the greatest challenges and threats to democratic governance in West Africa. More worrisome is the magnitude and degree of its manifestation of corruption. Carothers, (2007) explains that nothing enfeebles democracy more than corruption. Corruption distorts democratic governance, provides perverse incentives for dysfunctional behaviour, and ultimately diminishes the quality of life by diverting funds for social services into private pockets. Democratic governance in West Africa has not been immune to the damages of corruption.

Corruption has remained the bane of politics which continued to undermine the effectiveness of elections to engender democratic governance (Adeniyi, 2018). The consequence of the pervasiveness of corruption tends to reduce the state capacity; and ultimate state failure. This problem is a major factor in the deepened economic stagnation and under-development of West African states, arising from diversion of states resources meant for development to serve the private interests of political leadership. When this is added to the monetisation of the political space, it is no surprise that the culture of impunity is gaining ground in West African countries.

v. Illiteracy/political ignorance

Success of democratic governance largely depends on active participation of the citizens. Active participation however, depends on how politically informed the people are which also depends on the peoples' ability to read and write. Illiteracy and political ignorance make the people susceptible to the deceit of political office seekers. Most of the electorates in West Africa appear not know the extent and limit of their political rights. The political ignorance of majority of the people makes it possible for the political elites to exploit and manipulate them to fit into their selfish political goals and ambitions.

vi. Ethno-religious crises and Recurring Political Instability

Most of the West African countries are experiencing one form of ethno-religious related crisis which constitute potent challenges to democratic governance. For instance, insurgency, militancy, farmer-herder conflict and banditry are manifestations of insecurity that threaten democratic governance in the various societies. These crises occur outside of the confines of the law and tend to weaken democratic institutional mechanisms and thus, threaten democratic governance. The combined effect of the crises is that political instability has become a recurring feature of the politics. In every political system, those who are in power face democratic opposition would normally want to replace them, either to change or modify existing policies. But in most West African countries the ruling party equate opposition with treason, or in the extreme are defined as "separatists" or "secessionists" Desperate to contain what is ideally a legitimate contribution to constructive dialogue, the sitting government often pushes the opposition groups underground, where they remain and continue as potent threats to political stability.

vii. Poverty and unemployment

Poverty is another factor that constitutes grave challenge to democratic governance in West Africa despite the abundant human and material resources. A person deprived of the basic wherewithal cannot effectively function politically. This means more people in West African are basically concerned with survival than in politics. The concern for survival makes them susceptible to manipulation by the rich politicians. That is exactly why it is common in West Africa, to hear of buying and selling of votes. Due to ignorance and poverty, people are willing to sell their votes for as low as a cup of salt. Indeed, there is clear absence of integrity for a poor hungry person to preserve. This perhaps explains the reason for vote buying; bullying, ballot snatching, maiming and killing that characterize the electoral processes in West African countries.

Also, due to the cost of politics, only the rich can actually contest for elective positions. This means that, no matter how credible a person may be, he/she cannot exercise effectively his/her rights to be voted for because of poverty. This has made power to circulate only around a few rich powerful individuals.

viii. Weak Democratic Institutions

The weakness of the democratic institutions in West African states is another challenge to democratic governance. The various democratic institutions such as the Executive, Judiciary, the Legislature and electoral agencies in Africa are apparently weak. In principle, each of these institutions is constitutionally empowered to maintain a certain degree of independence and autonomy while serving as checks on each other. However, Executive domination remains a formidable reality in West African politics. This dominance and over-bearing characteristics of the Executive is located in the pattern and practice of dictatorship in West African states (Burton, 2019). The manners in which the electoral bodies have conducted elections in African countries depict a favourable disposition to the party in power while the Judiciary has “served as a tool for creating political topsy-turvy that undermined the democratic process”. In this sense, erosion of rule of law, arbitrariness and impunity results to high levels of corruption. This legacy has fundamentally undermines democratic governance.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the analysis above, it is evident that election has remained the cornerstone of democracy due to its capacity to regulate the dynamics of political power and serves as a critical framework for democratic governance. In other words, sustaining and improving democratic governance requires credible elections and the smooth succession of one regime by another. However, it appears that in West Africa, most countries have been witnessing voting without 'choosing', because the process of electing political leaders is horrendously flawed. This negates the capacity of election to engender democratic governance and bring about meaningful socio-economic development in the various countries.

Lack of free and fair elections often threaten the democratic governance as a result of legitimacy question. Fraudulent election in West Africa results to democratic deficits evident in poor governance, blurred leadership and policy summersault, political and economic instability, rampant disregard to the rule of law and disobedience to court rulings as well as mortgaged judicial system amongst other colossal failures of democratic ideals. The attendant consequences include poverty; unemployment; poor economic management; widespread corruption; infrastructural deficits and lack of social trust and confidence in government. This situation is made complex by the crisis of widespread collapse of security apparatus social values, and governance institutions which continue to undermine the socio-political cum economic development in West Africa.

It is therefore recommended that key institutional guards of democracy need to be reformed and reconfigured for efficiency. Elections should be free and fair to allow the people to select in or out the candidates of their choice into the leadership positions of their countries. There should be adherence to democratic principle of rule of law and separation of powers. More importantly the elites should allow the electoral management bodies, the legislature, the Judiciary, the police, the constitution and the civil

society to function in line with the global best practices to ensure credible elections and effective democratic governance. Moreso, political socialization and conscientization are essential to reduce if not eliminate illiteracy and political ignorance.

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