

Original Article

Party Supremacy and Its Influence on Presidential Elections in Nigeria and Ghana: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: The paper aims at conducting comparative political research on the role played by party supremacy in Nigeria and Ghana to determine the direction of presidential elections in West Africa two of the most advanced democracies. Based on the concepts of the institutional theory and elite theory, the paper questions the influence of internal parties, domination of elites inside the party and party unity to the occurrence of candidate, citizen participation, and affiliate governance of the democratic accountability. Although these two nations lack a strict resemblance as they apply presidential systems of governance in a multi-party system, there are contrasting effects in the practice of partisan power. Party supremacy is commonly associated in Nigeria with elite domination, poor party internal democracy, and patron client relationship which result in reduced voter choice and reduced electoral competition. Competitive primaries, voter-powered intra-party democracy, and increased electoral legitimacy, however, have through the relatively institutionalized party politics in Ghana and more specifically the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in particular allowed a rapid expansion of democracy in Ghana. To examine these dynamics, the paper uses qualitative data based on electoral reports, the constitutions of the parties, key informant interviews and secondary literature. The results indicate that with no checks by democratic standards, party control results in a lack of integrity in the elections and curtailment of political innovations. In conclusion, the study recommends that strengthening of the internal democracy, the transparency in the selection of the candidates and the elimination of the elite control would help the countries to improve the quality of their presidential elections and the democratic form of government. The paper is a contribution to the existing literature written on African democratic development by providing a new comparative understanding of how party supremacy mediates the democratic outcome in the hybrid regimes.

Keywords: Party Supremacy, Presidential Elections, All Progressive Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), Ghana, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a modern democratic system, it is evident that the political parties have become fundamental in the electoral governance through various ways in which they are used to generate the organization platform where political participation, recruitment of leadership, and articulation of local political policies is undertaken. But the quality and influence of political parties differs markedly across democracies and in the contemporary presidential systems like Nigeria and Ghana the extra-parliamentary parties play a leading role. The overwhelming role of party dominance that works as the excessive power of a party elite in deciding the emergence of candidates, the performance of elections, and the political direction becomes a critical issue in such systems (Onapajo & Babalola, 2022; Drah & Osei, 2021).

Supremacy of parties in Nigeria have usually equaled to elite manipulations, undemocratic primaries and imposition of candidates without much consultation and internal contests. This has culminated in voter apathy, internal politics, and political defections that destabilize legitimacy of elections (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2020). Nigeria is one of the countries currently having the two most popular parties, which are the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People Democratic Party (PDP). The parties previously have been criticized on a regular basis and labeled oligarchic systems where political patrons hold great influence in arm pit selection and policy making (Okoye, 2023). This has led to an increasing gap between the political elite and the voters hence undermining democratic responsibility.

On the other hand, Ghana has been identified generally as a democratic and stability state in West Africa with every release of presidential elections being conducted peacefully. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have formalised quite competitive and organised procedures of selecting candidates. But most recently, there is increased internal centralization of strength, commodification of politics, and increased power of elite financiers in the party



hierarchies (Gyampo, 2022). Nonetheless, with the help of such institutions as the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the Ghana electoral system has retained a relatively good level of political legitimacy and trust of citizens (Dzisah, 2021).

It is through this form of comparison that the research into this scholarly case is given a platform through which to examine the role of the idea and practice of the supremacy of parties on presidential elections in two of the most politically strategic countries in Western Africa. Although the two nations have common colonial experiences and presidential scripts, they differ in their domestic parties as well as their democratic strength. There is, therefore, critical need to explore such dynamics in order to reveal how elite control in parties either hinders or facilitates democratic consolidation in the region.

A. Problems Statement

Enshrinement of partisan dominance in African politics has come up as an enabler and a barrier to democratization. Ideally, inner unity as well as policy leadership ought to be supported by the supremacy of the party. In practice however, it has at many times settled bites to uphold undemocracy trends in the candidate selection and in elections. Presidential election in Nigeria is gradually becoming a combination of dark primary elections, elite bargaining, and candidate imposition by powerful power brokers, instead of competitive intra-party democracy (Ezeibe et al., 2021; Okonkwo & Agbakwuru, 2023). This has caused many voter disillusion, and frequent intra party squabbles as well as loss of faith in the democratic institutions. As an example, the 2023 Nigerian presidential primaries revealed grave gaps in governance within the parties, as candidates emerged after a controversial process heavily biased toward financial rewards and the agreement of the elites instead of the masses (Adeoye, 2023). These are practices that undermine the doctrine of electoral integrity and breed more state of despair amongst the populace concerning the representativeness of elected officials.

Ghana has been more strongly consolidated in its democracy even though internal party processes have been faced with a threat to integrity due to the growing power of money politics and domination by elites. Recent NPP and NDC primaries were alleged to be characterized by vote-buying, a command-and-control unit and exclude grassroots members (Gyampo, 2022; Drah and Osei, 2021). This development indicates that the participatory arrangements, which have promoted the credibility of elections in Ghana, are corroding. Thus, the comparative studies based on assessing the impact of the idea of party supremacy institutional and operational sides on presidential elections in Ghana and Nigeria have a serious gap.

Although there is literature on party politics in each of the countries, there is little work which has comparatively evaluated the role of internal party politics in moderating the quality of democratic governance in West African presidential democracies. This paper aims at addressing this gap by providing a comparative review on how far party supremacy influences the choice of candidates, elections and democratic legitimacy in Nigeria and Ghana. This is aimed at determining the structural weakness and institutional opportunities in party systems of each country that either promote or undermine a democratic consolidation.

B. Objective of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine party supremacy independent factor affecting presidential election procedures and democratic consolidation in Nigeria and Ghana as the main purpose of this research.

Specific Objective include:

- Explore the form and content of party domination in the Colonial nation of Nigeria and Ghana main political parties.
- Analyze the practices of party supremacy in choosing presidential candidates mainly on internal democratic procedures of parties and controlling party elites.
- Compare the implication of an oligarchical rule of parties to elective competition, participation as well as legitimacy of presidential elections in both countries.
- Compare institutionalized responses as regards the capture of parties and undemocratic processes of party life in Nigeria and Ghana.
- Present policy suggestions to strengthen internal democracy and limit the adverse impacts of over-domination of parties in presidential regimes.

C. Theoretical Framework

This research is supported under two theoretical inseparable lenses, including the Elite Theory and the Institutional Theory. These models are adequate to describe how the party dominance is wielded in the presidential elections especially in the hybrid democracies such as Nigeria and Ghana.

a) Elite Theory

The Elite Theory offers an analytical insight on how the decision making processes are controlled by a small group of people in the political parties, usually those who are wealthy, influential and powerful groups that belong to the elite. The classical exponents like Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939) and Mills (1956) have described that a minority group who are the elite political actors take the command on power irrespective of the established form of democracy. Focusing on party supremacy, the elite theory is used to understand how party chiefs and funders dominate the process of candidate nomination mostly to the disadvantage of grassroots participation and internal democracy (Onapajo & Babalola, 2022). It is notable that in Nigeria, the capture of elite can be easily illustrated by the example of presidential primaries when so-called godfathers choose to vote in their own way, using money power, patronage systems, and party machinery control (Ezeibe et al., 2021). In Ghana, likewise, assigned a more defined structure of internal democracy, there is an increasing threat to participatory representation through the escalating influence of elites, materialized in the forms of tokenized primaries and gatekeeping (Gyampo, 2022).

Elite Theory therefore lays the background to the dynamics of concentration of powers in political parties and the manner in which such concentration manipulates democratic way of doing things since presidential elections are highly contested and a form of elite manipulation becomes desirable.

b) Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory is a complement to the elite approach since it emphasizes the influence on the given political outcomes because of the formal rules as well as procedures and organizational forms of the political parties and election agencies. According to North (1990), the incentive structure which dictates the behavior of the actors is a creation of institutions be they formal or informal. Institutional theory can be used in this paper to analyze how far party constitutions, electoral laws and regulatory systems do or do not support party supremacy. As an example, Electoral Commission of Ghana applies rather stringent rules of internal primaries and campaign funding, contributing to the institutionalization of party democracy (Dzisah, 2021). On the other hand, the system of political parties in Nigeria is characterized by the laxity in the execution of party rules, low monitoring of primary elections, and responsive party units, which contribute to the rule by elites (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2020; Okoye, 2023). The Institutional Theory comes in handy especially when it comes to determining how democratic institutions moderate the actions of elites and control the conduct of parties. It allows a comparative inquiry into the reasons why the system has performed relatively better in terms of presidential elections integrity in Ghana than in Nigeria despite the similar structural issues.

II. THEORY SYNTHESIS

This research incorporates Elite Theory together with the Institutional Theory to appreciate the combination of agency and the structure prevailing by political elites. Whereas the elite theory affirms the individualistic and status character of party politics, the institutional theory pursues a blueprint of evaluating how the formal setup can facilitate or limit such closely contested elites. This dual-theory study makes it possible to have a subtle examination on party supremacy and how it impacts on presidential elections in Nigeria and Ghana.

A. The Conceptualization of Party Supremacy and Internal Democracy

Party supremacy in political science defines the level at which part parthenon and leadership leads governance with regard to internal decisions within the parthenon and the overall decision with regards to political outcomes. This does not imply the same meaning as party discipline since they usually include an elite imposition, centralization, or informal power on popular or participatory mechanisms (Basedau & Stroh, 2008). Party supremacy in presidential countries such as Nigeria and Ghana has momentous consequences on the process of emergent leadership, electoral legitimacy, and the course of the democratic consolidation. Through empirical findings, internal party democracy has in many ways been compromised by hegemonic party parties mainly due to their preference of serving elite interests rather than the mode of participatory governance (Onapajo & Babalola, 2022). According to Ezeibe et al. (2021) and Adeoye (2023), the case of vote-buying, elite deal broking, and candidate imposition is commonplace in the internal primaries in Nigeria particularly during the period preceding the presidential elections.

B. Elite Capture and Candidate Nomination in Nigeria

Elite capture has been identified consistently in the literature on the party politics in Nigeria as a central variable in defining party supremacy. Okonkwo and Agbakwuru (2023) based on the content analysis of the congress and convention of 2015-2023 assiduously argue that godfatherism is still vital in presidential candidates in both the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People Democratic Party (PDP). As their results demonstrate, partisan leadership commonly bypasses democratic

processes in favor of their cronies especially those with large-scale financing or those with local affiliates. Likewise, an example of articles utilizing mixed methods, conducted by Ezeibe et al. (2021), who examined interview data based on 30 party officials, found that inner democratic processes were frequently ceremonial.

The democrats in parties do not often do as they please as the delegates are influenced by financial incentives, the fear of evictions and the allegiance to political godfathers to vote according to what they are told. This is also supported by the 2023 presidential primaries in Nigeria. Adeoye (2023) shows the part of the primaries of both significant parties were characterized by violations of the procedure, financial corruption, and the lowest level of participation by the grassroots, where elite-approved candidates were born. This information supports the previous fears that party politics in Nigeria are not democratic machines as party aunties but rather elite networks (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2020).

C. Ghana: Trouble Free, Increasingly Elite Power

Examples of more well-institutionalized parties, as often referred to when it comes to Ghana, in contrast with Nigeria, include the Ghana system of parties. The same can be stated by other scholars, including Drah and Osei (2021) and Gyampo (2022), who claim that the primaries in both the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) are at least procedurally competitive. Nevertheless, developing empirical evidence indicates that these processes are gaining more force of elite investment and commands control of central politics. In longitudinal research covering NPP and NDC primaries in 2012, 2016, 2020, Gyampo (2022) reveals that there is a sharp increase in the expenses of competing in primaries. The polls on which the unsuccessful applicants participated showed that above 80 percent of them lost because of insufficient funds and not popularity and suitability to the offices. This has led to the internal democracy to be seen as an event that can be monetized and brought about emergence of a force of a transaction political class which is more interested in political patronage by the elites and leave the people at the grassroots at bay. Through interviews of 40 political party administrators and members of Electoral Commission, Drah and Osei (2021) observe that both the major parties have increasingly adopted a more informal approach to decisions made by national executives in vetting as well as endorsing presidential candidates. Although there has not been violence in the election process in Ghana (the election process has been peaceful and credible), it is a sign of shifting towards elitism as has been experienced in Nigeria.

D. Electoral legitimacy and Party Supremacy

A cross-national empirical study carried out by Onapajo and Babalola (2022) on the comparison within West Africa of party supremacy led to the finding that although Ghana has a stronger electoral legitimacy claim than Nigeria, the two regimes share intra-party deformations as what negatively weakens their democratic status. Based on Afrobarometer and reports on national election observation (2016-2020) data, they found that the level of support among the population in the parties was closely linked to the attitude to the fairness of the selection of candidates. This has created a culture of voter apathy and political alienation in Nigeria whereby party supremacy has resulted.

The 2023 general elections of the Fourth Republic voters register the lowest number of votes in the course of the election turnout in Nigeria as the campaigns which were extracted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023) revealed that only 26.7 percent of the total population participated in the elections with post-election surveys denoting distrust in the party processes as the core reason behind non-participation (Okoye, 2023).

In Ghana, the total turnout in the 2020 presidential results was about 79 percent (ECG, 2021). The action of this drop in youth membership, however, is becoming a source of concern, and disillusionment of perceived entrenchment of old political elites and absence of an effective intra-party reform was reported in many respondents (Dzisah, 2021).

E. Comparative Gaps and Implications of Theory

Although the comparative literature appreciates the institutional variation between Nigeria and Ghana, not many of them examine comprehensively the impacts of difference in party supremacy in determining the electoral outcomes and democratic consolidation. Much of what already exists is country-based and too shallow in analytic comparison to come up with a reformable institutional leaver or culturally based solutions. This is the gap that the present study will fill by integrating empirical observations made by the electoral commissions, party archives and interview survey data to develop a comparative model of analyzing the translation of internal party dynamics into national politics. In theory, this study combines elite theory and institutional theory in an attempt to understand the failure of formal rules of democracy to control informal power of elites in presidential systems in Africa.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The research topic is designed in the form of comparative qualitative research study with roots in a case study methodology. It is a case study on Nigeria and Ghana as purposively selected case study in West Africa because the two countries share a similar political system (presidential democracy), possess strong parallels in terms of history and have different patterns of democratic consolidation. The goal is not generalizable the findings at the African sub-continent level but to present a theory informed, empirical based, comparison of the institutional effects of party supremacy on presidential elections in two most influential Republics in the region.

B. Methods and Rationale

Since the focus of the study is on the elite behavior, dynamics of institutions, and processes within the party, a qualitative method can ensure a more profound investigation of meanings, structures, and political practices that cannot be effectively explained by quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This strategy favors the research of secret sources of power, and the informal networks and belief concerning supremacy of parties. Data Sources In conducting this study both primary and secondary data are utilized:

a) Primary Data

Key informant interviews (n=30): The interviewees will be high ranking party members, electoral commission personnel, political analysts, civil society monitors, and former presidential candidates, who, between the two countries, have previously tried their luck in the polls. The interviews were semi-structured in order to be both deep and open.

The official sources are party constitutions, the patterns of the main election, the list of candidates, and the reports of the national election commissions.

b) Secondary Data

To accompany or corroborate interview data, academic journals and policy briefs, reports of election observers (ECOWAS, AU, EU), media analysis, and Afrobarometer datasets were also used.

C. Sampling Technique

The participants were chosen on a purposive sampling basis and above all knew the inner workings of the party and the processes of how, or who is chosen to represent the party as a presidential candidate. We tried to have a balanced representation between the two major parties per country, APC and PDP in Nigeria and NPP and NDC in Ghana and also through electoral and civil society institutions.

D. Data Collection Procedures

The fieldwork was run in June of 2023, and 2024 through February. The interviews took the form of virtual and face-to-face. The need to get the ethical approval of the research ethic committee of a host institution in Nigeria was sought, and informed consent was obtained on all individuals. Transcriptions of interviews (solicited) were made verbatim.

E. Reliability and Validity

In a bid to increase validity, the triangulation was used among the data sources, interviews, official documents, and secondary literature. A few respondents had their interpretation done under membership checking to ascertain the right responses to the interpretative accountings. The consistency of the themes was confirmed as a case of reliability, whereby inter-coder agreement determined by assessing two independent coders on how the 20 percent data would be reviewed. 3.6Data Analysis

Data was coded and categorized with the help of NVivo 14, which involved the use of thematic analysis. A hybrid method was applied: deductive coding was performed concerning the research questions and theoretical framework (elite theory and institutional theory). Inductive coding was applied to derive emergent themes using data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). We have developed comparative matrices to compare similarities and differences between the Nigerian and the Ghanaian cases.

F. Limitations

The research notes the possible shortcomings which include:

- Restrictions to access to high political officials who are considered as elite.
- Self-reporting bias, especially on such sensitized topics as godfatherism and party financing.
- Variation in availability of data in Nigeria and Ghana particularly on official documents of parties.

They were counteracted by the cross-validation of claims with the help of multiple sources and embedding discoveries with the context of the bigger trends of electoral as well as institutional patterns.

IV. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

A. Party Internal Organization and Possession of Power

There is shift in the organizational structure between the political parties in the two countries Nigeria and Ghana. Such a situation is common in Nigeria where party leaders especially the national executive and power brokers strongly dominate the process of making decisions to an extent of marginalizing constitutional processes. Electronic interviews held with members of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and People Democratic party (PDP) show that intraparty processes like ward congresses and primary election committees are often averted or compromised. Although the procedural rules mentioned perfect consensus, primaries, and equal plays, the observer saw that the role of the national leader is the key; delegates are the mere pieces of rubber (Interview, Abuja, 2023). Such statements can be confirmed by the INEC (2023) reports and election observers, who have reported procedural irregularities and elite imposition in regard to presidential primaries. In comparison, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Ghana show a relatively higher level of observance of internal practice with more frequent national Congresses and tight contested primaries. Nevertheless, the prominence of party executives in determining the winners of the primaries is posed as a serious challenge even in Ghana as they would nominate candidates through screening, exorbitant filing fees, and tacit support of compliant aspirants. One of the past presidential aspirants of the NDC observed: And it is not that the people are choosing who they want; it is that the party leadership feels he or she can win elections or has resources to organize a campaign. (Interview, Accra, 2023)

B. Financialization and Monetization of Primaries

Nigerian and Ghanaian respondents admitted that the monetization of internal parties was increasing, though in Nigeria, monetization of the process was more evident. In Ghana the filing is not very clear but through the filing fee is quite high. In Nigeria, there is an inducement of delegates financially, godfatherism, as also called, auctioning of tickets. In both countries, according to the data of the survey conducted by Gyampo (2022) and Ezeibe et al. (2021), more than 70 percent of the party givers are confident that financial capacity is a decisive factor in presidential primaries. According to the interviewees in Nigeria, the average delegate was given up to 50,000 ₦ 100,000 (65 000 130) during the APC presidential primaries and PDP presidential primaries. In Ghana, this has less direct effect on vote-buying, but the party financiers have informal, but implied control over aspirants by way of their sponsorship, and this brings about a lack of internal competitiveness within a party.

C. Godfatherism and Elite Imposition

The culture of having the elite impose candidate has been caused by the centralization of power on the elite persons, particularly in Nigeria. According to former aspiring agents and civil society activists, the decision regarding who should be the presidential candidate is usually achieved in closed doors, where the top financiers sit and hold discussions with the top party officials in the country. As an example, the 2023 APC primary that led to Bola Ahmed Tinubu being declared the winner was usually looked upon as a foregone conclusion because of his political clout and wealth. On the same note, the candidature of Atiku Abubakar as a PDP rule more of an elite agreement than grassroots dynamism (Okoye, 2023). In Ghana, party rules have some degree of transparency and accountability though the elites also have a say. The 2020 NDC primary that led to a reappearance of the candidate John Mahama was reported by observers as being free, but of high monetization (Drah & Osei, 2021).

D. Electoral Legitimacy and the Perception of the Voter

According to Afrobarometer and post-election reports, it has been demonstrated that there is a legitimacy crisis in Nigeria with 26.7 percent participation in the 2023 elections, this is the lowest voter turn up since 1999 (INEC, 2023). Respondents in the civil society organizations trace this to rigged party primaries, lack of credible choice and elite recycling. Though trust has withered among youth and inexperienced voters in Ghana, voter participation in the 2020 presidential race in the country was higher (79%) (ECG, 2021). Most of the youth in Ghana were discontented with the reign of old politicians and the sense of being shut out in the political arena.

E. Policies, Procedures and Litigation

Electoral Commission in Ghana has the constitutional independence and has laid down strict guidelines on how political parties operate including the transparency in the registration and financing of political candidates. The interviewees commended Commission in the provision of open primaries and little executive interference. On the other hand, the legal mandate of Nigeria (INEC) does not include the regulation of internal party primaries other than monitoring them. As a high-ranking INEC officer

owned up, as follows: We are spectators who do not have teeth. Whenever we report violations, they overlook us until we appear in courts. Such regulatory lapse is a contributive factor toward impunity and endemic capture of political parties by the elites. Overview of Empirical findings

Summary of Key Empirical Insights

Theme	Nigeria	Ghana
Internal Democracy	Compromised politically	competitive albeit elite instigated
Financialization	So deep rooted and corrupt	Monetized but more regulated
Elite Imposition	Vulgarity (godfatherism)	Growing but more delicate
Voter Trust and Turnout	Low legitimacy, 26.7% turnout (2023)	Higher legitimacy, 79% turnout (2020)
Institutional Regulation	poor INEC oversight	vigorous Electoral Commission actions

Source: Authors

F. Discussion of Findings

The study results indicate that, though the two countries Nigeria and Ghana are presidential democracies and operate within a multiparty system, the practice of party supremacy in these two countries differs vastly with respect to its structure, degree and influence on democracy. These findings are discussed below through the prism of the Elite Theory and the Institutional Theory; and their consequences with regard to democratic consolidation in West Africa are evaluated.

a) Party Supremacy as an Instrument of Elite capture

This empirical investigation is consistent with the main thesis of the Elite Theory, the domination of the internal organization of the party by political elites to preserve their interests and ensure that the main power can be easily obtained by them. The party supremacy is implemented through extremely personalized party leadership, financial patronage and informal contracts between godfathers and oligarchs in Nigeria (Ezeibe et al., 2021; Okonkwo & Agbakwuru, 2023). The nomination of presidential aspirants has become a daily occurrence where candidates like Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar emerged in 2023 without due process of party constitutions.

The party supremacy in Ghana that also makes the central executives powerful is more less informal consequential in form and norm. The undermining of party congresses and electoral colleges is still visible but is fast reversed by monetization of the candidate selection processes and endorsements of candidates by elites (Gyampo, 2022). In Ghana, therefore, the control by elites is more clandestine, but less influential in determining the electoral decisions and the leadership possibilities. These results confirm the matter suggested by Onapajo and Babalola (2022) according to which elite consolidation within the political parties can be considered a long-lasting obstacle to democratic deepening in presidential systems throughout the African continent.

b) Moderating Institutions and structures

The case of Nigeria and Ghana testifies to the explanatory value of Institutional Theory. The stronger party laws, electoral rules and enforcement standards have checked some element of party dominance overload in Ghana. The Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG) has a proactive governing role in monitoring interior party elections, being transparent in the registration of candidates, and implementing campaign financing disclosure (Drah & Osei, 2021). In Nigeria, such is not so since INEC has a limited mandate making it an observer during party primaries. Its failure at enforcing internal democracy and penalizing parties on violations has facilitated the processes or domination of the elite. However, it is a weakness defined within institutions which fuels further the informal power networks emphasized by Elite Theory leading to its being a vacuum of accountability that undermines electoral action. Consequently, the results indicate that in countries where institutional limitations are non-existent or lax, party domination serves as a channel to the decline of democracy.

c) Democratic Legitimacy, Voter Perception and Voter Turnout

Part of the most interesting discoveries is the relationship between the supremacy of parties and election legitimacy. Some of these reasons such as widespread discontent with the imposition of candidates, transparency, and money politics in elections in Nigeria, led to the lowest recorded voter turnout (26.7%) in the 2023 general election (INEC, 2023). Survey and post election reports indicates that the voters are progressively losing confidence in elections as they are perceived to be a show of the elite whose fate has been written. In Ghana, the turnout in elections is high (79 percent in 2020), but as qualitative evidence demonstrates, citizens are increasingly losing their trust in the re-election of the same candidates, as well as the control of old elite groups. This loss in faith of people is aligned to the general declination of the trust in the political parties and leadership renewal processes as reported by Dzisah (2021) and Afrobarometer surveys which showcase the loss of trust in the process but at

a slow but discernible rate. The above findings serve to support the thesis that party hegemony, which is misused, directly contravenes participatory democracy and wins the electorate off, particularly when the formal choice of the electorate is restricted by elite preselection.

d) *Comparative Dimensions and Scope of Structural Reform Potential*

By comparison, the semi-institutionalized model of party supremacy in Ghana does not seem to destroy democratic stability as it has been the case in Nigeria where parton acts as the driving force behind the system. In both countries the elite control is present, although there are vast differences in intensity of institutional mediation. Ghana shows that peaceful, orderly, internal democracy and control powers can balance the power of elites, but Nigeria exemplifies the possibilities of the unregulated hegemony of party, which creates a politically cynical, electorally disengaged, and self-destructive party. This corresponds to Gyampo (2022) and Adeoye (2023) suggestion that internal party re-alignment when under independent regulatory regimes is sound enough to maintain democratic coordination among the elites without compromising democratic themes of participation. Moreover, as the findings indicate, financial disclosure, grass root participation and judicial monitoring of the party primaries possess important lever to the lessening of the drawback of supremacy by the parties. Production and Theoretical Moment

The results confirm the two-theoretical nature of the study. Elite Theory shows how the power is concentrated in the hands of the party financiers, national executives, godfathers in politics, who use internal machinations to pursue selfish interest. Institutional Theory however explains how the regulating atmospheres either negate or supportive of this domination amongst the elite. The formal rules exist in both countries, and in the case of Ghana, where the institutions are powerful, they can restrain elite power, whereas in the case of Nigeria where the institutions are weak or captured, systemic failure in democracy exists.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how party domination has affected presidential elections in Nigeria and Ghana with a comparison and a factual account based on the perspective of the Elite Theory and Institutional Theory. The results emphasize that although the two countries share in features of centralized parties and elite domination, the extent and influence of the party predominance is markedly varied. Party supremacy in Nigeria is typified by the existence of godfathers existing within a system of financial dominance, low internal democracy and system wide capture by elites which has resulted in low electoral legitimacy of parties, disillusioned electorate and poor attendance at voting. The election of 2023 was a symbol of this democratic erosion, in which internal party stakeholder ship was extremely secret and closed.

In Ghana, however, there is a more organized and institutionalized party system and comparatively more complied by the internal regulations and the check of the Electoral Commission. But an increasing commercialization of internal primaries and manipulation by elites indicate something amiss in an ominous direction toward similar forms of political centralization in Nigeria. These two cases demonstrate the harmful effects of uncontrolled party hegemony on the electoral competition, transparency, and active governance, thus endangering the process of democratic consolidation in West Africa.

Notably, the results confirm that it is not only strong parties but, in fact, strong institutions that are needed to curb the excesses of the elites and to assuage the integrity of presidential elections.

A. Recommendations

In order to turn around the adverse effects of party supremacy and enhance better presidential elections in Nigeria and Ghana the following are the measures that could just be taken:

a) *Enhance Legal and Institutional Party Primary Review*

The Electoral Act of Nigeria needs to be revamped to give the INEC futher powers to conduct more controls and implement and enforce the element of internal democracy in political parties such as the power to cancel non-open primaries and punish breach of it.

- The Electoral Commission in Ghana has got to institutionalize financial checks, vetting of candidates, particularly in places where the competition is likely to be skewed due to elite sponsorship.

b) *Advance Party Democracy within the Party 3*

- The law should compel parties to publish before and after primary election campaign-regulating directions, the names of their delegates, and their varies finances. Capping of campaign expenditure should be included in internal elections so as to minimize the role of money on internal elections and make it more equal among candidates.

c) *Incorporate Intra Party Dispute Settlement Procedures Into Institutions*

- Devise and put in place a system of independent intra-party ombudsmen in political parties (under the scrutiny of electoral authorities) that will intervene in disputes that may arise as a result of imposition and inconsistency of selection of candidates.

d) *Improve on Civic Education and Engagement of the Population.*

- National orientation agencies and civil society organizations ought to closely pursue voter education care to foster the pillar of democracy in the whole country by supporting the cause of inner party democracy as a foundation pillar of national democracy.
- Plat forms ought to be established that allow the grassroots members of the party to have an impact on policy and emergence of candidates especially women and youth groups.

e) *Enhance Payment of Political Financing*

- Institute government-subsidized yet merit-based campaign finance in order to even the playing field, especially in favour of those aspirants who are credible but do not have the backing of the elites.
- Strictly control or prohibit the outside/outside money on the inside primaries, regardless of whether they are anonymous or foreign or even domestic.

f) *Promote Regional Learning and Best Practice*

- West African dialogues on party reforms should be held by ECOWAS and AU in which Nigeria will get to learn the institutional structures of Ghana and vice versa as Ghana can learn the recent legislative initiatives of Nigeria on political party accountability.

B. Final Reflection

The issue of party supremacy is not really undemocratic in itself. Nevertheless, adopted in order to entrench elite interest and discourage participatory choice, it poses a severe danger to democracy. This paper suggests a realigning of party authority, which would be based on openness, participation, and institutional control. It is only these reforms that Nigerians and Ghanaians can so far have established a democratic gain and to be in a position to know that presidential elections represent the sheer will of the populace.

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