

Electoral Governance in Africa at a Turning Point: Challenges, Reforms, and Democratic Outcomes in Cameroon and Ghana

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doi:10.63593/LE.2788-7049.2026.06.001

Abstract

This article examines electoral governance in Africa through a comparative analysis of Cameroon and Ghana, with a particular focus on the challenges, reform trajectories, and democratic outcomes associated with electoral processes. Grounded in the normative framework of international and regional human rights law, the study interrogates the extent to which electoral systems in both countries comply with standards set out in instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Adopting a qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative research methodology, the study analyzes constitutional provisions, electoral laws, institutional practices, and scholarly literature to assess the effectiveness of electoral governance frameworks. The analysis is further informed by Rule of Law Theory and Utilitarian Theory, which together provide a dual lens for evaluating both the legality and societal impact of electoral processes. The findings reveal significant disparities between the two countries. Ghana demonstrates relatively stronger electoral governance, characterized by institutional independence, credible reforms, and peaceful transfers of power, thereby contributing to democratic consolidation. In contrast, Cameroon's electoral system is constrained by limited institutional autonomy, electoral irregularities, and weak implementation of reforms, resulting in diminished public trust and contested democratic outcomes. The study further finds that while both states have ratified key international and regional instruments, compliance remains uneven, particularly in terms of practical enforcement. The article concludes that effective electoral governance requires more than formal legal frameworks; it demands genuine institutional independence, political will, and alignment with human rights standards. It recommends comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening electoral institutions, enhancing transparency, and promoting inclusive political participation. The study contributes to scholarship by integrating legal-normative and outcome-based analyses to provide a more holistic understanding of electoral governance and democratic legitimacy in Africa.

Keywords: Cameroon and Ghana, democratic outcomes, electoral challenges, electoral governance, electoral reforms, and turning point

1. Introduction

The conduct of elections is not merely a political exercise but a legal process deeply embedded in international human rights law. Central to modern democratic theory is the principle that electoral governance must safeguard the effective realization of political rights, particularly the right to participate in public affairs, to vote, and to be elected. These rights are expressly guaranteed under Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), and Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.¹

¹ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. (1981). Article 13. Organization of African Unity.

Collectively, these instruments impose binding and persuasive obligations on states to ensure that elections are free, fair, transparent, and genuinely reflective of the will of the people. Notwithstanding this normative framework, a persistent disjunction exists between international legal standards and electoral practice in several African states. Although most states formally guarantee political participation, the practical realization of these rights is frequently constrained by institutional fragility, politicized electoral management bodies, limited accountability mechanisms, and episodic electoral violence. The UN Human Rights Committee has clarified that Article 25 of the ICCPR requires not only formal recognition of political rights but also their effective enjoyment through impartial administration and genuine electoral competition.¹ Yet, in many African jurisdictions, electoral governance structures fall short of these minimum standards, thereby undermining both democratic legitimacy and human rights compliance.²

Within this broader context, electoral governance in Africa reveals divergent trajectories, particularly when comparing Ghana and Cameroon. Ghana has developed a relatively resilient system characterized by institutional continuity, electoral multiparty elections, and repeated peaceful transfers of power.

Although not without challenges relating to perceptions of electoral management neutrality and administrative constraints, Ghana's electoral framework has progressively strengthened adherence to constitutional and international standards of political participation.³ By contrast, Cameroon exemplifies a more constrained model of electoral governance, where formal constitutional guarantees coexist with persistent concerns regarding institutional independence, electoral transparency, and political competitiveness. Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics, electoral processes have frequently been marked by allegations of irregularities, opposition marginalization, and declining public trust in electoral institutions. These conditions raise significant questions regarding Cameroon's compliance with its obligations under Article 25 of the ICCPR and Article 13 of the ACHPR, particularly the requirement of genuine and equal political participation.⁴

Against this backdrop, this article undertakes a comparative legal analysis of electoral governance in Ghana and Cameroon within the normative framework of international human rights law. It interrogates the extent to which electoral institutions and practices in both states align with binding and interpretive standards governing political participation. The central argument advanced is that while electoral reforms are a necessary condition for democratic consolidation, they are insufficient in the absence of robust institutional independence, credible electoral administration, and genuine political competition.

By juxtaposing Ghana's relatively progressive electoral trajectory with Cameroon's more contested experience, the study contributes to broader debates on democratization, constitutional governance, and human rights compliance in Africa. It further demonstrates that electoral governance must be understood not only as a political mechanism but as a legally regulated human rights process, the integrity of which is fundamental to the legitimacy of democratic order.

2. Conceptual Clarification

For purposes of conceptual precision and doctrinal clarity, this study draws on definitions from multiple authoritative dictionaries commonly used in legal and academic research, including *Black's Law Dictionary*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the *Cambridge Dictionary*, and the *Collins English Dictionary*. These sources are relied upon for their consistency in legal, linguistic, and research-oriented definitions.

2.1 Electoral Governance

The concept of electoral governance is not directly defined in standard dictionaries; however, its components are well captured. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "governance" as the act or manner of governing, while *Black's Law Dictionary* describes it as the exercise of authority and control over public administration and legal systems.⁵ Similarly, *Cambridge Dictionary* defines governance as the way in which organizations or countries are managed at the highest level.⁶

Drawing from these meanings, electoral governance refers to the legal and institutional framework through

¹ UN Human Rights Committee. (1996). *General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in public affairs and the right to vote)*. United Nations.

² Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

³ Debrah, E. (2016). The Electoral Commission of Ghana and the administration of elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 25–45.

⁴ Fombad, C. M. (2012). Cameroon's emergency powers: A recipe for (un)constitutional dictatorship? *Journal of African Law*, 56(1), 62–81.

⁵ *Black's Law Dictionary* (11th ed.). (2019). Thomson Reuters.

⁶ *Cambridge Dictionary*. (2020). Cambridge University Press.

which electoral processes are organized, regulated, and administered, including rule-making, implementation, and adjudication.

2.2 Electoral Challenges

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a “challenge” as a difficult task or problem that requires effort to deal with, while the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes it as a call to dispute or contest.¹ *Black’s Law Dictionary* further situates it in legal context as an objection or formal contestation of a process or decision.

Accordingly, electoral challenges refer to the institutional, legal, and political obstacles that hinder the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections, including malpractice, weak institutions, and political interference.

2.3 Electoral Reforms

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines “reform” as to improve a system by changing it, while *Collins English Dictionary* describes it as to make changes in something in order to improve it.²

Black’s Law Dictionary adds a legal dimension by defining reform as the correction or amendment of defective laws or systems. Thus, electoral reforms refer to intentional legal, institutional, and administrative changes designed to improve the transparency, credibility, and effectiveness of electoral systems.

2.4 Democratic Outcomes

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “democracy” as government by the people, while *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describes it as a system in which power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or through representatives.³ The term “outcome” is defined as a final result or consequence.⁴

Therefore, democratic outcomes refer to the results and consequences of electoral processes, including legitimacy of leadership, political stability, citizen trust, and representation of the popular will.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative research design to examine electoral governance in Africa, with particular focus on Cameroon and Ghana. The methodological approach is grounded in legal analysis and comparative inquiry, enabling a systematic evaluation of the relationship between electoral governance frameworks and democratic outcomes within the broader context of international human rights law.

3.1 Research Design

The research is primarily doctrinal in nature, involving the critical examination of legal texts, institutional frameworks, and normative standards governing electoral processes. Doctrinal legal research facilitates the interpretation, synthesis, and critical evaluation of legal principles derived from statutes, case law, and international instruments.⁵ This approach is particularly appropriate for assessing compliance with established human rights norms and constitutional provisions regulating elections.

In addition, the study employs a comparative analytical approach, which enables the systematic comparison of electoral governance systems in Cameroon and Ghana. Comparative legal methodology is essential in identifying patterns, divergences, and causal explanations across jurisdictions, particularly in studies involving institutional performance and democratic outcomes.⁶ This approach enhances the explanatory depth of the study by situating national experiences within broader theoretical and normative frameworks.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study relies on secondary data, derived from authoritative legal and scholarly sources. These include:

- Primary legal materials, such as national constitutions, electoral laws, and relevant international and regional human rights instruments, including the UDHR, ICCPR, and ACHPR;
- Judicial decisions and official reports, particularly those addressing electoral disputes, institutional reforms, and governance practices;

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2020). Merriam-Webster Inc.

² Collins English Dictionary. (2020). HarperCollins Publishers.

³ Oxford English Dictionary (online ed.). (2020). Oxford University Press. Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Hutchinson, T., & Duncan, N. (2012). Defining and describing what we do: Doctrinal legal research. *Deakin Law Review*, 17(1), 83–119.

⁶ Siems, M. (2018). *Comparative law* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, policy reports, and publications from international organizations and electoral observation bodies.

The use of diverse and credible sources ensures both doctrinal rigor and contextual richness in analyzing electoral governance systems.¹

3.3 Method of Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis and comparative legal reasoning to analyze the data. Legal texts and institutional practices are systematically examined to assess their conformity with international human rights standards, particularly those governing political participation and electoral integrity. Content analysis allows for the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and gaps within legal and institutional frameworks.²

The comparative method facilitates a structured evaluation of similarities and differences between Cameroon and Ghana, enabling the study to move beyond descriptive accounts toward explanatory analysis of divergent democratic outcomes.³ Furthermore, the analysis is guided by the theoretical frameworks of Rule of Law Theory and Utilitarian Theory. While the rule of law perspective evaluates adherence to legality, transparency, and institutional independence, the utilitarian approach assesses the broader societal consequences of electoral governance, including political stability, public trust, and democratic legitimacy.⁴

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Rule of Law Theory and Utilitarian Theory. These frameworks provide a normative and analytical basis for examining electoral governance and its implications for democratic outcomes in Cameroon and Ghana.

4.1 Rule of Law Theory

Rule of Law Theory constitutes a foundational principle in constitutionalism and democratic governance, emphasizing that all persons and institutions, including the state, are subject to and accountable under the law. At its core, the rule of law requires legality, equality before the law, legal certainty, and the protection of fundamental rights.⁵ In the context of electoral governance, the rule of law mandates that electoral processes be conducted in accordance with established legal frameworks that are transparent, predictable, and impartially enforced.

From a human rights perspective, the rule of law is intrinsically linked to the protection of political participation rights as enshrined in international legal instruments such as the ICCPR and the African Charter. The effective realization of these rights depends on the existence of independent electoral management bodies, impartial dispute resolution mechanisms, and adherence to constitutional provisions governing elections. Where electoral institutions are subject to political interference or fail to operate within the confines of the law, the legitimacy of electoral outcomes is fundamentally undermined.

In comparative terms, Rule of Law Theory provides a critical lens through which to assess the divergence between Ghana and Cameroon. Ghana's relatively stable electoral system reflects a stronger institutional commitment to legal accountability and procedural compliance, whereas Cameroon's electoral governance challenges-particularly concerns regarding institutional independence and enforcement-suggest a deficit in the operationalization of rule of law principles. Thus, this theory enables an evaluation of how adherence to legal norms shapes electoral credibility and democratic legitimacy.

4.2 Utilitarian Theory

Utilitarian Theory, most prominently associated with thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, is premised on the principle that actions and institutions should be evaluated based on their capacity to produce the greatest good for the greatest number.⁶ Within the context of governance, utilitarianism emphasizes outcomes, efficiency, and the overall welfare implications of political and legal arrangements.

Applied to electoral governance, Utilitarian Theory shifts analytical focus from formal legal compliance to the substantive consequences of electoral systems. It interrogates whether electoral processes, regardless of their formal structure, effectively promote political stability, public trust, social cohesion, and inclusive participation.

¹ Epstein, L., & King, G. (2002). The rules of inference. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 69(1), 1–133.

² Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Sage Publications.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Fuller, L. L. (1969). *The morality of law*. Yale University Press.

⁵ Dicey, A. V. (1885). *Introduction to the study of the law of the constitution*. Macmillan.

⁶ Bentham, J. (1789). *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*. Oxford University Press.

An electoral system that formally complies with legal standards but produces widespread dissatisfaction, exclusion, or instability may be considered deficient from a utilitarian standpoint.

In the African context, this perspective is particularly relevant in assessing the practical impact of electoral reforms. Ghana's electoral system, for instance, may be viewed as comparatively successful not only because of its adherence to legal norms but also due to its capacity to foster peaceful transitions of power and broader societal acceptance of electoral outcomes. Conversely, Cameroon's electoral challenges may be understood as producing suboptimal societal outcomes, including diminished public trust, political disengagement, and periodic tensions.

While Rule of Law Theory emphasizes procedural integrity and legal compliance, Utilitarian Theory foregrounds the consequences and societal impact of electoral governance. The integration of these two frameworks allows for a more comprehensive analysis of electoral systems, bridging the gap between normative legal standards and practical democratic outcomes. In this study, the rule of law provides the benchmark for assessing institutional legitimacy and compliance with human rights obligations, while utilitarianism evaluates the extent to which electoral governance contributes to broader democratic stability and public welfare.

By combining these perspectives, the study advances a dual analytical approach that not only interrogates whether electoral processes are conducted in accordance with established legal norms but also whether they produce outcomes that enhance democratic legitimacy and societal well-being in Cameroon and Ghana.

5. Legal Framework for Electoral Governance in Cameroon and Ghana

Electoral governance in Cameroon and Ghana is anchored in a multi-layered legal framework comprising international human rights instruments, regional norms, and domestic constitutional and statutory provisions. This framework establishes the legal standards governing political participation, electoral administration, and democratic accountability. Both Cameroon and Ghana are parties to several of these instruments and are therefore legally bound to uphold the principles of free, fair, and credible elections. However, the effectiveness of these legal regimes depends not only on their formal ratification but also on their implementation and enforcement.¹

6. International Legal Framework

At the global level, electoral governance is primarily governed by international human rights law, which recognizes political participation as a fundamental right. Both Cameroon and Ghana have ratified key international instruments and are therefore bound by their provisions.

6.1 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides that everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. It further establishes that the will of the people shall be expressed through periodic and genuine elections conducted by universal and equal suffrage and held by secret ballot. Although the UDHR is not a binding treaty, it has attained the status of customary international law and serves as a foundational normative framework guiding democratic governance.² Both Cameroon and Ghana, as member states of the United Nations, are expected to uphold its principles.

6.2 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)*

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides a binding legal framework for electoral governance. Article 25 guarantees the right of every citizen to vote and to be elected in genuine periodic elections conducted by universal suffrage and secret ballot. Both Cameroon and Ghana have ratified the ICCPR, thereby undertaking binding obligations to ensure these rights are effectively realized. The UN Human Rights Committee, in General Comment No. 25 (1996), emphasizes that states must guarantee not only formal rights but also practical conditions for their exercise, including impartial electoral administration and equal political participation.³

6.3 *Other Relevant International Standards*

Both Cameroon and Ghana are also parties to other international instruments reinforcing non-discrimination in political participation. These include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These treaties impose binding obligations on states to eliminate discriminatory barriers to political

¹ Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

² Shaw, M. N. (2017). *International law* (8th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

³ UN Human Rights Committee. (1996). *General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in public affairs and the right to vote)*. UN Women. (2014). *Women's participation in political processes*.

participation and promote inclusivity in governance.¹

7. Regional Legal Framework

At the regional level, Cameroon and Ghana are bound by African human rights and governance instruments that reinforce democratic norms and electoral standards.

7.1 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)

Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) guarantees every citizen the right to participate freely in the government of their country. Both Cameroon and Ghana have ratified the African Charter, thereby assuming binding obligations to ensure political participation in accordance with democratic principles. The African Commission has further interpreted this provision to require credible elections and equal access to political processes.²

7.2 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007)

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) provides a comprehensive legal framework for electoral governance in Africa. Both Cameroon and Ghana have ratified the ACDEG, committing themselves to principles such as the establishment of independent electoral bodies, transparency in electoral processes, and democratic accountability. The Charter represents a significant evolution in regional efforts to institutionalize democratic norms and prevent unconstitutional changes of government.³

7.3 Sub-Regional Framework

Ghana, as a member of ECOWAS, is bound by the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), which sets detailed standards for free, fair, and transparent elections, including zero tolerance for unconstitutional accession to power. This Protocol has played a significant role in shaping electoral governance in West Africa.⁴

Cameroon, while not a member of ECOWAS, is subject to broader African Union commitments and regional norms that promote democratic governance. However, the absence of a strong sub-regional enforcement mechanism comparable to ECOWAS may partly explain differences in reform outcomes.

8. Domestic Legal Framework

In this section, both Cameroon and Ghana legal frameworks shall be examined.

8.1 Cameroon

Electoral governance in Cameroon is governed by the Constitution of 1996 (as amended) and the Electoral Code of 2012. These instruments provide for political pluralism, electoral procedures, and citizen participation in governance.

The creation of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) represents an attempt to institutionalize electoral administration. However, concerns persist regarding its independence and effectiveness, particularly in relation to executive influence and electoral credibility.⁵ While Cameroon's legal framework reflects its international and regional obligations, the gap between law and practice remains a major challenge.

8.2 Ghana

Ghana's electoral governance framework is anchored in the 1992 Constitution, which guarantees democratic governance and establishes the Electoral Commission under Article 45 as an independent body responsible for conducting elections.

Ghana's legal regime is complemented by electoral regulations and judicial oversight mechanisms that enhance transparency and accountability. The Supreme Court plays a significant role in adjudicating electoral disputes, thereby reinforcing constitutionalism and the rule of law.⁶ This institutional arrangement reflects Ghana's

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2010). *Human rights and elections: A handbook on the legal, technical and human rights aspects of elections*.

² Viljoen, F. (2012). *International human rights law in Africa* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

³ Aye, J. R. A. (2017). The politics of elections in Ghana. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(2), 3–30.

⁴ Hartmann, C. (2016). ECOWAS and the restoration of democracy in The Gambia. *Africa Spectrum*, 51(1), 85–99.

⁵ Fombad, C. M., & Ayele, D. (2016). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: A critical analysis. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 16(2), 381–405.

⁶ Prempeh, H. K. (2008). Africa's constitutionalism revival: False start or new dawn? *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 5(3), 469–506.

relatively strong compliance with its international and regional obligations.

8.3 Assessment of the Legal Framework

Both Cameroon and Ghana have ratified and domesticated key international and regional legal instruments, thereby committing themselves to uphold democratic principles and electoral integrity. However, the comparative analysis reveals that formal ratification does not automatically translate into effective compliance.

Ghana demonstrates a higher degree of alignment with both the letter and spirit of its legal obligations, as reflected in credible elections and democratic stability. In contrast, Cameroon exhibits a persistent gap between formal legal commitments and actual implementation, raising concerns about the effectiveness of its compliance with binding human rights standards.¹ This disparity highlights a critical insight: the strength of electoral governance lies not only in legal frameworks but in their enforcement, institutional integrity, and political context.

9. Challenges And Reforms in Electoral Governance in Cameroon and Ghana

Electoral governance in Africa stands at a critical juncture where the promise of democratic consolidation is persistently tested by institutional weaknesses, political contestation, and uneven reform trajectories. While elections are widely held across the continent, their credibility and capacity to produce legitimate democratic outcomes remain deeply contested. Cameroon and Ghana, in this regard, present contrasting yet instructive experiences—one reflecting enduring structural constraints and the other illustrating gradual institutional strengthening. This section interrogates the principal challenges undermining electoral governance in both countries and critically evaluates the scope, nature, and effectiveness of reform efforts.

9.1 Challenges in Electoral Governance

Electoral governance in both Cameroon and Ghana is shaped by a range of structural, institutional, and political challenges that significantly affect the credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes. While the nature and intensity of these challenges differ across the two countries, they collectively reveal systemic weaknesses that undermine compliance with both constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards on political participation. These challenges are consistent with broader patterns observed across emerging democracies, where formal electoral institutions often coexist with informal practices that weaken democratic accountability.²

9.1.1 Institutional Independence of Electoral Management Bodies

A central challenge in electoral governance is the lack of institutional independence, particularly of electoral management bodies (EMBs). In Cameroon, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) has been widely criticized for its perceived proximity to the executive, raising doubts about its impartiality and credibility.³ This institutional weakness undermines the integrity of electoral processes and erodes public confidence in election outcomes.

In Ghana, although the Electoral Commission has historically enjoyed a stronger reputation for independence, it has faced increasing scrutiny over allegations of political bias, leadership disputes, and administrative inefficiencies.⁴ This underscores the broader challenge of maintaining both actual and perceived neutrality of electoral institutions, which is essential for electoral legitimacy.⁵

9.1.2 Electoral Malpractice and Irregularities

Electoral malpractice remains a persistent challenge, particularly in Cameroon. Allegations of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, irregular voter registration processes, and lack of transparency in vote tabulation have frequently characterized elections, often resulting in contested outcomes and opposition boycotts.⁶ Such practices are inconsistent with international standards governing free and fair elections and undermine the effective realization of political rights.⁷

While Ghana has experienced comparatively fewer systemic irregularities, disputes over voter registers, electoral

¹ Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

² Schedler, A. (2002). The menu of manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 36–50.

³ Fombad, C. M. (2012). Cameroon's emergency powers: A recipe for (un)constitutional dictatorship? *Journal of African Law*, 56(1), 62–81.

⁴ Debrah, E. (2016). The Electoral Commission of Ghana and the administration of elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 25–45.

⁵ Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Konings, P. (2011). The politics of neoliberal reforms in Africa: State and civil society in Cameroon. *African Studies Review*, 54(2), 167–170.

⁷ Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral malpractice*. Oxford University Press.

logistics, and collation processes have occasionally raised concerns about transparency and credibility.¹ These issues highlight that even relatively stable electoral systems require continuous institutional strengthening.

9.1.3 Limited Political Competition and Opposition Marginalization

In Cameroon, restricted political space and opposition marginalization significantly constrain electoral competitiveness. The dominance of the ruling party, coupled with administrative and legal barriers, limits meaningful participation and weakens democratic pluralism.² This phenomenon is characteristic of hybrid regimes where elections occur without genuine political contestation.

By contrast, Ghana exhibits a more competitive multiparty system, with relatively open political competition between major parties. However, high levels of political polarization and winner-takes-all dynamics sometimes create tensions that challenge inclusiveness and democratic stability.³

9.1.4 Electoral Violence and Security Concerns

Electoral violence remains a potential threat to democratic stability across Africa. Although its intensity varies, it is often linked to weak institutions, high political stakes, and socio-economic inequalities (Collier & Vicente, 2012; Norris, 2014). Cameroon has experienced episodes of electoral tension and unrest, particularly in politically sensitive and conflict-affected regions.

Ghana, while widely regarded as peaceful, has recorded localized electoral violence and security concerns, particularly during closely contested elections.⁴ These incidents underscore the importance of robust electoral security frameworks and conflict prevention mechanisms.

10. Democratic Outcomes in Cameroon and Ghana

The democratic outcomes of electoral governance provide a critical lens through which the effectiveness of electoral systems can be assessed. Beyond the mere conduct of elections, these outcomes reflect the extent to which electoral processes translate into legitimacy, political stability, citizen participation, and the consolidation of democratic institutions. In the context of Cameroon and Ghana, electoral governance has produced divergent results, shaped by differences in institutional strength, reform implementation, and adherence to democratic norms. A comparative evaluation of these outcomes offers valuable insight into how electoral systems either advance or constrain democratic development.

10.1 Electoral Legitimacy and Credibility

Ghana's electoral system continues to demonstrate relatively high levels of credibility. The 2020 general elections recorded a voter turnout of approximately 78.9%, reflecting strong citizen engagement and confidence in the electoral process. Although the results were contested, the dispute was resolved through the Supreme Court, reinforcing institutional legitimacy and adherence to the rule of law.⁵

In contrast, Cameroon's electoral credibility remains contested, even in its most recent electoral cycle. The 2025 presidential election recorded approximately 8.08 million registered voters, with a turnout of about 57.76% (approximately 4.67 million voters). The incumbent secured roughly 53–54% of the vote, while the leading opposition candidate obtained about 35%. Although these figures indicate a modest improvement compared to the 53.85% turnout recorded in 2018, the election was widely disputed by opposition actors, with concerns raised regarding transparency, electoral administration, and the credibility of the results.⁶

Recent empirical assessments further suggest that public trust in electoral processes in Cameroon remains fragile, with citizens expressing skepticism about the independence of electoral institutions and the fairness of outcomes. Afrobarometer findings reinforce this trend, indicating that a significant proportion of respondents doubt the integrity of elections and the neutrality of electoral management bodies.⁷

10.2 Political Stability and Transfer of Power

Ghana continues to exemplify democratic resilience through regular and peaceful transfers of power between

¹ Aye, J. R. A. (2017). The politics of elections in Ghana. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(2), 3–30.

² Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jockers, H., Kohnert, D., & Nugent, P. (2010). The successful Ghana election of 2008: A convenient myth? *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48(1), 95–115.

⁵ Electoral Commission of Ghana. (2021). *Report on the 2020 general elections*.

⁶ International Crisis Group. (2025). *Cameroon's 2025 presidential election and its implications for democratic governance*.

⁷ Afrobarometer. (2023). *Public attitudes toward democracy and governance in Africa*.

major political parties. Since 2000, multiple transitions have occurred without major conflict, reinforcing political stability and democratic consolidation.¹ These transitions demonstrate the effectiveness of electoral processes as mechanisms for leadership renewal and accountability.

By contrast, Cameroon has experienced prolonged incumbency without meaningful political alternation. Despite regular elections, leadership continuity has persisted for decades, limiting democratic competition and weakening accountability mechanisms. This lack of turnover reduces the capacity of elections to function as instruments of political change.²

10.3 Public Trust and Political Participation

Empirical evidence highlights significant disparities in citizen engagement. Ghana consistently records high voter turnout, with nearly 79% participation in the 2020 elections, reflecting strong public confidence and active civic engagement. The role of civil society organizations and domestic election observers further enhances transparency and trust in the electoral process.³ In Cameroon, however, participation levels are comparatively lower and uneven. The 2020 parliamentary elections recorded turnout below 45%, with significantly reduced participation in conflict-affected Anglophone regions due to insecurity and boycott calls.⁴ Afrobarometer data also indicate declining public trust in electoral institutions, contributing to voter apathy and reduced political participation.⁵

10.4 Democratic Consolidation and Protection of Rights

Ghana's democratic system continues to exhibit progressive institutional consolidation, supported by judicial independence, respect for constitutionalism, and protection of civil liberties. Electoral disputes are typically resolved through legal channels, reinforcing adherence to the rule of law and democratic norms.⁶

In contrast, Cameroon demonstrates characteristics of a hybrid political system, where formal democratic institutions coexist with constraints on political freedoms. Electoral processes have been affected by restrictions on opposition activities, limitations on media freedom, and ongoing security challenges, particularly in the Anglophone regions. These factors undermine compliance with international human rights standards and weaken the overall democratic impact of elections.⁷

11. Reforms in Electoral Governance

To address changes identified, there is need for several reforms to be made. Each shall be examined seriatim.

11.1 Institutional and Administrative Reforms

Ghana has undertaken significant reforms aimed at strengthening electoral administration, including the introduction of biometric voter registration, improvements in electoral logistics, and enhanced transparency in results management. These reforms have contributed to increased public trust and electoral credibility.⁸

Cameroon has also implemented reforms, notably the establishment of ELECAM as an electoral body and periodic adjustments to electoral procedures. However, these reforms have been criticized as insufficient, particularly in addressing concerns about institutional autonomy and executive influence.⁹

11.2 Legal and Procedural Reforms

Legal reforms have been central to efforts to improve electoral governance in both countries. In Ghana, reforms have strengthened electoral dispute resolution mechanisms and enhanced stakeholder participation, contributing to greater electoral transparency and accountability.¹⁰

In Cameroon, while legal reforms have been introduced, they have often failed to address fundamental structural

¹ Cheeseman, N., Lynch, G., & Willis, J. (2020). *The moral economy of elections in Africa: Democracy, voting and virtue*. Cambridge University Press.

² Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

³ Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2015). Africa's waning democratic commitment. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1), 101–113.

⁴ International Crisis Group. (2020). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and the risks to elections*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Prempeh, H. K. (2021). Judicial independence and electoral justice in Ghana. *African Studies Review*, 64(2), 1–20.

⁷ Freedom House. (2023). *Freedom in the world: Cameroon country report*.

⁸ Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2015). Africa's waning democratic commitment. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1), 101–113.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

issues, including the concentration of power and limited checks on electoral authorities, thereby reducing their overall effectiveness.¹

11.3 Role of Civil Society and International Actors

Civil society organizations and international observers have played a crucial role in promoting electoral accountability. In Ghana, civil society engagement has strengthened monitoring, transparency, and public confidence in elections.

In Cameroon, however, civil society influence has been more constrained, and international observation missions, while present, have had limited impact on substantive electoral reforms.² This reflects broader challenges in translating external recommendations into domestic institutional change.

11.4 Regional Normative Framework

At the continental level, instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) provide normative standards for electoral governance. These frameworks emphasize transparency, accountability, and democratic participation. However, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in states where domestic political dynamics undermine reform commitments.³

11.5 Comparative Perspective on Challenges and Reforms

A comparative analysis reveals that the effectiveness of electoral reforms is largely contingent upon political will, institutional capacity, and the broader governance environment. Ghana's relative success reflects sustained commitment to reform, stronger institutional frameworks, and active civic engagement. In contrast, Cameroon's experience highlights the limitations of reforms that are not accompanied by genuine institutional independence and political inclusivity.

Ultimately, the persistence of electoral challenges alongside uneven reform outcomes underscores the need for more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to electoral governance. Effective reform must extend beyond formal legal adjustments to address deeper structural and political constraints, ensuring alignment with international human rights standards and the realization of credible democratic outcomes.⁴

12. Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine the relationship between electoral governance, reform processes, and democratic outcomes in Cameroon and Ghana within the framework of international human rights law. Drawing on doctrinal and comparative analysis, several key findings emerge.

First, the study finds that institutional independence is the most critical determinant of credible electoral governance. Ghana's relatively stronger democratic outcomes are closely linked to the operational autonomy and institutional capacity of its Electoral Commission, whereas Cameroon's electoral credibility is significantly undermined by perceptions of executive influence over electoral institutions. This disparity reinforces the centrality of the rule of law in ensuring impartial electoral administration and compliance with international standards such as Article 25 of the ICCPR.

Second, the study reveals that electoral reforms, while necessary, are insufficient in isolation. In Ghana, reforms have been more comprehensive and effectively implemented, contributing to improved transparency, stakeholder trust, and peaceful transfers of power. In contrast, Cameroon's reforms have largely been incremental and procedural, failing to address deeper structural issues such as political dominance, limited accountability, and weak enforcement mechanisms. This demonstrates that the success of reforms depends not merely on their adoption but on their depth, implementation, and political context.

Third, the findings indicate that electoral malpractice and limited political competition remain persistent obstacles to democratic consolidation, particularly in Cameroon. Practices such as voter intimidation, lack of transparency, and opposition marginalization significantly constrain the realization of genuine political participation, contrary to the provisions of international and regional human rights instruments. While Ghana performs comparatively better, challenges such as political polarization and occasional electoral disputes highlight that democratic consolidation remains an ongoing process.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Fall, I. M. (2011). *Election management bodies in West Africa: A comparative study of the contribution of electoral commissions to the strengthening of democracy*. ECOWAS.

³ Hartmann, C. (2016). ECOWAS and the restoration of democracy in The Gambia. *Africa Spectrum*, 51(1), 85–99.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Fourth, the study establishes that the effectiveness of electoral governance must be assessed not only in legal terms but also in terms of societal outcomes. From a utilitarian perspective, Ghana's electoral system has contributed to greater political stability, public trust, and acceptance of electoral outcomes.

Conversely, Cameroon's electoral processes have produced lower levels of public confidence and limited democratic legitimacy, indicating weaker overall societal benefits.

Finally, the study finds that regional and international normative frameworks have had uneven influence on domestic electoral governance. While instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance provide important standards, their implementation is largely dependent on domestic political will and institutional capacity. Ghana has demonstrated greater alignment with these frameworks, whereas Cameroon's compliance remains more formal than substantive.

In sum, the findings underscore that credible electoral governance in Africa requires more than formal legal structures; it demands genuine institutional independence, effective reform implementation, and sustained commitment to democratic principles. The comparative experience of Cameroon and Ghana illustrates that where these conditions are present, electoral processes are more likely to yield legitimate and stable democratic outcomes.

13. Conclusions

This article has examined electoral governance in Africa through a comparative analysis of Cameroon and Ghana, situating the discussion within the normative framework of international human rights law. It has demonstrated that while both states have formally embraced democratic institutions and electoral processes, the quality, credibility, and outcomes of these processes differ significantly due to variations in institutional design, political context, and the implementation of reforms.

The analysis underscores that electoral governance is fundamentally a legal and institutional question, not merely a procedural or political one. The extent to which elections reflect the will of the people depends largely on adherence to rule of law principles, including institutional independence, transparency, accountability, and equal political participation. In this regard, Ghana's electoral system illustrates how sustained reforms, stronger institutional autonomy, and active civic engagement can enhance electoral credibility and democratic consolidation. Conversely, Cameroon's experience reveals the limitations of formal compliance with electoral norms in the absence of genuine institutional independence and political inclusivity.

Furthermore, the study highlights that electoral reforms, while necessary, must be substantive rather than symbolic. Incremental or procedurally focused reforms that fail to address underlying structural constraints—such as executive dominance, weak oversight mechanisms, and restricted political competition — are unlikely to produce meaningful democratic outcomes. This finding reinforces the importance of aligning domestic electoral frameworks not only with the letter but also with the spirit of international human rights obligations, particularly those relating to political participation under instruments such as the ICCPR and the African Charter.

From a broader analytical perspective, the integration of Rule of Law Theory and Utilitarian Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of electoral governance. While the rule of law emphasizes compliance with legal norms and institutional integrity, the utilitarian perspective draws attention to the societal consequences of electoral processes, including political stability, public trust, and democratic legitimacy. The comparative evidence suggests that effective electoral governance must satisfy both dimensions—legal validity and societal utility.

This study contributes to the existing body of scholarship by bridging the gap between legal-normative analysis and outcome-based evaluation of electoral governance in Africa. By integrating rule of law and utilitarian perspectives within a comparative framework, it advances a more holistic understanding of how electoral systems function not only as legal constructs but also as instruments shaping democratic legitimacy and societal welfare. Additionally, the juxtaposition of Cameroon and Ghana provides nuanced empirical insight into why similar constitutional and international commitments yield divergent democratic outcomes, thereby enriching debates on electoral reform and human rights compliance in emerging democracies.

Ultimately, this study affirms that credible electoral governance is indispensable to democratic legitimacy in Africa. The contrasting experiences of Ghana and Cameroon illustrate that democratic consolidation is neither automatic nor guaranteed by the mere existence of elections. Rather, it requires sustained commitment to institutional reform, respect for human rights, and the cultivation of political environments that allow for genuine competition and participation.

In conclusion, the future of electoral governance in Africa will depend on the extent to which states move beyond formal electoralism toward substantive democracy, grounded in the rule of law and responsive to the collective welfare of citizens. Without such transformation, elections risk remaining procedural rituals devoid of

genuine democratic meaning.

14. Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, a number of legal, institutional, and policy-oriented recommendations are proposed to strengthen electoral governance and enhance democratic outcomes in Cameroon and Ghana, as well as in comparable African contexts.

14.1 Strengthen Institutional Independence of Electoral Management Bodies

A primary recommendation is the need to guarantee the independence and impartiality of electoral management bodies (EMBs). This requires reforms in the appointment processes of electoral commissioners to ensure transparency, inclusiveness, and insulation from executive control. Legal frameworks should provide clear safeguards for tenure security, financial autonomy, and operational independence, in line with international standards under Article 25 of the ICCPR and Article 13 of the African Charter. In Cameroon, in particular, reforms should prioritize restructuring ELECAM to enhance its credibility and public trust.

14.2 Deepening Electoral Reforms Beyond Formalism

Electoral reforms must move beyond procedural adjustments to address underlying structural and political constraints. This includes revising electoral laws to ensure fairness in constituency delimitation, equitable access to media, and transparent vote tabulation processes. Reforms should also incorporate enforceable accountability mechanisms to sanction electoral malpractice. In Cameroon, reforms must be more substantive and transformative, while Ghana should focus on consolidating and refining existing reforms to sustain electoral credibility.

14.3 Enhancing Electoral Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

To improve public confidence in electoral processes, there is a need to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms. This includes the adoption of technology-driven solutions such as biometric verification systems, real-time results transmission, and open data access for electoral results. Additionally, independent electoral audit systems should be institutionalized to review electoral processes and outcomes. Judicial mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes must also be strengthened to ensure timely, impartial, and effective adjudication.

14.4 Promoting Inclusive Political Participation

Ensuring inclusive and equitable political participation is critical to democratic legitimacy. Legal and institutional reforms should remove barriers to participation for opposition parties, women, youth, and marginalized groups. In Cameroon, particular attention should be given to expanding political space and reducing administrative and political constraints on opposition participation. In Ghana, efforts should focus on addressing political polarization and promoting broader inclusivity in governance processes.

14.5 Strengthening the Role of Civil Society and Electoral Observation

Civil society organizations and election observation bodies should be empowered to play a more active role in promoting electoral integrity. Governments should facilitate, rather than restrict, civil society engagement in voter education, election monitoring, and advocacy. Furthermore, the recommendations of international and regional election observation missions should be systematically implemented to enhance electoral reforms and accountability.

14.6 Enhancing Electoral Security, Conflict Prevention Mechanisms and Strengthening Compliance with Regional and International Norms

Given the risks associated with electoral violence, it is essential to develop comprehensive electoral security frameworks. This includes training security personnel on election-specific duties, establishing early warning systems for electoral conflict, and promoting dialogue among political actors. Preventive measures should focus on addressing the root causes of electoral tensions, including political exclusion and lack of trust in institutions.

States should take concrete steps to domesticate and implement regional and international legal instruments governing elections, such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and relevant human rights treaties. This includes aligning domestic laws with international standards and ensuring effective enforcement through independent institutions. Regional bodies, including the African Union and sub-regional organizations, should also enhance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.

14.7 Fostering Political Will and Democratic Culture

Ultimately, the success of electoral governance reforms depends on the presence of genuine political will and a democratic culture. Political leaders must demonstrate commitment to democratic principles, including respect for electoral outcomes and the rule of law. Efforts should also be made to promote civic education and

democratic values among citizens, thereby strengthening public demand for accountability and good governance. In sum, these recommendations emphasize that improving electoral governance requires a holistic and sustained approach that integrates legal reform, institutional strengthening, and political transformation. Without such comprehensive efforts, electoral processes risk remaining formally democratic but substantively deficient.

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