

ATHENA PERSPECTIVES

Fresh and Deep Dimension to the News

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Ghana vs. Nigeria Electoral Systems

Introduction

The conduct of elections in Ghana and Nigeria provides a critical opportunity to examine their electoral processes, identify best practices, and recommend improvements.

Athena Perspectives presents an analytical comparison of the systems in both countries, focusing on structure, voting and collation, use of technology, transparency, and the role of electoral officers. It concludes with recommendations to address specific challenges and enhance electoral integrity in both nations.

Structure of Electoral Systems

Ghana's electoral structure is simple. The process involves 16 regions, 276 constituency collation centres, and 40,976 polling stations. Results flow efficiently from polling stations to constituency collation centres, then to regional collation centres, and finally to the national collation centre for the declaration of results. This streamlined framework ensures an orderly and efficient process, reducing logistical challenges and the risk of manipulation.



16
Regions



276
Constituency
collation centres



40,976
Polling stations

Nigeria's system, by contrast, is more complex. It includes 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), 774 local government areas (LGAs), and over 176,846 polling units. The results go through multiple layers, including polling units, wards, LGAs, states, and the national level. This multi-tiered collation process often leads to delays, inefficiencies, and errors. Ghana's streamlined structure offers a clear advantage in terms of efficiency and ease of management, making it a model for electoral systems.



36
States



774
LGAs



176,846
Polling Units

Voting and Collation Process

Ghana's voting process is anchored using carbonized pink sheets at polling stations. These sheets are publicly displayed at the polling units, enabling immediate verification by citizens and party agents. Results are then tallied at constituency collation centres in the presence of stakeholders. Presidential election results are typically declared within 48 hours, showcasing efficiency and transparency. Disputes, when they arise, are resolved promptly at the constituency level.

In Nigeria, results are recorded on Form EC8A at polling units before moving through a series of collation levels. This layered process, while comprehensive, often results in significant delays.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that Nigeria limit the collation of results to the ward level. At this stage, BVAS data should be verified, statistically significant recounts of selected polling units conducted, and ballot papers scanned for faster access to results.

Results should then be entered into an e-collation system for aggregation at higher levels. Manual Form EC8B ward collation results should be uploaded to a public viewing portal to enhance transparency. Ghana's system is more transparent and timelier, making it the superior model for voting and collation.

Use of Technology

Ghana’s electoral process uses Bimodal Verification Devices (BVDs) for voter verification, effectively preventing impersonation and double voting. However, the process remains largely manual, which limits scalability and speed. Scanned summaries of results are uploaded online only after the declaration, delaying public access to results.

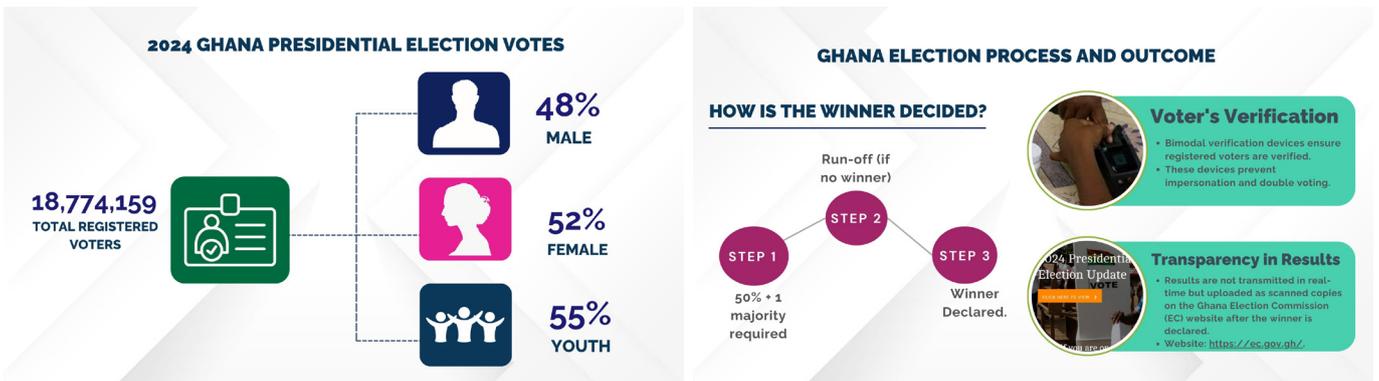
Nigeria has adopted the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which enables real-time voter verification and result transmission. However, inconsistent implementation undermines its effectiveness. If deployed consistently, BVAS, combined with an e-collation system, could significantly enhance the credibility and transparency of elections in Nigeria. While Ghana’s technology use ensures reliability, Nigeria’s system has the potential to be more advanced if operational challenges are addressed.



Transparency

Transparency is essential to fostering public trust in electoral systems. Ghana achieves this through the immediate public display of pink sheets at polling stations and constituency collation centres. This allows citizens and parties to conduct parallel tabulations, minimising scepticism about official results.

Nigeria’s transparency efforts, despite leveraging BVAS, are undermined by delays in result uploads and limited access to aggregated data. To improve, Nigeria must ensure that ward collation of results is promptly uploaded to a secure and accessible online portal for real-time review. Ghana’s emphasis on public access to results sets a higher standard for transparency.



The Integrity of Electoral Officers

The integrity of electoral officers plays a pivotal role in determining the credibility of elections. In Ghana, the Electoral Commission's adherence to transparency and strict procedures enhances the public's trust. Electoral officers' commitment to posting results publicly, ensuring accurate tallies and ensuring that all party agents are satisfied with recorded results has significantly reduced opportunities for manipulation.

Globally, examples such as Canada's independent electoral commission and Germany's robust training programs for electoral officials demonstrate best practices. These include mandatory ethics training, regular audits, and severe penalties for misconduct.

Nigeria can adopt similar measures by introducing mandatory certification programs for electoral officers, periodic evaluations, and stringent consequences for violations.

Judicial Processes for Election Petitions

Ghana's judicial process for electoral disputes is governed by a strict timeline. Petitions must be filed within 21 days of the result declaration and resolved within 42 days. This efficiency ensures that disputes do not linger and undermine governance. Additionally, petitions can only challenge the declared winner, further streamlining the process.

In Nigeria, a revised judicial mechanism is proposed. Presidential election petitions should go directly to the Supreme Court, with a decision rendered within 60 days. Gubernatorial petitions should be addressed by the Court of Appeal, whose decision would be final. For senatorial, House of Representatives, and State House of Assembly elections, dedicated election tribunals headed by a Court of Appeal judge and two High Court judges should handle disputes, with their decisions deemed final.

This streamlined approach would reduce delays, ensure judicial efficiency, and reinforce public confidence in the electoral process.

Recommendations for Nigeria

To enhance its electoral system, Nigeria should:

- » Limit result aggregation to the ward level and incorporate BVAS verification, ballot scanning, and statistically significant recounts.
- » Implement an e-collation system for higher-level aggregation and upload manual Form EC8B results to a public portal.
- » Expedite dispute resolution by adopting a tiered judicial process with time-bound decisions.
- » Strengthen the consistent application of BVAS technology for voter verification and result transmission.
- » Enhance the integrity of electoral officers through mandatory ethics training, regular evaluations, and strict accountability measures.



GHANA VS. NIGERIA ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

GHANA



40,976 polling stations, **276** constituency collation centres, **16** regional collation centres, **1** national collation centre.



After Verification, Votes are recorded on pink sheets, verified by party agents, and progressively collated from constituency to regional and national centre, with public displays ensuring transparency.



Uses BVD (Biometric verification device) for voter's verification
Uploads the regional summary sheet to the website after declaration.



Display copies of pink sheets at polling stations and ward collation centres.



To be declared the winner in a Ghanaian presidential election, a candidate must secure more than 50% of the valid votes cast (50% + 1 vote) to avoid a runoff.



Does not have an Election Petition Tribunal. Election petition must be filed within 21 days of result declaration and resolved within 42 days.

Structure of Electoral System

Voting and Collation Process

Use of Technology

Transparency

Election Outcome

Dispute Resolution

NIGERIA



176,846 polling units, over **8,809** wards collation centres, **774** LGA collation centres, **1** National Collation centre.



After Verification, Votes are recorded on Form EC8A, verified by party agents, and collated through multiple levels from wards to LGAs, states, and the national centre, with digital uploads ensuring partial transparency.



Uses BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) for accreditation
Real-time upload of results to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (iReV)



Upload Form EC8A in real-time to the INEC Result Viewing Portal.



To be declared Presidential winner, a candidate must secure at least 25% of votes cast in 2/3rd of the entire 36 States of Nigeria (that is in 24 states).



Has an Election Petition Tribunal for resolving electoral disputes but slower Judicial process.

Recommendations for Ghana

Ghana can further improve its system by:

- » Introducing real-time result transmission alongside manual processes to enhance transparency.
- » Establishing dedicated election tribunals to handle disputes more efficiently.
- » Addressing declining voter turnout through targeted voter engagement and education campaigns.
- » Leveraging technology to improve the speed and scalability of the collation process.

Conclusion

Ghana's electoral system demonstrates the value of simplicity, transparency, and the integrity of electoral officers, offering important lessons for Nigeria. Conversely, Nigeria's adoption of advanced technology like BVAS indicates significant potential if operational challenges are addressed.

By adopting best practices from Ghana and refining its technological infrastructure, Nigeria can restore public confidence in its elections.

Ghana, meanwhile, can strengthen its reputation by embracing technological advancements and improving voter engagement.

Both countries stand to benefit immensely from learning from each other's successes and addressing their respective challenges.

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