Foreign Election Interference in Africa’s De-Democratization Culture

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ABSTRACT

The 2016 USA elections appear to have made Russia the “poster-boy” for election interference across the globe, allegedly using tools such as disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, email hacking, leaking of confidential information, and others. All such activities are a threat to national self-determination, democracy, and the autonomy of the people. Since then, elections in developing democracies in Africa are also alleged to have experienced interference by the usual suspect: Russia. In Africa, the actors of election interferences have been expanded beyond Russia to include foreign countries and companies in past elections in Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Ghana. The next general elections in Ghana are in December 2024. In the previous general elections in Ghana, there were no significant allegations of election interference, although, in 2020, the specter of foreign election interference emerged in the political discourse. The actions of the domestic actors to de-democratize elections were mentioned selectively. It may be simplistic to argue in favor of election non-interference in Ghana’s political business cycle every four years since 1992, but the allegations are not supported by evidence and are merely anecdotal and subjective or based on geopolitical realism. What can be proven is the de-democratization of incumbents and other domestic political actors in domestic elections through open vote-buying by politicians and vote-rigging by incumbent political leaders. In such a political dysmorphic situation, it is difficult to accuse any entity of being the mastermind of election interferences in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, de-democratization, election interference, foreign.

1. Introduction

It would be irresponsible to analyze the factors leading to foreign or local election interferences without first considering as background to such interferences the practice of De-democratization processes in a given political and economic ecosystem such as Ghana (Alkhani, 2017; Tilly, 2003). This position is hinged on the rationale that election interference of any kind is motivated and instigated by the pre-existing internal vulnerabilities of that particular nation regarding election manipulation, partisan and identity politics, mud-slinging, and desperation (Davies, 2018; Lindberg, 2003, pp. 127–131; Tilly, 2003). Some of the factors contributing to election interferences are divisive politics that prevail in that nation, the practice of cancel culture against those of the so-called mainstream political thoughts, voter greed and unrealistic expectations from presidential and parliamentary aspirants, the desperation by political parties to win either presidential or parliamentary elections at all cost (Kouba & Lysek, 2019; Mabane, 2008; Nugent, 2006, pp. 253–256).

The value of the exercise of democracy in Ghana and similar nations in Sub-Saharan Africa under republican constitutions such as those of Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda, is degraded with vote-buying, gift-giving, and inducement; voter intimidation; incumbent abuse of national assets to support campaigns; infusion of financial contributions from sources whose funds may be tainted with criminal activities (Anaxagorou et al., 2020; Batory, 2016; Bogaards, 2009; Tilly, 2003). This brings that nation into the de-democratization domain with a long list of corrupt practices that, in a mature democracy such as the UK or that of the United States of America and Canada, may not be so rampant and so
blatantly common (Alikhani, 2017; Batory, 2016; Coppedge et al., 2021; Lindberg, 2003; Lynge, 2023, pp. 144–172).

The literature review appears to suggest a deliberate approach within domestic politics by national politicians to also undermine democratic principles and turn around to blame the resulting outcomes from those deliberate actions on so-called international or foreign election interferences (Alikhani, 2017; Batory, 2016; Bogaards, 2009; Davies, 2018; Tilly, 2003).

For the purpose of analyzing the intentional and deliberate activities of national politicians in elections, I have adopted the concept of the “de-democratization hypothesis” to explain the factors the national politicians apply to undermine their own national constitutions, the rule of law, universal adult suffrage and democracy (Alikhani, 2017; Batory, 2016; Bogaards, 2009; Davies, 2018; Tilly, 2003). The rest of the paper will focus on the ways and manner of election interference, using the case study approach and through literature review and content analysis of the selected papers. Though this is not a classic systematic literature review that follows its own protocols, a desktop review of the literature on election interferences, the phenomenon of interests, is, nonetheless, election interference in Africa’s dysmorphic political system. Therefore, materials that fit this categorization may be used in the analysis.

2. DE-DEMOCRATIZATION HYPOTHESIS

It would be totally unacceptable conduct in any mature democracy for parliamentary aspirants to openly share money with electoral delegates or use State or Federal official vehicles as NPP Parliamentary candidates were seen riding in their official government vehicles, fueled by the people of Ghana at their campaigns and celebration of parliamentary election victories on November 2, 2023, in various constituencies in Ghana. Ghanaians politicians on both sides of the political divide, that is to say, the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, politicians big and small, educated or not, pursue a practice of De-democratization, whereby although they intrinsically know the right behavior in conducting elections and also know about international best standards, choose deliberately to apply a series of measures meant to de-democratized republican ideals under the nation’s Constitution and sabotage the notion of universal adult suffrage (Alikhani, 2017; Batory, 2016; Bogaards, 2009; Davies, 2018; Kouba & Lysek, 2019; Tilly, 2003).

The de-democratization hypothesis presumes a hatred for democracy, the autonomy of the population, and, above all, the right to choose. It is paternalistic and patronizing to the population and eligible voters because the politicians presume that the national voters are, perhaps, intellectually challenged, too stupid, or uneducated and have no discerning abilities to choose between a suitable candidate and one who is unsuitable to solve the problems of the communities at that particular moment and for these reasons, a chosen candidate by the political party must be imposed on the voters in that constituency of nation at all cost and inducements (Alikhani, 2017; Batory, 2016; Davies, 2018). The de-democratization hypothesis is operationalized through constructs such as vote-buying, gift-giving with the purpose of inducing votes, voter intimidation, rigging of ballot outcomes in favor of a candidate, appointing electoral commission key personnel and board members on a partisan basis, and using the state or government resources, personnel, and other assets to promote partisan campaigns of their preferred candidate or the incumbent. In Ghana, as practiced by the political parties that still rely on the ‘electoral colleges’ or ‘delegate system’ such as the New Patriotic Party of Ghana, electoral abuses bordering on criminal conduct are often executed in front of live camera lenses at polling stations, or revealed by the confessions of those aspirants making the payments and constituency delegates receiving same (Lindberg, 2003).

In their just-ended November 2, 2023, elections of Parliamentary Candidates in their so-called “orphan constituencies,” a delegate in the Ashanti Region was captured on camera saying the voting in that constituency had not started because they were waiting for their payment before casting their vote and ended with the slogan, “No money, no Vote.” This event occurred in Ejura Sekyere-Odumasi in the Ashanti Region. This goes in support of Lynge’s assertion that elections in Ghana are like “( . . . ) harvesting season when it comes to reaping the fruits from the parliamentary tree” (Lynge, 2023, p. 127). Other NPP delegates, and perhaps party officials, were seen on camera sharing money with and among delegates with glee. Orphan constituency refers to the constituency where the New Patriotic Party has no parliamentary representation. The label “orphan constituency” is an unfortunate nomenclature that the NPP started in 1998, barely six years after the introduction of the 4th Republican Constitution of Ghana. It patently mocks the concept of multi-party democracy in the first instance and disparages the fiduciary responsibilities of those political parties or independent candidates representing the so-called “orphan constituencies” in parliament legitimately. Such labels are used when the actors do not appreciate the nature of multi-party culture in a pluralistic society, which is a dimension of the de-democratization hypothesis.
3. Procedural Approach to Literature Search

In this paper, the author has taken a broad view of the types of election interferences that have been documented or observed in the current developing democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The author employed desktop literature review and content analysis as the most convenient approach for this work. Key terms and phrases were used to identify literature on the topic opportunistically, terms such as “threat to constitutional government by incumbents,” “election interference by foreign governments,” “election interference by Russia, China, and others,” election interference by domestic political actors and non-actors”; “election manipulation by financiers,” and the “influence of foreign cash inflows to domestic elections.” The data was culled from journals, books, and other grey literature sources and purposively selected from the huge cache of publications on the topic, selecting those papers that addressed the African or Ghanaian situation. The data was briefed and analyzed based on the author’s skills, training, and experiences working on policy, law, and national security concerns. As an operative term, disinformation is defined as “false information that is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government organization to a rival power or the media” or “false information deliberately and often covertly spread, as by planting rumors, in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Romerstein & Manning, 2004). Misinformation, on the other hand, means “false or inaccurate information, especially that which is deliberately intended to deceive” (Vraga & Bode, 2020).

4. Threat to Republican Constitutions in Sub-Saharan Africa by Incumbents

It has been observed and even documented that the constitutional and governance systems in black Africa are under threat from incumbent leaders who temper with presidential term limits in countries such as Rwanda, Cameroon, Gambia, and the Ivory Coast, to mention but a few as part of the desire to de-democratize their political systems (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021; Kouba & Lysek, 2019; Lindberg, 2003; Lyne, 2023; Mabane, 2008; Nugent, 2006; Ohlin, 2021; Versteeg et al., 2020). Other constitutional assaults in the De-democratization processes include central government ignoring pragmatism in employment opportunities and merit-based executive appointments as well as skewing wealth creation and sharing to one side of the ethnic and political divide (Norman, 2023a). Deliberate distortions of term limits are probably the biggest threat to the political business cycle and show evidence of grand scheme manipulation of elections in the affected nations (Davies, 2018; Versteeg et al., 2020).

The theory of change in this paper is that those nations that have suffered either foreign or domestic election interferences created the conditions for such a phenomenon to happen through their willful pursuit of the De-democratization goal and that, if those societies wish to eradicate or minimize election interferences, the leadership, the judiciary, and the security agencies as well as the media have to apply in their sectors the rule of law, transparency, probity and accountability (Davies, 2018; Tilly, 2003). Directly or indirectly, the leaderships, particularly the presidents of these nations and their hangers-on, the various parliamentarians, the judiciary at the apex Courts, and the security agencies, are all complicit in either direct or indirect usurpation of the sovereignty of the nations affected and the illegal participation in municipal elections by foreign elements. Such de-democratization actions undermine State responsibility within the domestic sphere, Sovereignty, and international law and diplomacy by undermining the legitimacy of the fraudulently elected government.

This view is supported by a study by Versteeg et al. (2020). After reviewing 234 incumbents in 106 countries that have pursued term limit evasion, they found that, globally, such a quest is ‘very common.’ They also found that about “one-third of the incumbents who reached the end of their prescribed terms pursued some strategy to remain in office” (Versteeg et al., 2020, p. 1). Secondly, none of those attempts ignored the Constitution outright. Instead, incumbents universally displayed nominal respect for the Constitution by using constitutional rules and procedures to circumvent term limits, with about two-thirds attempting to amend the Constitution. Their paper also stressed that other approaches to evade term limits by incumbents had included judicial interpretation, drafting a new constitution, resetting the start date of presidential terms, “finding a faithful agent replacement leader whom the incumbent can control after he is out of office, and delaying elections by citing some form of political instability” (Versteeg et al., 2020, p. 1). In all the strategies, the courts have been the “most ineffectual in halting evasion attempts” (…) “courts mostly do the opposite: validate the president’s attempt to remain in office past his term,” and ‘that building broad, grassroots resistance movements might be more effective than putting faith in the courts’ (Versteeg et al., 2020, pp. 173–183).

The danger of presidential term evasion is that “when presidents remain in office indefinitely, comparative experience shows that they can consolidate enormous amounts of power that vitiate checks and balances by institutions such as the legislatures and the Courts” (Dixon & Landau, 2019,
p. 361). This may create the conditions for desperate attempts by other elements or the opposition to have the leader removed, which could be the conduit for foreign entry into the domestic affairs of the nation. In addition, the ruling political hierarchy and dominant political party’s interference with political appointments based on identity politics (Norman, 2023b) provides a conducive environment for the possibility of foreign interference in general and presidential elections (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021, pp. 386–390, Ekdale & Tully, 2019, pp. 27–30; Ohlin, 2021, pp. 239–241). Amongst some of the unintended consequences of term limit evasion are the loss of legitimacy by the ruling government in many districts of the political ecosystem, which then allows the operations of organized criminal elements, official corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and general malaise in the nation as observers in many Sub-Saharan nations such as Ghana have witnessed and commented, despite the obfuscation by the government to re-direct the issues to other causes such as COVID-19, Ukraine-Russian war or simply the effects of climate change (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2012; IDEG, 2023).

5. Skewed Literature on Foreign Interferences vis-a-vis Africa’s Defective Democracy Touched by Political Dysmorphia

The De-democratization nature of African politics and its practice, the rule of law, and the use of executive powers could create a conducive atmosphere for foreign interference to occur (Davies, 2018; Tilly, 2003). Researchers have noticed and documented foreign interferences in education (Long & O’Connell, 2022), the healthcare delivery system (Dolan et al., 2023), social and cultural grooming of the youth (Sibani, 2018), and the training of high-level professionals for industry, academia, politics and governance and even sexual rights and preferences of the populations: A twin matter which has now become highly contentious and divisive continental subject since the scramble for Africa between 1894 and 1895 (Hochschild, 1999). These developments create the impression that African leaders, the Presidents, bureaucrats, and university scholars included are easily machinated and easily seduced with money and honorariums or salary top-ups, scholarships, appointments, and other prurient incentives. The literature on election interference also contains self-serving pronouncements by Western scholars and writers. For example, Siegle (2021) appears to have offered a biased view of Russia’s interference in Africa as a general matter of concern, as if it is only Russia that interferes with activities in Africa, be it elections, defense and military, building military bases, interfering in economic and social affairs and even delving into matters of human sexuality vis-à-vis Africa’s social culture and stance against homosexuality. Siegle wrote that, perhaps, unlike the rest of the Western or industrialized nations:

“Russia has gained considerable influence in Africa in recent years through its strategy of elite capture. This has contributed to democratic deterioration and the thwarting of the aspirations of hundreds of millions of African citizens. In the process, Russia has made headway in reshaping governance norms in Africa in line with Vladimir Putin’s vision of a post-liberal international world order. Russia has thus far faced minimal costs for these actions, which compromise African sovereignty. Until democratically committed African citizens, governments, and international partners can organize tangible diplomatic and financial costs on these egregious actions, Russian efforts to co-opt African leaders can be expected to continue.” (Siegle, 2021, para. 37).

Generally, the literature on election interferences appears to focus on “foreign interference” and deems such as “a violation of the membership rules for political decision-making” (…) “the idea that only members of a polity should participate in elections” (Ohlin, 2021, pp. 239–240). Lynge (2023) investigated the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of local electoral manipulation in Ghana. Miscounting of ballot cast was the key finding of that paper. Lynge (2023) tested the incidence of miscounting in the 2008 and 2012 parliamentary elections and found that the number of ballots rejected positively correlated with the number of years the party of the incumbent MP has held the constituency seat. Lynge provided that:

“(…) nearly one-third of all legislative elections held in Africa since 2010 were either fundamentally flawed (8%), or flawed to the extent that irregularities likely decided who won the legislative majority, (…) with another (21%) being causally labeled as ambiguous.” (Lynge, 2023, pp. 144).

This is emerging evidence that, perhaps, Ghana’s democracy is erected on pillars of dishonesty and mediocrity as the primary normative core values and, perhaps, a congenital condition that afflicts most black nations not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but everywhere, where Africans are gathered in significant numbers when it comes to the inviolability of the electoral processes. The de-democratization hypothesis operates not only in the African continental political processes but also in Africa, where the de-democratization processes appear to be institutionalized. The works of Mabane...
(2008), Pachón et al. (2017), Aldashev and Mastrobuoni (2019), Lindberg (2003), and Nugent (2006) each address a defect in the electoral processes of African countries with respect to dishonest conduct such as ballot stuffing, vote buying, and other varieties of electoral misconduct, it is, perhaps, an oxymoron to ‘cry wolf’ about foreign election interferences, if not a complete delusional act.

Such a skewed view of geopolitical influence in the affairs of Africa is not helpful in trying to find solutions to the issue of election interference, a matter that concerns all nations in the world, including Russia, China, and the European Union.


Ohlin (2021), in presenting at the Symposium on the Biden Administration and the International Legal Order: A Roadmap for Fighting Election Interference, focused on cyber-tools used in election interference. Ohlin started with a revealing statement and admission that:

“If we have learned anything since the 2016 election (of the USA), it is that foreign election interference is not just a strategic tool used by Russia. Many countries are now using social media disinformation as statecraft to attack democracies”. (Ohlin, 2021, p. 69).

In the same material, he raised the issue of the significance of election interference on the overall outcome of an election so suspected to have suffered such an encroachment. In the famous or infamous assertion against Russia for allegedly interfering with the 2016 US general elections, it was observed that the margin of victory was so small that such an outcome could be attributable to a number of factors. In that election, it was alleged that Russia interfered to hurt Hillary Clinton’s presidential ambitions, a Democratic Party flagbearer, who won the popular vote by almost 2.9 million votes (65,844,610 in all 50 States or 48.2% of eligible voters but with 227 electoral vote which is under the minimum of 270 needed. This was against her competitor from the Republican Party, Donald J. Trump, who received 62,979,636 votes or 46.1% popular votes but with 304 electoral votes over the minimum of 270 needed). “The difference in the popular vote was “80,000 from three Rust Belts between a Clinton win” (popular vote) “and Trump win” (electoral vote)” (Ohlin, 2021, p. 70). While the reasons for those three states to go for Trump may not necessarily be due to the alleged Russian interference but purely on the outcome of the expression of choice by the voters in those states, many researchers in the United States of America and elsewhere have fallen victim to the popular propaganda in international law and diplomacy that Russia interfered. For this conclusion of Russian interference in the 2016 US elections, no other reason is tenable, no matter the source, which brings the entire conversation on foreign interference under Rothkopf’s (2017) “America’s Golden Age of Stupidity.” Rothkopf’s statement that America was in the “Golden Age of Stupidity” under His Excellency, President Donald John Trump, the 45th president of the United States of America. By this, Rothkopf meant the “willful disregard of knowledge—regardless of the motive,” and one might add the source, and that such stupidity is an “unwinnable proposition (…) because those who battle facts are at war with reality” (Rothkopf, 2017, pp. 1–2). Rothkopf used various Trump adverse utterances against public health interventions he displayed during the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2021 and 2022 to demonstrate his point (Rothkopf, 2017). The implications of Rothkopf’s (2017) observations on the American public under President Trump are perhaps not limited to that era but also apply in a general sense to the events following the 2016 US general elections, probably until the January 6, 2020 insurrection in the US capital.

This affirmation is posited on the thinking that, perhaps, no right-thinking American patriotic voter would vote for Donald Trump. Therefore, to have done so, it must be due to some external influences. If this argument should stand, the actual outcome of the 2016 election in the USA ought to be justified with more convincing data.

6.1. Nigeria’s Case

In another largely anecdotal narrative relative to Nigeria’s experiences with election interference, Jemison (2021), in a blog, alleges to have the answer to how Cambridge Analytica influences Nigeria’s Presidential Elections. Jemison’s assertions maintain that the interference occurred in two documented political business cycles in 2007 and 2015, which “(…) some scholars have termed as the “digital war in Africa,” where “companies, (…) governments and wealthy private individuals leveraged digital media propaganda in covert ways to influence the traditional running of democratic elections” (Jemison, 2021, para. 2). “In relation to their 2007 work in Nigeria, SCL Group—of which Cambridge Analytica is a subsidiary—admitted to advising that “a more effective strategy might be to persuade opposition voters not to vote at all—an action that could be easily monitored” (Jemison, 2021, para. 2).
It appears there is a bit of confusion between the engagement of the services of political strategists and the issue of political election interference in Jemison’s presentation. The use of political strategists is a common feature of modern democratic elections, and that alone may not be evidence of interference. Jemison also maintained that:

“In 2015, Cambridge Analytica continued their targeted election content in Nigeria with campaigns promoting Goodluck Jonathan’s re-election. In December 2014, Brittany Kaiser, a senior executive at Cambridge Analytica—and later a prominent whistleblower—had been introduced to an unnamed Nigerian oil billionaire who was interested in contracting Cambridge Analytica to run a covert presidential elections campaign in favor of the incumbent candidate Goodluck Jonathan, who represented the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) and who was opposed by Muhammadu Buhari, representing the All-Progressives Congress (APC). The proposed budget for the campaign to defeat Buhari was (£2 million, N1.05 billion or $2.5 million). “Buhari’s campaign was run by AKPD Message and Media, the same firm from which former President Barack Obama’s strategist David Axelrod had come. As a result, there were noticeable parallels in how the campaigns of Buhari and Obama were run, particularly around the tenets of hope on which both were fixed. One former Cambridge Analytica employee described the campaign this way: “It was the kind of campaign that was our bread and butter... We’re employed by a billionaire who’s panicking at the idea of a change of government and who wants to spend big to make sure that doesn’t happen.” Investigations into Cambridge Analytica’s work have confirmed that the company engaged foreign assistance from Israeli intelligence firm Black Cube, who helped the team hack records to acquire medical and financial information about Buhari.” (Jemison, 2021, para 4–5).

With all due respect, every single one of the instances narrated by Jemison bothers on consultancy services provided by a political strategic firm, which results in their advice being labeled as interference.

6.2. European Union Case

The European Union has its own narrative on the use of cyber tools by insiders and outsiders in elections within the respective nations. The European Parliament resolved to strengthen, among other threats to the overall social and political affairs of the union, particularly with respect to election interference, privileged or strategic communication channels, and cyber-related controls, to provide targeted responses to mis- or dis-information during elections and other precautions on preemptory responses as permitted under international law and diplomacy (Kalniete, 2023; pp. 32–36). What is more, telling is how the EU protocols diagnosed the problem of interference through social media platforms and the routine use of internet services due to the pervasive practices of data mining companies and other groups. It said in Resolution # 42:

“(… ) that the business model of online platforms still relies on advertising based on personal data and opaque algorithms whereby more engagement translates into more advertising revenue, and that this engagement is generated by algorithms that reward polarized and extreme opinions at the expense of fact-based information and thus pose significant risks of data manipulation; stresses that the General Data Protection Regulation20 (GDPR), the DSA, the Code of Practice on Disinformation and the upcoming Regulation on Transparency and targeting of political advertising create additional safeguards against such abusive and manipulative practices; recalls the support for all measures to ban micro-targeting for political advertising, particularly but not limited to those based on sensitive personal data.” (Kalniete, 2023, p. 27).

Such online internet use and the subsequent development has nothing to do with the activities of one nation but more to do with the interface between technology and the behavior of people to the technology and its application to the opportunities in the general stream of commerce and political life.

This appears to be in line with Giddens (1979) and later with DeSanctis and Poole’s (1994) theses on the interface between technology and people, resulting in the development of the Adaptive Structuration Theory as individuals’ autonomy is influenced by social or technological structures adapted in the mundane activities of man to opportunities and functioning, the companies involved in the provision of internet services which is made available to the population on pro bono basis; need to recoup some of that capitalization. As these companies provide universal access to social media platforms at no financial cost to the users except the purchase of online access through telephonic companies, it makes sense, despite the consequential but unintended outcome of using data collected from individuals that use that specific platform, for targeted advertisement. The structure is, therefore, composed of the sociological relationship of the populations to these platforms and the technological providers’ need towards financial sustainability and resilience by profiting from the cache of data they
invariably possess together with the data owners due to the access and uses of its customers (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Giddens, 1979). No social media platform can get access to one's data unless one chooses to use or access information services on one of such platforms. In effect, therefore, individuals appear to surrender a part of their sovereignty to the operators of social media platforms when they elect to be on this or that platform and that the election to use a particular platform is not part of the basic necessities of life (Ogola & Cheruiyot, 2022).

6.3. Kenya’s Case

This view is in line with Ogola and Cheruiyot (2022), who proffered that the news media in Kenya also employ data mining on social media platforms and other internet mediums to collect information on news and developments in the public space. It is purely a matter of achieving optimal efficiency in news gathering and operations, although the eventual diffusion of the data they gather may be biased or focus on minutia and may lose sight of the big picture or story. They also offered the following in defense of their theory:

“The data harvesting and curation capabilities of some of these online based platforms make them especially suitable for targeted news distribution. These capabilities enable, among other things, the personification of news, which both responds to and shapes individual interests (psychographic targeting), in the process increase user interaction, growing new audience and ultimately generating advertising revenue for news organizations. However, the reliance on second-and-third-party data audience or use data that companies indirectly collect and aggregate to be share or sold in this emergent news ecosystem present several data accountability challenges for news organizations, requiring legislative and policy interventions.” (Ogola & Cheruiyot, 2022, p. 92).

As already mentioned, the ability of foreign operatives and their principals to interfere in national elections is directly dependent on the activities of the political elite in that nation, as can be seen from the examples given.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This author likens the intentional creation of the conditionalities that, perhaps, enable foreign election interferences or even domestic and corporate interferences in Ghana’s electoral process to dysmorphia. Political dysmorphia is the obsessive focus on perceived external threats to the internal systemic defects in the various nations, which can easily be corrected by the leadership of these nations if they have the moral, ethical, and individual will to respect the rule of law, the autonomy of the population and the sovereignty of the nation. Nations with political dysmorphic neurosis often compare themselves with advanced democracies unfavorably with their immature and corrupted systems and pay an inordinate amount of attention to what others may do to them to further weaken their internal electoral processes. The national or local post-election press releases from political parties in Ghana often claim to have run clean, fair, and transparent elections and pat themselves for a job well done, despite the blatant recorded misconduct diffused to the general public by responsible media houses as and when such misconducts are happening or have happened (Joy News, 2023). The self-serving evaluation of having conducted an almost perfect electoral event does not match the realities the rest of the society may feel or see or have seen and felt at polling stations and on television. Such weak cognitive thinking about political equity and transparency allows them to ignore their roles in political interference and make poor decisions about the events they can hardly control (Katz & Ermey, 2023). While dysmorphic thinking may not have been created by one individual, in some situations, it is one individual who could take proactive cognitive steps to subdue the negativity that is created and blunt the sick notions of that society. Politicians in Africa, scholars, and the general population tend to hold an unexamined view that Africa is entitled to develop its own brand of democracy, which is not at par with the universal concept of democracy. They tend to promote a culturally relative kind of governance system that goes beyond the wicked demands of Realism and Statism but meanders freely into authoritarianism (Eriksson, 1968; Huysmans, 2004a, 2004b; Williams, 1998). The concept of “African democracy” invokes Rachels and Rachels (2019) treatise on the “Challenge of Cultural Relativism,” providing a derisive platform to disrespect African leadership and its social norms.

That is to say, it is generally assumed that there is democracy relative to Africa, and therefore, there is a concept of “African Democracy Relativism.” Due to this, democracy in Africa ought to be different from democracy everywhere else. “Choice” as an ethical value subsists and emanates from autonomy and freedom. When people are free in a democracy, they also have the freedom of ‘Choice’ in their functioning. There are many limitations on the right to choose in Africa due to the general limitations placed on freedoms. African governments, scholars, and the citizenry recognize that they
have negative thoughts about the kind of democracy their nations practice, not having fully grasped and understood the concept of sovereignty, autonomy, and choice at both the personal and institutional levels (Norman, 2017, pp. 115–120). Africans, generally speaking, have negative thoughts about their leaders, co-workers, products made in their nation, and just about everything in their nations, from the quality of university education to the healthcare delivery system, despite their collective colonial narrative.

The social sciences and humanities have, over the years, diagnosed, analyzed, prescribed, intervened, and recommended solutions to the many social diseases of the mind, soul, self, ego, id, superego, but the African social and political systems are so recalcitrant that, change does not appear to be forthcoming. Due to the perceived misalignment of Africa’s social, political, and intellectual mindset, encroachment at elections, the formation of its people in schools and universities, and just about every meaningful human endeavor occurs willy-nilly and prone to foreign interferences. Every disease has its own treatment protocol. Political dysmorphia is a mental health condition, as in the case of body dysmorphia, where a person is reported to spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about flaws in their appearance. Such flaws may probably go or be untouched by onlookers, and even if they notice such flaws, they may not think of it as a demerit or significant to the overall value of the person with such a condition. Therefore, political dysmorphia is a condition where the actors in the political business cycle know that their actions have already created flaws in the democratization process of election through skewing districting and voter registration data to one candidate, stuffing the electoral commission with party functionaries, appointing judges to the supreme court of the nation on partisan lines, intimidating potential voters for the opponent, misappropriating national funds, assets, vehicles, and personnel to support the incumbent politician, monopolizing the media space for one party, and many others, but preferring rather blame others within or without their ecosystem for self-created flaws or threats to the electioneering activities within the African context. In a nutshell, African governments cry wolf about foreign election interference even when there is no such threat but those threats created by the leadership itself.

Among some of the deterrence approaches to foreign election interference is the recommendation contained in the paper of Lamond and Venook (2020). In that piece, they advised that “America was caught off guard in 2016, but there are no excuses in future elections” and that “understanding the entirety of the 2016 interference operation is important for preventing and mitigating the impact of foreign interference” (Lamond & Venook, 2020, pp. 1–4). They also provided that, in the national political space, there should be “information sharing, increased transparency, and being vigilant” (Lamond & Venook, 2020, pp. 1–4). Without being overly critical, it is interesting to bear in mind that political parties and political competitors, by their nature, do not cooperate on information sharing, and neither do they wish to be transparent with their opponents. Though the advice of the researchers may be sound, it is not realistic and of low utilitarian value to blunting foreign interferences in national elections.

It is a bit troubling when, in Ohlin’s lecture at the Symposium on the Biden Administration and the International Legal Order, he proposed, among other reprisals and responses to election interference, customary international law and diplomacy measures such as the “imposition of sanctions on foreign actors that engage in election interference” (Ohlin, 2021, p. 71). This is despite the obvious jurisdictional issues that instantly come to the fore of such a suggestion. How does the Biden Administration, for example, prosecute an alleged Russian or Chinese or an actor from any other nation, such as the UK, where the US Courts do not have the right to such an alleged perpetrator? How would the determination of the sanctions be made without convincing evidence beyond a mere suspicion in the interest of due process and justice? Prosecution of the alleged foreign election interference could potentially lead to a repeat of a Guantanamo type of rendition and imprisonment of foreigners captured by such thinking. It would certainly go against the spirit of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. The Charter also offers that “the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples” is the sine qua non of inter-state relationships, a position that claws back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (Norman, 2022). Article 2(7) of the Charter also does not authorize “intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State. The principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, self-determination, and non-intervention reflect the core understanding of the attributes and entitlements of States in the international system” (Keitner, 2020, p. 2).

The other troubling issue raised by the prescriptions to the Biden Administration by Ohlin is that there should be an “encouragement to the Justice Department to issue more indictments” (Keitner, 2020, p. 72), which goes in tandem with the first suggestion above. First of all, this suggestion is actually patronizing to the Justice Department. That department does not need any “encouragement from any sources” to prosecute its core mandate to protect homeland security and to go after those who attack, undermine, infringe, or encroach on the domestic security and foreign interests of the United States of America. The Justice Department is to issue indictments to whom? To foreign operators or actors with
no locus in the United States, if, in fact, the conduct was executed by those foreign operators? This suggestion seems to dovetail with Ohlin’s last suggestion in dealing with foreign election interference to the Biden Administration that it should “criminalize solicitation of foreign interference (Keitner, 2020, p. 73). Therefore, the two suggestions appear to be directed to US citizens and not to the alleged foreign perpetrators overseas. If this is the case, then the suggestion is superfluous since legislation and statutes already exist in the annals of US law and policy to counteract such conduct on the part of American citizens and subjects. Frankly, it is not every domestic phenomenon that falls under the domain of international law, order, and diplomacy. Election interference assessment is like a bouquet of flowers with many petals. Its diagnoses and analyses need a dispassionate evaluation, assessment, and prescription in order to preserve respect for human rights not only in one nation, such as the United States of America but as a universal matter that applies to all persons everywhere.

From the foregoing discussions and evidence produced in this paper, it is a bit unsettling to keep blaming one nation, one entity, and one geographical location as either being prone to foreign election interference or being susceptible to such activities. Due to the economic vulnerabilities of African nations, just about every kind of human need that can be efficiently fulfilled by foreign nations, such as access to international credit, can be a source of foreign election interference (Anaxagorou et al., 2020; nations, just about every kind of human need that can be efficiently fulfilled by foreign nations, such as access to international credit, can be a source of foreign election interference (Anaxagorou et al., 2020; Jablonski, 2014). The attraction for this kind of encroachment on the will of the people is triggered by the political and economic activities long before elections and continues through that landscape during electioneering campaigns until the day of voting. Foreign influences are constantly present in every nation’s election, whether such influences permeate national systems through algorithmic encroachment, application of mined data, or direct and pernicious use of malware, spyware, disinformation, misinformation, data distortion, deep fakes, or artificial intelligent manipulation of information. In the long run, voters know who they want or are going to vote for long before elections are organized. Such mindsets are formed from their personal experiences and self-efficacy regarding their personal well-being, dwindling purchasing power, and sense of prosperity under one administration or another.

It is condescending to presume in the case of Ghana that but for the intervention or interferences of Russia or even the government of the United Kingdom with that of the United States of America, those who have been elected in Ghana have indeed been elected into office. This does not seek to deny the possibility that foreign machinations, financing support to certain candidates that provide such a candidate with added advantage, and demonization of opposing candidates may not happen (Shortell & Watkins, 2018). Despite this possibility, it is also realistic to add that the complacency of incumbency is probably more self-destructive than any act of foreign election interference could garner throughout the entire nation during any one election. The activities of foreign or even internal election interferences may be effective in a localized district or voting enclave but not throughout the entire nation. Such thinking for any given population presumes that most of the voters in that enclave are actually nincompoops who do not possess the cognitive abilities to evaluate their choices. This paper was motivated by the thinking that those nations that have suffered either foreign or domestic election interferences created the conditions for such a phenomenon to happen, including economic dependency on foreign assistance, excessive borrowing, and debts, and that, if those societies wish to eradicate or minimize election interferences, the leadership, the judiciary, and the security agencies, as well as the media, have to apply in their sectors the rule of law, transparency, probity, and accountability. Above all, the Presidents of Africa have to be held accountable to the people and, perhaps, de-link entry into politics and public service as the solution to financial freedom, a pernicious belief system that has led Africa to under-development, huge national debts, feelings of malaise and the absence of joy and happiness in the faces of the populations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES


