



## Party Politics and Internal Democracy: A Sine qua non to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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**Abstract.** Political parties are essential to democracy, because they provide a platform for citizen representation and involvement. The practice of internal democracy, which guarantees justice, openness, and inclusivity within party organizations, is essential to their effectiveness. However, Nigeria grapples with serious challenges with its internal party practices, despite its ambitions toward a consolidated democracy. Within political parties, there is widespread disrespect for democratic values in Nigeria, which breeds factionalism, power battles, and electoral malpractice. The deterioration of internal democracy poses significant challenges to the nation's democratic consolidation, as it impedes the rise of responsible leadership and cultivates a climate of impunity among political elites. From a methodological standpoint, this study evaluates the level of internal party democracy in Nigeria by conducting a thorough examination of the body of current literature, legislative frameworks, and empirical data. By utilizing academic knowledge and practical illustrations, it highlights the structural flaws and systemic obstacles that threaten Nigeria's democratic system of government. A series of suggestions are put out in response to these difficulties to stimulate the restoration of internal party democracy and accelerate the process of democratic consolidation. These include pushing for the passage of laws to fortify election procedures, giving independent electoral authorities authority to supervise party primaries, and supporting public awareness initiatives to encourage civic participation and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Citizen participation, internal democracy, Nigeria, political parties

### 1. Introduction

Political parties play a crucial role in democratic societies by combining various interests and ideologies to create coherent platforms for governance. Their function extends beyond a simple

voting apparatus to include fundamental elements of democracy, including accountability, participation, and representation. Political parties are the means by which the populace interacts with the apparatus of government, influencing laws, choosing representatives, and expressing general goals (Ashindorbe & Nathaniel, 2019). This approach makes it impossible to overestimate the significance of political parties in a democracy. As a bridge between government and civil society, they offer a structural foundation for democratic governance. Citizens express their interests and preferences in the political sphere by uniting cohesive groupings among political parties. By doing this, political parties facilitate the hearing of various viewpoints and the conciliation of divergent viewpoints, promoting consensus building and compromise necessary for efficient government (Olawumi, 2023).

In Nigeria, where the Fourth Republic began in 1999 after decades of military governance, political parties have never played a more significant role. Nigeria's journey towards democratic consolidation began with the inauguration of civilian rule and was characterized by periodic cycles of elections and power shifts (Akinyetun, 2021a; Akinyetun & Ebonine, 2022). However, under the surface of democratic development, the landscape is tainted by institutional shortcomings and systemic problems. Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been distinguished since its founding by a profusion of political parties that reflects the dynamic and diverse political environment of the nation (Onapajo & Fatai, 2021). However, despite this diversity, there is a deep-rooted dysfunctionality that is shared by all, and it shows itself as a breakdown of internal party democracy. The threats of factionalism, imposition, and electoral malpractice are enormous, threatening the basic foundations of democratic governance from the ruling parties to the opposition (Akinyetun, 2022; Akinyetun & Ebonine, 2023).

Nigeria's inability to achieve internal party democracy has significant ramifications for its democratic consolidation. The fundamental tenets of democracy are accountability, transparency and inclusivity. Nonetheless, the validity of the democratic process as a whole is questioned when political parties struggle with these ideals (Obianyo & Alumona, 2022). Election credibility in Nigeria is threatened by the pervasiveness of godfatherism, money politics, and electoral violence, which erodes public confidence in democratic institutions. Furthermore, the lack of an internal party democracy exacerbates tensions between different ethnic and religious groups by feeding a vicious cycle of political instability and social discontent (Chendu & Egbe, 2022). When political parties fail to promote inclusivity and consider a range of interests, it exacerbates polarization and societal disintegration in a nation as varied as Nigeria, where identity politics frequently rule the day (Akinyetun, 2021b; Akinyetun, 2024). Consequently, the social fabric is weakened and democratic institutions are more susceptible to exploitation and manipulation by special interests.

The pervasiveness of godfatherism and political godfather individuals, who have disproportionate influence over party matters, is one of the most obvious signs of the breakdown of internal party democracy. To further their personal interests at the expense of the electorate or the party as a whole, these godfathers frequently control party structures, force their own candidates on party members, and select candidates (Fagbadebo, 2020). Furthermore, widespread corruption, vote buying, and other electoral malpractices during party primaries and congresses threaten internal party democracies (Obiagu et al., 2021). Regardless of their qualifications for the position or ability to govern, candidates with the most financial resources or influential supporters frequently win nominations. Political parties suffer from a culture of impunity that disenfranchises regular party members and prevents them from competing.

Furthermore, Nigeria's internal democracy failure has serious ramifications for social cohesion, stability, and government. Although internal party democracy is purportedly promoted by constitutional provisions and legal structures, the actual situation presents a different picture. The procedures and systems inside political parties that guarantee openness, diversity, and equity in choosing candidates and appointing leaders are referred to as internal party democracies (Adekola, 2021). However, in Nigeria, political battles between party hierarchies, patronage networks, and individual interests frequently trump these ideals.

Beyond the internal operations of political parties, the failure of internal party democracy has had significant ramifications for Nigeria's democratic consolidation. First, it erodes the credibility of the democratic process by making voters feel as though they have less real choice, and that party insiders manipulate elections (Idachaba & Makinde, 2021). Second, it worsens social discontent and political instability by pushing disenfranchised party members and marginalized groups to find ways to voice their complaints (Awhefeada & Aloamaka, 2023). This can manifest itself as violence, protests, or even an insurrection, as has been observed in some regions of the nation where discontent with the ruling class has stoked instability. Third, rather than serving as a platform for public service and advancement, political offices have become a way of accumulating wealth and power, perpetuating a cycle of elite capture and rent-seeking behaviour (Promise, 2022). This strengthens the political class's culture of corruption and impunity, and erodes public confidence in democratic institutions.

## 2. Research Methodology

The author adopted a qualitative study approach to better understand the complex relationships between political parties, internal democracy, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This choice is the result of the desire to fully explore the intrigues of the topic and obtain a sophisticated grasp of the difficulties, workings, and possible resolutions associated with internal party democracy in Nigeria. The methodological framework was carefully designed to offer an in-depth examination of the complex environment of political parties and internal democracy in Nigeria. First, this begins with a thorough analysis of the body of research on political parties, internal democracy, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. With the aid of scholarly journals, books, government reports, and other reputable publications, the author hopes to build a solid theoretical framework that is enhanced by historical viewpoints and empirical data relevant to the research. Second, the author conducted a thorough analysis of relevant texts, such as electoral laws, constitutional clauses, and legislative frameworks that control political parties and Nigerian internal democracy. Through a close examination of these documents, the author aims to identify important clauses, show loopholes, and address issues that arise from the internal-party systems. To this end, the author utilized thematic analysis to analyze the discourse found in pertinent documents about political parties and internal democracy in Nigeria. This was done to

better understand the subject matter by identifying recurrent themes, patterns, and opposing opinions. However, in recognition of the inherent limitations of qualitative research such as the possibility of biases in document analysis and subjective interpretation of findings, the author ensured the values of transparency, reflexivity, and triangulation of data sources. This was meant to overcome the limitations and guarantee the validity and dependability of the findings.

### 3. Theoretical Framework: Democratic Institutionalism

Democratic institutionalism holds that political institutions such as electoral processes, political parties, and governance structures must be strong and functional for democratic systems to be effective and stable (Herzog, 2023). Democratic institutionalism offers a prism through which to examine how political parties support democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paradigm emphasizes how crucial institutional practices, norms, and designs influence political conduct, accountability systems, and democratic government as a whole (Herzog, 2023). To apply democratic institutionalism to this study, we must look at how Nigeria's institutional framework for political parties affects internal party democracy and, in turn, democratic consolidation. To do this, it is necessary to evaluate the effects of party structures, constitutional clauses, election rules, and legal frameworks on the degree of internal democracy within political parties. In addition, the framework makes it possible to investigate how individuals, civil society, state institutions, and political parties interact to shape Nigeria's path toward democratic consolidation (Akinyetun & Ebonine, 2022). This highlights how institutional players mediate political rivalry, handle disputes, and promote democratic norms and practices. This study examines how reforms that promote inclusivity, transparency, and accountability – all of which are targeted at enhancing internal party democracy – help consolidate democracy in Nigeria via the lens of democratic institutionalism. It also allows us to investigate the difficulties and limitations political institutions encounter in advancing democratic governance and the consequences for the long-term viability of democratic regimes.

Political parties' legal frameworks are visible through institutional design analysis. The laws governing political behavior and participation were established by the Nigerian Constitution, election laws, and party constitutions. However, these rules are routinely broken despite constitutional protections, such as open candidate selection processes that are meant to foster

internal party democracy. For example, accusations of candidates' imposition during party primaries are not uncommon in both the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) (Basiru, 2019). This promotes internal party strife and undercuts the democratic principles outlined in the Constitution. More so, party structure assessment draws attention to the hierarchical structure of Nigerian political parties, which concentrates power among party insiders and powerful leaders. Decision-making procedures are frequently opaque, and grassroots people have little say in the matter. One prominent instance is the prevalence of party godfathers in states such as Lagos and the Rivers, who have considerable control over the choice of candidates and party operations (Nwambuko et al., 2024). This consolidation of power maintains a culture of political patronage, and disenfranchises regular party members.

The issues presented by the mixed-member proportional representation system are revealed through an evaluation of Nigeria's electoral system. Despite being designed to provide representation for a range of interests, internal party democracy is frequently not upheld by this system. Parties have a lot of power when it comes to choosing candidates, which can result in the imposition of preferred candidates and suppression of internal competition. For example, there were several accusations of electoral misconduct across political parties during the 2019 general elections, including vote buying and manipulation of party primaries (Nwagwu et al., 2022).

The delicate balance of power between political parties, state agencies, civil society, and the general public is highlighted by examining interactions among institutions. Due to institutional independence issues and political meddling, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which monitors elections and implements electoral laws, faces formidable obstacles. This was made clear by the 2007 elections, which drew harsh criticism for their anomalies, opaqueness, sparked demands for electoral reform, and increased accountability (Nwolise, 2007).

Meanwhile, identifying barriers and restrictions draws attention to the structural problems that impede Nigeria's democratic development (Akinyetun, 2022). Significant challenges include limited political inclusivity, widespread corruption, and inadequate enforcement tools (Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021). These issues are made worse by the predominance of elite-driven politics and patronage networks, which undermine attempts to improve party democracy and the effectiveness of government. For example, the integrity of the electoral process is compromised by

the entrenchment of money politics and the use of violence during elections, which further erodes public confidence in democratic institutions.

#### 4. Literature Review

##### *Historical Development of Political Parties in Nigeria*

Nigeria's political parties have a complicated history entwined with the nation's post-colonial nation-building initiatives, independence struggle, and the colonial past. With the rise of groups and movements promoting political representation and self-governance in the early 20th century, political parties first appeared in Nigeria. Many people consider the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which was established in 1923 under Herbert Macaulay's direction, to be the country's first political organization. By promoting more autonomy within the colonial administrative framework, the NNDP mainly served the interests of the educated elites and native businessmen (Orjinta & Ameh, 2020).

Before Nigeria gained independence in 1960, a number of other political parties were formed, each of which represented the various socio-cultural and regional identities that existed there. Under the direction of individuals like Nnamdi Azikiwe, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) grew to become well-known nationalist organizations that promoted self-governance and eventual independence. Similarly, Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG), established in 1951, supported the rights of the Yoruba people residing in western Nigeria. The Hausa-Fulani aristocracy was represented in the northern region by the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which was led by individuals such as Ahmadu Bello. In the same region, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) offered a forum for radical and socialist views (Ojo, 2010).

The varied sociocultural environment of Nigeria was reflected in these early political organizations' frequent ethnic and regional affinities. Nevertheless, they also contributed significantly to the anti-colonial movement's mobilization and the preparation of Nigeria's independence process. Nigeria went through a period of political unrest following its independence in 1960, which was characterized by interethnic conflict, tensions within the area, and military involvement. The NPC ruled the north, the NCNC ruled to the east, and the AG ruled to the west during the First Republic, which ran from 1960 to 1966. However, in the end, the First Republic fell, and the

military government took over as a result of these regional rivalries and power struggles (Chukwu & Udem, 2023).

In the decades that followed, political parties were suppressed, and military dominance solidified. Successive military administrations have suppressed political dissent and consolidated power within the military hierarchy. Political parties were not permitted to function openly in Nigeria until the country's 1999 transfer of civilian control. Nigeria's robust and pluralistic democracy is reflected in the proliferation of political parties that have emerged since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Along with this growth, there have been difficulties including factionalism, rigging elections, and a lack of intellectual cohesion.

##### *Main Political Parties and their Influence on Nigeria's Political History*

An examination of Nigeria's major political parties sheds light on the nation's political history by outlining each party's positions, beliefs, and effects on national development and governance. Numerous political parties have become significant figures in Nigerian history, influencing the country's political landscape:

*National Democratic Party of Nigeria (NNDP):* Under Herbert Macaulay's direction, the NNDP was established in 1923 as Nigeria's first political party. Representing the interests of educated elites and native traders, it promoted greater autonomy within the colonial administrative framework. Although the NNDP was instrumental in creating a foundation for nationalist sentiments, the rise of more ideologically driven parties diminished its impact (Orjinta & Ameh, 2020).

*National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC):* Under the direction of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the NCNC grew to become a well-known nationalist organization that promoted eventual independence and self-government. It was crucial to Nigeria's fight for independence and garnered support from a wide range of ethnic groups in the East. Nigerians in all areas responded favorably to the NCNC's emphasis on unification and self-determination, which helped pave the way for the nation's ultimate independence in 1960 (Ojo, 2010).

*Action Group (AG):* Chief Obafemi Awolowo established the AG in 1951 to advocate for the rights of the Yoruba people in western Nigeria. It garnered broad support from the Yoruba people by promoting progressive programs, such as free healthcare, education, and agricultural reforms. The democratic socialism and grassroots empowerment philosophies of the AG had a long-lasting effect on Nigerian

politics, influencing leaders and political parties in the succeeding decades.

*Northern People's Congress (NPC):* During the pre- and early post-independence eras, the NPC, led by individuals like Ahmadu Bello, controlled politics in northern Nigeria. It promoted a conservative agenda centered on traditional leadership structures and religious ideas, and it fought for the preservation of northern interests and cultural values. The NPC has shaped national policies and political debates, and its impact goes beyond regional bounds (Ojo, 2010).

*Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN):* During the Second Republic, Chief Obafemi Awolowo founded the UPN in 1978, which represented a return to progressive politics in Nigeria. To combat poverty and inequality, it promotes decentralization, economic empowerment, and social welfare initiatives. In the southwest, where it was widely supported, the UPN's emphasis on infrastructure development, healthcare, and education has left an enduring legacy (Ojo, 2010).

*People's Democratic Party (PDP):* The PDP gained prominence in Nigerian politics after it was founded in 1998 during the country's transition to civilian governance. It went on to hold a presidency for the bulk of the Fourth Republic. As a result, a broad coalition of political interests, including economic elites, regional power brokers, and former military officials, came together. However, charges for electoral fraud, corruption, and poor governance tainted the PDP's term in office, leaving many Nigerians disillusioned (Yagboyaju, 2021).

*All Progressives Congress (APC):* The APC, which was created in 2013 by uniting several opposition groups, proved to be a strong opponent of the PDP, which is currently in power. It took advantage of public dissatisfaction with the previous administration by pledging to combat corruption, bolster security, and boost the economy. When the APC emerged victorious in the 2015 presidential contest, Nigeria experienced its first democratic handover of power between political parties. However, just like its predecessor, the APC has come under fire due to internal conflicts and poor governance (Yagboyaju, 2021).

#### *Past Attempts at Political Party Reforms*

Numerous efforts have been made over the years to solve issues that political parties experience and enhance their internal democracy, accountability, and openness. However, because of institutional flaws, political resistance, and insufficient implementation mechanisms, the results of these reforms have frequently fallen short of expectations.

*Legal Reforms:* In Nigeria, enacting laws to control party operations and advance internal democracy has been one of the main strategies for political party

reform. Parts mandating parties to have transparent primaries, uphold democratic values, and guarantee inclusive representation have been added to laws such as the Electoral Act and the Nigerian Constitution (Odigwe, 2015). Although the basis for party accountability has been established by these legal reforms, the lack of effective enforcement measures has resulted in widespread non-compliance and political actors operating with impunity.

*Independent Election Commission Oversight:* The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was created with the purpose of supervising and controlling political party operations, such as the holding of primaries and elections (Olaniyi, 2017). However, political meddling, lack of resources, and capacity issues have restricted INEC's efficacy of INEC. Although the INEC has worked to keep an eye on party operations and punish offenders, its effectiveness has been limited by administrative difficulties and legal gaps that political parties have taken advantage of.

*Civil Society Engagement:* In addition to pushing for political party reform, civil society organizations have been essential in advancing accountability and transparency inside party systems. Civil society organizations have increased their public understanding of the significance of internal democracy and the necessity of party reform through study, campaigning, and public awareness campaigns (Oke & Atufe-Musa, 2021). However, lack of funding, political persecution, and the entrenched interests of party leaders opposed to change have limited their effects.

*International support:* Funding and technical help for political party reform projects in Nigeria has been offered by international donors and development agencies. With differing degrees of success, initiatives to increase women's involvement, boost party capacity, and improve electoral integrity have been implemented (Domingo & Nwankwo, 2010). However, recipient governments' politicization of aid, donor fatigue, and shifting priorities have hampered the efficacy of these measures.

### **5. Internal Democracy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: The Nexus**

The concepts and procedures controlling candidate selection, leadership appointments, and decision-making procedures are all included in internal democracy within political parties (Aylott and Bolin 2017). With this internal democratic framework, which is based on justice, accountability, transparency, and inclusivity, party members are guaranteed to actively shape the party's direction and actions. Internal democracy is important because it

affects many facets of party operations, and ultimately, the larger democratic landscape. First, it makes diversity and representation within parties easier by giving participants a range of experiences, passions, and points of view to participate in decision making. This gives the party more legitimacy and credibility, and gives its members a feeling of pride and community (Godwin, 2016).

Furthermore, internal democracy encourages accountability and openness within political parties, protecting against corruption, the misuse of power, and favoritism. Internal democracy holds party leaders accountable and encourages more transparency by exposing party activities such as budgetary procedures and candidate selection to public inspection (van Biezen & Piccio, 2013). Parties also gain the legitimacy and public confidence that domestic democracies foster. Parties that run democratic campaigns are seen as genuine advocates of their voters will, which boosts their legitimacy and chances of winning elections. Furthermore, internal democracy functions as a means of settling disagreements among parties, which lessens the possibility of factionalism and internal conflict by using official dispute resolution procedures.

Ultimately, internal democracy has a big impact on how well political parties are represented and led. Parties that place strong emphasis on internal democracy are more likely to draw competent and morally upright leaders, which enhances their effectiveness and long-term success (Godwin, 2016). Consequently, this improves the party leadership, policy results, and governance standards.

To evaluate the efficacy and robustness of Nigeria's governance structure, it is essential to understand the connection between internal party democracy and democratic consolidation. Academic discussions and factual data have repeatedly highlighted the importance of internal party democracy in the larger process of democratic consolidation.

Scholars underscore the importance of political parties in promoting democratic engagement and administration. Political parties are essential platforms for democratic participation and governance; therefore, they require an internal party democracy that is transparent, inclusive, and accountable. Political parties are the foundation of democracy, and through their internal processes, they have a significant influence on the standards of representation and governance. They are the 'lifeblood' of democracy, according to Sartori (2005), and their internal dynamics have a big impact on how political

regimes develop. Furthermore, Diamond (1999) emphasizes that the consolidation of democratic values depends critically on competitive party politics based on democratic norms.

Mainwaring and Scully (1995) provide empirical evidence that parties with strong internal democratic processes typically have higher levels of support from the public, electoral success, and political stability in general. On the other hand, parties that place a higher priority on centralization and elite control are more likely to experience institutional breakdown and internal conflict, which present significant obstacles to the consolidation of democracy. Moreover, Merkel (2004) states that political parties' adherence to democratic principles determines how successful the democratic government is. Parties that uphold democratic values are more suited to fostering capable leadership, supporting inclusive policies, and successfully serving the interests of their voters. Levitsky and Way (2010) warn that parties devoid of internal democracy frequently display immoral behavior, unstable policies, and inadequate leadership, which hinders the process of consolidating democracy.

In addition to encouraging public participation, accountability, and trust, internal party democracy also strengthens political legitimacy and civic engagement. According to Norris (2011), public confidence in democratic institutions is enhanced by the belief that democratic parties are both impartial and inclusive. On the other hand, as Inglehart and Welzel (2005) point out, a lack of internal democracy leads to citizen disenchantment and regression in democratic processes, which undermines trust in political institutions and government operations.

## **6. Legal Frameworks and Constitutional Provisions Aimed at Promoting Internal Party Democracy in Nigeria**

Studying Nigeria's internal party democracy through its constitutional provisions and legal frameworks exposes a vast array of laws and rules designed to promote fairness, inclusion, and openness among political parties. These legislative tools are vital cornerstones that support democratic processes and reinforce Nigeria's governance system. Section 221 of the Nigerian Constitution emphasizes the importance of political parties in the democratic process. This section emphasizes the crucial role of political parties in Nigeria's democratic fabric by highlighting their sole role in voter outreach and financial donations. Meanwhile, regarding party primaries in particular, the Electoral Act offers an essential legislative foundation for developing internal party democracy.

Political parties are required by Section 87 of the Act to hold primaries to nominate candidates for elective offices. It outlines how primaries will be held, guarantees that every candidate will have an equal chance of winning, and details how votes will be cast.

Political parties must also create constitutions and bylaws that outline how they will operate internally. These documents provide channels for resolving internal party issues and promoting democratic values by outlining membership standards, candidate-selection guidelines, and decision-making procedures. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is essential for monitoring political parties' compliance with electoral laws and internal democratic norms. INEC keeps an eye on party conventions, congresses, and primaries to ensure that all legal requirements are met. If any party is found to be breaking election rules or party standards, the consequences will apply.

In addition, the judiciary plays a key role as a mediator in settling disputes about internal party democracy and in maintaining political parties' accountability. Courts have the power to resolve conflicts, deem primary irregularities unlawful, guarantee adherence to election statutes and constitutional duties, protect party members' rights, and maintain the rule of law. Nigeria continues to confront obstacles in its efforts to advance internal party democracy, even in the face of legislative frameworks and constitutional guarantees. Often, insufficient enforcement mechanisms, gaps in implementation, and political meddling compromise the effectiveness of legislation. Furthermore, some parties put their own interests ahead of democratic ideals, encouraging factionalism, impunity, and internal strife.

### **7. Failure of Political Parties to Adhere to Democratic Procedures**

Factionalization, defection, and a degraded democratic culture are only a few serious issues that have arisen from Nigerian political parties' disregard for democratic processes. Many parties put their own interests, patronage, and power conflicts ahead of democratic principles despite the established legal frameworks and constitutional rules, which cause internal conflict and unforeseen repercussions. One of the main causes of factionalization in Nigerian political organizations is the imposition of candidates by party officials who disrespect internal democratic processes (Ikechukwu, 2015). Candidates are frequently chosen by personal allegiances, financial inducements, or ethnic affiliations rather than through fair and competitive primaries. In addition to creating

internal strife, this practice weakens party unity and cohesiveness by fostering the emergence of opposing groups within the party.

Furthermore, the lack of intra-party democracy upholds the hegemony of powerful individuals or groups in political party decision-making processes (Basiru, 2019). Members at the grassroots level feel disenfranchised and alienated from genuine involvement in party activities as a result of this concentration of power. Members of the party become disillusioned because of a lack of genuine representation and participation, which stokes animosity and internal splits that compromise the party's integrity as a whole. Unrestrained defection makes matters worse for Nigerian political parties, as members regularly change sides to pursue personal benefits or to support groups that are thought to have better chances for political growth (Badejo et al., 2016). Political parties' intellectual coherence and cohesiveness are also compromised by this culture of defection, which erodes public trust in the political system. The party's structure becomes unstable due to the frequent exodus of members, and the electorate becomes more distrustful and doubtful.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of Nigeria's political scene is worsened by the growth of political parties, which results from the main parties' unwillingness to adhere to democratic norms (Idachaba & Makinde, 2021). Theoretically, multiparty rivalry strengthens democracy, but smaller parties are more frequently used as platforms for individual aspirations than as an actual means of representation. Because many of these parties lack coherent ideologies and substantial policy programs, this fragmentation results in electoral instability, voter confusion, and decreased opportunities for a successful government.

### **8. Strategies to Promote Internal Democracy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

#### *Two Party System*

The possibility of the transition from Nigeria's present multiparty system to a two-party system has gained attention as a potential reform strategy. Advocates argue that this shift could bring several advantages, including increased political stability, effective governance, reduced electoral malpractice, and the promotion of internal democracy within political parties (Akinola, 2017). Proponents of a two-party system argue that it can provide voters with clearer choices and reduce electoral confusion, fostering public trust in the political system (Akinrefon & Oke, 2009). They also suggested that a two-party system could facilitate more effective governance by

exhibiting greater party cohesion, ideological clarity, and policy consistency. This can improve the delivery of public services, promote accountability, and enhance governance efficiency.

Another advantage is that consolidating political rivalry into two main parties may make it easier for electoral authorities like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to monitor and enforce election laws, strengthening attempts to consolidate democracy. Additionally, a two-party system could promote internal democracy within political parties, leading to open candidate selection procedures, grassroots involvement, and greater responsiveness to public concern (Owete, 2013).

However, critics of the proposal raise several concerns, including dictatorship and political inclusivity, which could reduce political variety and representation by marginalizing smaller parties (Yakubu, 2019). Mechanisms such as electoral thresholds and proportional representation could help preserve political inclusivity, while still reaping the benefits of a streamlined party system. Critics also highlight the challenges of party institutionalization in a two-party system, such as the need for constitutional and legal reforms to accommodate a two-party system. Stakeholder participation in inclusive discourse and consensus building is essential to ensuring that reforms uphold democratic values and safeguard citizens' rights (Akosile, 2016; Yakubu, 2019). Finally, they stress the importance of public education and awareness in gaining support and establishing legitimacy for a two-party system. Encouraging informed engagement in the political process through public discussion, media campaigns, and civic education programs can encourage informed support for this transition.

#### ***Empowerment of the Election Management Body (INEC)***

In order to further accountability, equity, and openness, it has been suggested that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) be in charge of party primaries and internal party operations in Nigeria (Ikechukwu, 2015). This plan seeks to improve the integrity of the voting process through strict adherence to law and democratic principles. Reducing the likelihood of fraud, manipulation, and anomalies will improve democratic governance and public confidence in the voting process. By overseeing party primaries, the INEC promotes inclusivity and meritocracy while also creating a fair political climate for all contenders. To lessen the likelihood of factionalism and intra-party disputes, parties are encouraged to implement transparent and inclusive processes for the selection of candidates, the appointment of delegates, and party leadership.

Political party accountability was further improved by the INEC's increased jurisdiction over party primaries. Parties bear accountability for their actions and choices, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has the authority to examine grievances, settle arguments, and deal with anomalies in elections (Basiru, 2019). This encourages adherence to election-related rules and laws. Adequate resource allocation and capacity building are necessary for successful implementation of an increased mandate. This entails supplying the required labor, tools, and logistical assistance; setting up reliable mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data; sending out monitoring teams; and educating elected observers. The INEC's supervisory power also depends on adequate financial funds and allocations. For the INEC's supervision of party primaries to be implemented effectively, it is imperative that stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and electoral specialists, be involved. By encouraging ownership, legitimacy, and transparency, this involvement eventually improves the effectiveness and long-term viability of Nigeria's election reform.

#### ***Independent Candidacy***

A major step toward promoting diversity, increasing political competition, and fortifying democracy is the addition of an Independent Candidacy to Nigeria's election laws. This strategy increases political participation and fosters a more varied democracy by enabling people outside recognized parties to engage in politics. By presenting different viewpoints, concepts, and policies, independent candidates can upend the status quo and stimulate political debate. Mainstream parties are compelled by this competition to put their voters' needs ahead of their own.

In addition, independent candidates improve their responsiveness and responsibility by concentrating on regional problems and speaking out on behalf of their constituents. This promotes a governing structure that is accountable and responsive. By enabling eligible people to run for office based on their qualifications, political leadership standards in Nigeria are raised, promoting meritocracy and leadership proficiency. However, legislative and constitutional changes are necessary to fully realize the potential of independent candidacy. It is crucial to implement equitable processes for candidate fundraising, registration, and campaigning in addition to changing election laws and nomination requirements. Campaigns for public education and awareness are essential in promoting independent candidacy, clearing up misunderstandings, and winning people on to the idea of voting reform. Voters are given more power through these efforts to demand reforms to strengthen democratic governance.

### *Reducing opportunism*

In Nigeria, combating opportunism is essential for advancing true public services and lessening the attraction of politically motivated positions of self-interest. Reducing the financial incentives linked to holding public office, putting term limits on elected officials' salaries and benefits, and matching them to those of professionals or government employees are all crucial steps toward achieving this goal. Deterring corrupt activities among public officials also requires strengthening anti-corruption tools such as asset confiscation and dismissal from public service. By educating more people about their responsibilities and obligations, civic education programs may be expanded, and a culture of transparency and responsiveness can be fostered. Placing a strong emphasis on performance and service delivery directs political rivalry toward observable results and honor commitment to public service. Ultimately, encouraging elected officials to lead honesty and humility through professional development programs and mentoring draws those who are dedicated to moral governance.

### ***Promoting Political Literacy and Civic Engagement***

To promote civic engagement, political literacy, and democratic governance in Nigeria, nationwide awareness programs are essential. These campaigns aim to educate the populace about political parties, democracy, and civic responsibilities. To achieve this, diverse communication channels such as radio, television, print media, social media platforms, community radio stations, and outdoor advertising should be utilized. Engaging content should be developed to explain the importance of civic engagement, the role of political parties in democracy, electoral processes, and citizens' rights and duties. Collaborations with media outlets, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and local leaders can enhance the effectiveness and reach of awareness campaigns. Interactive workshops, town hall meetings, and community forums can foster dialogue and idea exchange among citizens, political actors, and civic educators.

Prioritizing outreach programs targeting Nigerian youth is crucial. Develop youth-focused initiatives, civic education seminars, and leadership development courses to empower young people to participate in democratic processes and decision-making. Ensure awareness initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all segments of society, including people with disabilities, marginalized communities, low-literacy individuals, and those without internet access. Use multimedia formats, visual aids, and plain language to convey complex concepts in an understandable manner.

Embedding civic education in formal and informal learning settings, such as schools, universities, community centers, and places of worship, can foster sustained engagement and long-term sustainability.

## **9. Conclusion**

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of political parties to the consolidation of democracy. Political parties have always been essential organizations for bringing people together, expressing divergent viewpoints, and influencing laws and policies. Nigeria has had both successes and obstacles in its quest to consolidate democracy since the Fourth Republic took office in 1999. Recognizing the pressing necessity of internal party changes is essential to fortifying Nigeria's democratic institutions. Factionalization, desertion, and a degraded democratic culture have resulted from political parties' disregard for democratic ideals and practices, especially when it comes to internal procedures, such as primaries and candidate selection. The legitimacy and credibility of the entire democratic system are threatened by the loss of an internal party democracy. Nigeria's democracy depends on the strength and well-being of its political parties. The establishment of democracy remains elusive in the absence of dynamic and inclusive political parties that uphold democratic norms and ideals. Thus, to achieve durable democratic consolidation, it is imperative that all relevant parties—political leaders, civil society organizations, the media, and regular citizens – prioritize internal party democracy. Determined efforts are needed to implement significant reforms that support accountability, inclusivity, and openness within political parties. This entails fortifying legislative structures, improving election laws, and cultivating an internal democratic and party-discipline culture. Nigeria's democratic potential and the development of a more robust and responsive political system can only be realized by addressing the underlying causes of intra-party conflicts and institutional deficiencies.

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