

## **ELECTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERNAL PARTY CONFLICTS IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA'S 2019-2023 ELECTIONS**

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**Abstract** - This research explored the implications of internal party conflicts on Nigerian election results, focusing on the period from 2019 to 2023. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), among other major political parties, faced persistent challenges due to internal divisions. These conflicts often stemmed from issues such as leadership disputes, political opportunism, candidate selection, and insufficient internal democratic processes. The study assessed the effects of these internal struggles on party performance during state and national elections using a qualitative analysis of existing literature and political discourse. The findings indicated that unresolved internal conflicts negatively impacted the parties' abilities to conduct effective election campaigns and compete against their rivals. Contributing factors included corruption, prebendalism, and ideological uncertainty, which intensified factionalism within the parties. As a result, there was a notable decline in voter confidence and party loyalty, adversely affecting electoral success. The study concluded with recommendations for Nigerian political parties to adopt transparent decision-making processes, strengthen internal democratic standards, and establish clear ideological frameworks. Implementing these measures is vital for enhancing party cohesion, improving election outcomes, and fostering the overall stability of Nigeria's political environment.

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**Keywords:** Conflict, political party, internal democracy, electoral success, Factionalism

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### **Introduction**

In emerging democracies, political parties serve as vital instruments for representing public interests and shaping governance structures (Gambo, 2022). However, in many developing nations, such as Nigeria, political parties often struggle to establish transparent and inclusive systems that facilitate genuine participation in internal electoral processes. The political landscape in Nigeria, particularly between 2019 and 2023, has been marred by intense rivalries, defections, and internal conflicts within parties, which have not only disrupted the democratic process but also weakened party cohesion. For any democratic system to function effectively, both internal unity and intraparty democracy are essential. Unfortunately, internal disputes within Nigerian political parties frequently hinder the selection of qualified candidates for

public office, creating a political environment susceptible to anti-democratic influences. Ideally, political parties should function as platforms for advancing policies that benefit the public as a whole. In reality, they often become entangled in power struggles driven by self-interest, thereby undermining their broader objectives. These conflicts, characterized by competing personal ambitions, typically lead to internal discord, party defections, and organizational stagnation. Such disagreements, primarily motivated by self-serving goals, destabilize political parties and ultimately affect the wider electoral process (Gambo, 2022).

The ideals of fairness and transparency in Nigeria's elections have been compromised by electoral violence and disorder, often fueled by the desire to retain political power at all costs. These disruptions, both during and after elections, have cast doubt on the credibility of the electoral process. For any election to confer legitimate authority, the process must be deemed free, fair, and credible. Internal party conflicts can significantly impede efforts to educate, mobilize, and organize voters ahead of elections, thereby influencing electoral outcomes (Gambo, 2022). Examining internal party disputes offers valuable insights into the functioning of democratic governance. Political education, both within parties and among the general public, plays a crucial role in fostering an inclusive, accountable, and transparent political culture. By understanding the factors that drive internal conflicts, political actors and voters alike can better appreciate the importance of unity and shared objectives in ensuring peaceful and credible elections. Addressing intraparty conflicts has the potential to strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and enhance public trust in the electoral process. Hence, this study aims to explore the electoral implications of internal party conflicts in Nigeria's 2019–2023 elections, focusing on how these disputes affect the legitimacy, peace, and orderliness of elections. Therefore, by identifying the root causes of internal party conflicts and offering practical solutions to resolve them, this study seeks to contribute to the integrity of future elections in Nigeria. Additionally, the findings may provide valuable lessons for other emerging democracies facing similar challenges.

### **Conceptualization**

Conflict, complex in its nature, manifests in various forms such as animosity, dissatisfaction, and aggression. Fundamentally, it arises from

perceived incompatibilities in values, interests, or goals that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled (Gambo, 2022; Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Yusoff, 2020). In the context of political parties, conflict occurs when individuals or groups pursue competing interests, especially in the quest for power or decision-making authority within the party structure (Asuquo, 2022). Intra-party conflict is particularly fueled by rivalry among party members seeking control over internal policies, decisions, or electoral candidate selection processes (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020). These conflicts can be either dysfunctional or beneficial, depending on their perception and management. Within a political party, functional disagreements can foster creativity, mutual understanding, and growth by encouraging dialogue and the introduction of new ideas (Berger, 2017). Conversely, dysfunctional disagreements hinder progress, weaken party unity, and negatively affect decision-making processes (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). In Nigeria, internal party disputes, particularly over candidate selection for public office, often take a dysfunctional form, with profound implications for both party cohesion and the broader democratic process (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). Outcomes such as factionalism, defections, and instability diminish a party's ability to function effectively (Gambo, 2022). Gambo (2022) categorizes political party factionalism into three types: cooperative, competitive, and degenerative. Cooperative factionalism can yield positive outcomes by encouraging communication and peaceful conflict resolution, while competitive and degenerative factionalism tend to lead to division and confrontation. Cooperative norms, developed through regular interaction among party factions, can enhance productive and harmonious working relationships, benefiting both the party and the democratic system as a whole (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020).

Political parties are essential institutions within representative democracies, acting as vehicles for the articulation and aggregation of public interests (Julius, Samuel & Uchenna, 2023). Their role extends beyond mere electoral competition; they serve as platforms for the nomination of candidates, the mobilization of voters, and the consolidation of diverse societal interests into coherent policy agendas (La Palombara & Weiner, 2015). Through these functions, political parties facilitate the smooth operation of democratic systems by creating a structured space for political participation and dialogue. In the context of developing democracies, such as Nigeria, political parties also play a critical role in the political socialization of the electorate. They help

educate citizens on democratic norms and values, promote political awareness, and foster inclusivity by representing diverse groups within society (Basiru, 2019). Additionally, they act as training grounds for future political leaders, imbuing them with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of governance while adhering to democratic principles. As a result, political parties in these settings are not only political entities but also serve as educational tools for enhancing civic engagement and political participation.

However, internal conflicts often disrupt the effectiveness of political parties, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. Intra-party disputes over leadership, decision-making authority, and the selection of candidates for elections have long plagued Nigerian political parties (Epstein, 2020). These conflicts undermine party cohesion and weaken their capacity to present a unified front during elections, which is critical for maintaining voter confidence and winning electoral contests (Gambo, 2022). The presence of factionalism, often exacerbated by regional, ethnic, or personal loyalties, further complicates internal dynamics, leading to splits, defections, and weakened organizational structures (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). One of the major challenges faced by Nigerian political parties is the lack of robust internal governance structures. Many parties operate with minimal transparency and accountability in their internal processes, often allowing influential elites or political "godfathers" to dominate key decisions (Moliki, 2020). This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "godfatherism," distorts the democratic process by prioritizing the interests of a few powerful individuals over the collective will of party members. Consequently, internal democracy within parties is compromised, leading to the marginalization of grassroots members and stoking internal discontent. As party elites exert disproportionate influence over candidate selection and policy formulation, the broader party membership becomes disenfranchised, triggering internal crises that weaken party unity and effectiveness.

A study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 2010 on institutionalizing political parties in Kenya highlights the importance of establishing strong internal governance systems to prevent fragmentation and ensure party stability. This research emphasized the need for clear and transparent candidate selection processes, effective dispute resolution mechanisms, and inclusive leadership structures to promote party cohesion

(Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). The findings from this study are highly relevant to Nigeria, where similar internal challenges have threatened the sustainability of political parties. Strengthening internal democracy and governance within Nigerian political parties would not only reduce factionalism but also enhance their electoral competitiveness by building trust and loyalty among members. The consequences of weak internal structures are far-reaching. In addition to undermining party cohesion, internal conflicts within political parties often spill over into the broader electoral landscape, contributing to violence, voter disenfranchisement, and electoral irregularities. Internal party crises frequently lead to defections, where disgruntled members either form splinter groups or join rival parties, thereby diluting the party's electoral strength and fragmenting the political landscape (Epstein, 2020). Such instability diminishes public confidence in the democratic process and erodes the legitimacy of elections, as parties struggle to present credible candidates and coherent platforms.

The experience of political parties in other developing democracies offers valuable lessons for Nigeria. For instance, South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) has historically navigated internal tensions through established conflict resolution mechanisms and a commitment to inclusive leadership, which has helped the party maintain its dominance in the post-apartheid era (Basiru, 2019). In contrast, the absence of similar mechanisms in Nigeria has led to chronic instability within major political parties, resulting in recurring electoral challenges and governance issues. Consequently, to address these issues, Nigerian political parties must prioritize the institutionalization of internal democratic practices. This involves fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, and inclusivity in decision-making processes. Developing clear guidelines for candidate selection, ensuring equitable representation of diverse interests within the party, and establishing formal channels for resolving disputes are essential steps toward achieving party unity and stability. Moreover, political education within parties should be strengthened to emphasize the importance of collective goals over individual ambitions, thereby reducing the propensity for factionalism and power struggles (Gambo, 2022). Therefore, political parties are indispensable to the functioning of democratic systems, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. However, their effectiveness is often compromised by internal conflicts, weak governance structures, and the dominance of political elites. To

enhance their role as vehicles for democratic development, Nigerian political parties must address these internal challenges by promoting stronger internal democracy, fostering inclusivity, and establishing robust mechanisms for conflict resolution. Only by overcoming these internal hurdles can political parties contribute meaningfully to the consolidation of democracy and the advancement of good governance in Nigeria.

### **Internal Party Democracy**

The stability and success of political parties are fundamentally tied to the principles of internal democracy. Internal democracy encompasses mechanisms that facilitate participation among party members in critical decision-making processes, including governance, candidate selection, and policy formulation (La Palombara & Weiner, 2015). In the Nigerian context, the lack of internal democracy is a primary contributor to the prevalence of intra-party conflicts, which often manifest in the form of power struggles and factionalism (Asuquo, 2022). When decision-making is dominated by party elites, ordinary members feel marginalized and sidelined, leading to dissatisfaction and a sense of disconnection from the party's objectives (Gambo, 2022). Such exclusionary practices not only create a hostile internal environment but also diminish the party's ability to respond effectively to the needs and aspirations of its constituents. In its ideal form, internal democracy ensures that all party members, regardless of their status or influence, have the right to participate meaningfully in the party's decision-making processes. This inclusivity fosters transparency and accountability, ensuring that party decisions reflect the collective will and diverse perspectives of its membership (Berger, 2017).

The importance of internal democracy is underscored by its capacity to enhance a party's resilience against internal conflicts. Inclusive parties are often better equipped to navigate disputes, as they cultivate a culture of dialogue and collaboration that prioritizes consensus-building over confrontation. Such environments not only improve internal dynamics but also enhance the party's credibility during elections, as they are more likely to field candidates who genuinely represent the interests of their members and constituents (Epstein, 2020). The absence of robust internal democratic practices has had detrimental effects on the electoral process in Nigeria. The 2019–2023 elections highlighted these challenges, as many political parties struggled with internal discord, leaving members feeling alienated from key

decision-making processes (Innocent et al., 2020). This alienation led to fragmentation within parties, where discontented factions broke away or chose not to support the party during elections. The resultant electoral losses not only affected the parties involved but also contributed to a broader erosion of public trust in the democratic process, as citizens began to perceive political parties as self-serving rather than representative of the people's interests.

To address these issues, political parties in Nigeria must prioritize internal reforms that promote inclusion and democratic decision-making. Such reforms should aim to create structures that empower ordinary members and facilitate greater participation in party affairs (Gambo, 2022). For instance, implementing transparent candidate selection processes and establishing regular forums for member engagement can help mitigate feelings of disenfranchisement among the party base. These changes are essential for enhancing party cohesion, improving electoral performance, and ensuring the long-term stability of Nigeria's democratic system. Fostering an environment of inclusion and open communication is paramount for political parties seeking to manage internal conflicts effectively. By adopting practices that encourage member participation, political parties can present a unified front during elections, reducing the likelihood of factional disputes that can hinder their electoral success (Sieberer, 2020). Furthermore, such an approach contributes to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria by reinforcing the legitimacy of political parties as representative institutions. Therefore, internal party democracy is a critical pillar for the effectiveness and stability of political parties in Nigeria. By addressing the deficiencies in their internal democratic processes, political parties can not only improve their internal cohesion but also enhance their overall electoral viability. This, in turn, contributes positively to the democratic landscape of Nigeria, fostering a political culture that values inclusivity, accountability, and active participation among its citizens.

### **Factors Driving Internal Party Struggles in Nigerian Politics**

In a democratic society, the divergent objectives and interests of political party members can give rise to intra-party conflicts for a variety of reasons. Such conflicts can undermine a party's capacity to achieve its goals, breeding animosity, division, and discontent among members. Okonkwo and Unaji (2016) identify several key factors that contribute to internal party conflicts,

emphasizing the complexity of these dynamics:

- **Unfair Allocation of Resources:** Disparities in the distribution of party resources such as funding, campaign support, and access to platforms can lead to significant intra-party disputes. For instance, the All-Progressives Congress (APC) experienced rifts in party unity prior to the 2019 Nigerian general elections due to dissatisfaction among members over resource allocation, where favoritism towards certain candidates created an atmosphere of resentment. Members feel marginalized when they believe they are not receiving their fair share of the party's advantages, which can severely disrupt cohesion.
- **Nepotism and Preference for Family Members:** The practice of nepotism can fracture party unity, especially when influential figures, such as governors or party chairpersons, appoint family members or close associates to critical positions. Such preferential treatment breeds dissatisfaction among other party members, who may view these actions as indicative of corruption and bias. This partiality can significantly undermine the party's legitimacy and foster divisions, leading to factionalism.
- **Centralized Authority and Top-Down Decision-Making:** Many political parties in Nigeria operate under a hierarchical structure where decisions are made at the top, often without sufficient input from grassroots members. This centralization alienates those at the base who feel their voices are unheard. Historical instances, such as decisions made by leaders of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) without adequate consultation, have led to substantial dissent, compromising party unity and effectiveness.
- **Lack of Regular Meetings and Communication:** The absence of frequent communication and regular meetings can exacerbate existing tensions among party members. Misunderstandings are likely to escalate into conflicts when members do not engage in open discussions about strategies and objectives. For example, the 2015 leadership crisis within the PDP was significantly aggravated by the lack of inclusive meetings, resulting in splits and the emergence of breakaway factions.
- **Ineffective Communication and Decision-Making Processes:** Inadequate communication channels can lead to misinformation and



misbehavior among members. During the 2018 party primaries, numerous candidates reported feelings of exclusion due to a lack of transparency in decision-making, which resulted in protests among supporters and further disputes within the party.

These fundamental issues frequently give rise to some of the most severe and polarizing party disputes. Each of these factors fosters an environment where party members may use their influence to restrict others' potential, ultimately serving the interests of a wealthy elite. The unequal allocation of resources is particularly detrimental, undermining both democracy and party cohesion. When members perceive inequity, disputes are likely to arise, as each member desires a larger share of the party's benefits (Okonkwo & Unaji, 2016). Equitable resource distribution not only benefits members but also strengthens their commitment to the party's democratic principles. Conversely, unresolved conflicts are a likely outcome for any political party that promotes inequality. In Nigeria, party allegiance is often driven more by ethnic identity than by ideological alignment, leading to divisions and strife, particularly during elections. This ethnicization of party politics has resulted in intensified intra-party struggles, as members prioritize ethnic loyalty over party unity.

- **Zoning and Ethnic Conflicts:** Zoning, or the practice of allocating electoral seats based on ethnic or geographic lines, is another significant factor contributing to internal party conflicts. For instance, the APC's decision to zone specific positions led to protests from members who felt excluded based on their ethnicity or geographic location, reflecting the party's growing instability (Gambo, 2022).
- **Desire for Financial Gain:** Political ambitions in Nigeria are frequently driven by the pursuit of financial gain. Adekeye and Abdulrauf (2017) argue that individuals often view political power as a means to access and control public resources for personal enrichment. This quest for wealth overshadows genuine political aspirations and exacerbates power struggles among party members.
- **Ideological Ambiguity:** Many political parties in Nigeria are criticized for lacking clear ideologies, which leads to inconsistent goals and policies. The absence of a unified philosophy makes it difficult for parties to coordinate their interests, increasing the likelihood of disputes among members.

- **Executive Branch Interference:** The executive branch often exerts pressure on political parties, undermining their independence. When governors or other political figures exert disproportionate influence over party matters, internal conflicts can arise, challenging the party's autonomy and decision-making processes.
- **Religious Polarization:** In a nation characterized by diverse religious beliefs, religious differences can also contribute to internal disputes, impeding party cohesiveness and fostering divisions along religious lines.
- **Ethnic Dynamics:** Members who prioritize their ethnic identity over party loyalty can significantly impact party dynamics, creating factions that challenge the unity and stability of the party.

An examination of these factors reveals that internal democracy and ideological cohesion are critical challenges afflicting Nigerian political parties. Gambo (2022) asserts that a party's ideological coherence is a prerequisite for fostering internal democracy. A party with a clear ideology is more likely to maintain discipline and promote a democratic culture among its members. In Nigeria, the lack of internal democracy often leads to influential elites supporting politicians or policies that serve their interests rather than those of the broader membership. Political leaders frequently resist relinquishing power, and devoted followers may seek to distance themselves from state accountability. While political parties should represent the public's interests and hold authorities accountable for pressing issues such as infrastructure development, the prevailing environment is marked by a reluctance to challenge the status quo, particularly when constitutional principles are disregarded. The interplay of these factors creates a challenging environment for political parties in Nigeria, where internal conflicts not only undermine party unity but also impede the broader democratic process. By addressing these fundamental issues, Nigerian political parties can embark on a path toward increased stability and efficacy, fostering a political culture that values inclusivity, accountability, and genuine representation of the public's interests.

### **Progress and Challenges of Internal Party Political Dynamics in Nigeria**

Nigeria's political landscape has been profoundly shaped by the interplay of regionalism, leadership aspirations, and individual ambitions. The evolution of internal party politics reveals a complex tapestry of emotional, rational, and conflicting goals (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). Political parties are pivotal

actors in the decision-making processes of governance, significantly influencing how societal resources are distributed and managed. Historically, however, Nigerian political parties have often favored strong unitary leadership over internal party democracy, leading to systemic challenges (Basiru, 2019). Research indicates that while political parties are crucial for educating voters and enhancing political participation, their effectiveness is contingent upon robust internal structures and a commitment to democratic principles (Basiru, 2019; Julius et al., 2023). The legacy of Nigeria's colonial past has entrenched ethnic and regional divisions, which continue to impact political affiliations and party dynamics. Early political entities, such as the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG), were primarily organized along ethnic lines, with the NPC representing the Hausa-Fulani and the AG aligning with the Yoruba-speaking population of the Western Region (Gambo, 2022). This ethnic orientation not only fostered internal conflicts but also prioritized regional power over national cohesion. The National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which began with nationalist ideals, is a notable case where internal ethnic-based opposition emerged, particularly following Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's appointment as Premier of the Western Region, resulting in significant divisions (Basiru, 2019).

During the First Republic (1960–1966), the persistence of internal party conflicts was evident, notably in the rift between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Ladoke Akintola within the AG. Their ideological divergence, Awolowo's progressive national agenda versus Akintola's conservative regionalism, culminated in a split that gave rise to the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), destabilizing the political landscape of the Western Region and contributing to the eventual collapse of the First Republic (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). The Second Republic (1979–1983) similarly experienced severe internal strife, particularly within the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which grappled with leadership struggles and power allocation issues, leading to electoral malpractices that marred the 1983 elections and precipitated another military takeover (Basiru, 2019). The Third Republic (1991–1993) introduced new political parties, including the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). However, these parties struggled with internal democratic structures, undermining their potential for popular engagement and contributing to the

republic's collapse (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). In contemporary Nigeria, the challenges of internal party dynamics persist, particularly within major political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Leading up to the 2019 general elections, the APC faced significant internal divisions concerning candidate selection, resulting in defections of key members, including governors and party officials (Gambo, 2022). These defections weakened the party's cohesion and hindered its electoral effectiveness. The PDP similarly grappled with factional divisions over leadership and regional representation, particularly evident during its 2018 presidential primaries, which ultimately impacted its performance in the 2019 elections (Julius et al., 2023).

Moreover, internal disputes often extend beyond electoral contexts, affecting governance. For instance, after Governor Nasir El-Rufai's re-election in 2019 in Kaduna State, he encountered substantial resistance from within the APC, as many party members felt excluded from key decision-making processes. In Rivers State, factional conflicts between Senator Magnus Abe and former Governor Rotimi Amaechi further complicated the party's ability to contest elections, demonstrating how internal discord can hamper political activities (Basiru, 2019). The complexity of internal party dynamics is further exacerbated by regional power struggles. In the Southeastern region, where Igbo populations predominate, political leaders have historically faced marginalization within national parties. This perceived exclusion has contributed to the emergence of smaller regional parties, such as the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), which seeks to address local interests and dissatisfaction with the major parties' approaches (Adekeye & Abdulrauf, 2017). The 2023 elections presented a critical test for internal party dynamics, particularly within the APC. Disputes over the zoning of the presidency—whether it should be allocated to the North or the South—resulted in significant political maneuvering and defections, posing threats to the party's stability (Gambo, 2022). The resolution of such internal conflicts is crucial for ensuring the future stability of Nigeria's democracy. Without addressing the challenges of intra-party politics, characterized by factionalism, leadership disputes, and regional rivalries, Nigerian political parties risk remaining vulnerable to elite manipulation and declining public trust (Epstein, 2020).

## **Exploring the Complexities of Internal Party Conflicts in Nigeria's Political Arena**

Effective political parties rely on a spectrum of perspectives and roles to function optimally. However, internal dynamics often manifest as tensions between members prioritizing party unity and those driven by personal ambitions or factional interests (Moliki, 2020). The coherence of a party is a crucial determinant of electoral success; parties that maintain internal unity tend to perform better, while those plagued by internal conflicts often face setbacks in democratic progress. For instance, internal strife within the ruling party during the Ekiti State elections led to lackluster campaigning and diminished voter turnout, reflecting how internal disputes can disenfranchise even moderate members (Moliki, 2020). However, such conflicts typically arise when parties deviate from their foundational objectives in pursuit of personal or political gains. In Ogun State's 2019 gubernatorial primaries, disputes over candidate selection resulted in legal challenges and campaign delays, underscoring how unmet expectations regarding inclusion and fairness can trigger internal unrest (Gambo, 2022). While disruptive, these conflicts can also serve as a mechanism for identifying qualified candidates better suited to represent constituents.

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, internal party conflicts have increasingly undermined political functionality. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) faced considerable internal turmoil leading up to the 2015 elections, resulting in a factional split that birthed the All Progressives Congress (APC), ultimately leading to the PDP's electoral defeat (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Yusoff, 2020). This trend reflects a broader issue where the view of politics as a lucrative venture exacerbates competition for power and resources. Furthermore, the political elite's disregard for the rule of law often fuels intra-party tensions, as evidenced by the violent controversies during the 2023 Rivers State elections, which were marred by allegations of rigging and candidate imposition (Gambo, 2022). Despite these challenges, Nigerian elites have occasionally sought to mediate internal conflicts through power-sharing agreements that aim to balance regional and ethnic interests. Leading up to the 2023 presidential elections, major parties engaged in negotiations to ensure equitable power distribution across Nigeria's diverse regions. Although such agreements can foster political stability, they often obscure underlying factional

rivalries (Innocent et al., 2020). Thus, while internal party dynamics can serve as sources of conflict, they also have the potential to enhance party unity if managed effectively. Addressing the complexities of internal party conflicts in Nigeria's political landscape remains essential for the development of a stable and effective democratic system.

### **Impact of Internal Democracy on Conflict Dynamics within Major Political Parties in Nigeria**

Political parties are integral to participatory democracy and play a crucial role in shaping governance (Gambo, 2022). In modern societies, electoral democracy thrives when political parties not only survive but also expand their influence. A central aspect of democracy is the formation of political parties that create an equitable platform for political participation, irrespective of social class. However, internal conflicts can undermine the core values of representation within these parties. For political parties to function effectively, they must prioritize internal democracy, where inclusion guides every decision (Okonkwo & Unaji, 2016). Political parties in Nigeria have significant influence on national governance as their ideologies shape policies. Thus, addressing internal conflicts and reinforcing democratic practices are essential to their success. Participatory decision-making within parties enhances leadership quality, strengthens policy development, and boosts electoral performance.

Upholding democratic procedures is necessary to solidify a party's democratic legacy. The introduction of internal democracy in Nigerian political parties has seen varying degrees of success. Scholars argue that for democracy to permeate the broader political system, internal democracy within political parties is essential (Caselli & Tesei, 2016). Engaging party members in decision-making fosters political strategy, sharpens political acumen, and produces competent representatives. However, internal democracy can sometimes become a double-edged sword, threatening leadership stability and electoral prospects. Since 1999, elections in Nigeria have followed the liberal democracy model, where political actors are mandated by the Constitution to act democratically, thereby promoting internal democracy and reducing intra-party conflicts (Okonkwo & Unaji, 2016; Gambo, 2022). The Electoral Act emphasizes fair nomination processes, with oversight by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), yet political parties often fail to maintain unity, resulting in fragmented leadership and weakened internal cohesion. The lack of internal democracy has

enabled aspiring leaders to manipulate their positions for personal gain, undermining party unity and policy direction.

However, one of the key characteristic of Nigeria's political landscape is the influence of impunity and "godfatherism" within major parties like the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). Internal party decisions are frequently controlled by powerful figures, or "godfathers," who exert significant influence on leadership selection, often at the expense of democratic ideals. This pattern weakens party integrity, with leaders prioritizing the interests of their backers over the party's goals (Sieberer, 2020). For instance, during the 2019 elections, candidates' commitment to democratic principles was compromised by their allegiance to godfathers. In one such instance, allegations arose that Alhaji Atiku Abubakar paid delegates to secure their votes in the PDP primaries, distorting the party's democratic processes (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Yusoff, 2020). The PDP, founded in 1998 in response to General Sani Abacha's military regime, dominated Nigerian politics for years. However, it has frequently been accused of undermining internal democracy through election manipulation and factional conflicts. Similar challenges plague the APC, which was created in 2015 to challenge the PDP's dominance. The APC's formation from diverse groups brought power struggles and conflicting interests, leading to internal divisions. During the 2019 elections, internal strife in states like Lagos and Imo exposed cracks within the APC, with concerns over candidate selection and electoral manipulation surfacing (Gambo, 2022).

Despite the party's efforts to present a unified front, the persistent delays in holding national conventions since 2021 further indicate a lack of internal democracy. The historical development of Nigeria's political parties highlights the struggle for power, influence, and control, often at the expense of democratic ideals. Party leadership has often become self-serving, with politicians motivated by personal interests rather than party goals. Overcoming these entrenched systems and empowering party members to have a genuine say in decision-making remains a significant challenge. Political parties in Nigeria continue to grapple with the tension between leadership authority and democratic inclusion. While diversity of opinion is vital in a democratic system, it should not undermine party members' commitment to equality and the rule of law. However, Nigerian politics often disregards these democratic

norms, leading to increased marginalization and dissatisfaction among the populace (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). Party leaders frequently prioritize consolidating their own power over upholding the principles necessary for party growth and sustainability. The future of political parties in Nigeria depends on internal reforms that prioritize inclusivity, transparency, and democratic values. Such reforms would enable parties to represent the interests of the people more effectively and contribute meaningfully to national development.

### **Role of Political Parties in Promoting Democratic Stability**

Political parties are central to the democratic process, serving as vehicles for representation and governance. The strength of a party, its degree of institutionalization, internal cohesion, and organizational capacity, greatly impacts its effectiveness in a democratic system (Caselli & Tesei, 2016). In Nigeria, strong political parties are essential for democratic stability, yet internal conflicts continue to impede their development. The case of Akinwunmi Ambode, whose failure to secure his party's nomination for the 2019 Lagos gubernatorial election due to internal APC disputes, illustrates how intra-party conflicts can destabilize political systems and undermine democracy (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). Rosenbluth and Shapiro (2018) argue that modern political parties are characterized by three key features: centralization, representation of diverse interests, and a focus on winning political office. In Nigeria, these features manifest through parties like the APC and PDP, which often draw support based on regional, ethnic, and religious affiliations. However, the pursuit of political office can sometimes overshadow the broader democratic goals of inclusion and representation. This was evident in the APC's 2014 presidential primaries, where internal tensions between the party's northern and southern factions highlighted the fragility of intra-party unity, despite Buhari's eventual victory. Promoting internal democracy within parties is crucial to ensuring that members and supporters have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes. In Nigeria, however, political parties frequently struggle with internal democratic practices. The PDP's zoning system, which rotates leadership and presidential nominations between the North and South, exemplifies the internal conflicts that arise when parties attempt to balance internal democracy with national unity. The case of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who left the PDP ahead of the 2015



elections due to disagreements over zoning policies, demonstrates how such arrangements can lead to factionalism (Gambo, 2022).

In Nigeria, internal party conflicts are often fueled by godfatherism and personal ambitions, undermining democratic values. Political godfathers' powerful figures who control party nominations and election outcomes play a significant role in exacerbating intra-party disputes. During the 2007 national elections, for instance, former President Olusegun Obasanjo was accused of handpicking Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the PDP's presidential candidate, sidelining more popular contenders (Sieberer, 2020). Such manipulation weakens internal party democracy, leading to defections and further eroding party institutions. Despite constitutional provisions that mandate political parties to uphold internal democracy, the influence of power brokers and godfathers continues to distort the process. Bola Tinubu, a key figure in Lagos State politics, has faced criticism for his dominance over candidate selection in the APC. This has led to internal dissent and allegations of undemocratic behavior, threatening the party's credibility (Sieberer, 2020). Furthermore, the commercialization of party nominations, where candidates are selected based on their financial clout rather than merit, further undermines democratic processes. Political parties in Nigeria often suffer from internal strife due to undemocratic candidate selection procedures that favor a small elite. As parties become vehicles for personal enrichment, competition for positions and resources intensifies, leading to internal violence and instability. This is evident in states like Rivers and Akwa Ibom, where intra-party disputes have escalated into violent confrontations, highlighting the broader security implications of internal party conflicts (Caselli & Tesei, 2016). For Nigerian political parties to contribute meaningfully to democratic governance, they must prioritize internal reforms that promote inclusion, transparency, and democratic values. Internal party dynamics are a critical aspect of Nigeria's political development. While internal party conflicts can disrupt democratic processes, they also have the potential to strengthen party unity and improve candidate selection when managed effectively. For Nigeria's political parties to contribute to national development and democratic stability, they must address internal challenges through inclusive leadership and transparent procedures. Failure to do so will leave Nigeria's democracy vulnerable to elite manipulation, instability, and a loss of public trust.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study on internal party conflicts and their electoral implications in Nigeria significantly enhances the existing body of knowledge regarding democratic governance and political party dynamics in emerging democracies. It elucidates the complex relationship between internal party democracy and electoral outcomes, highlighting how conflicts within political parties can undermine their effectiveness and credibility. By examining the case of Nigeria's 2019-2023 elections, this research reveals the detrimental effects of factionalism and the prioritization of personal interests over collective goals, thereby emphasizing the need for robust internal structures and democratic practices. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of accountability and prompt conflict resolution within parties, providing valuable insights for policymakers, political analysts, and party leaders seeking to enhance democratic processes. This study not only sheds light on the challenges facing Nigerian political parties but also offers a framework for understanding similar dynamics in other emerging democracies, thereby enriching the discourse on political stability and governance.

### **Conclusion**

This paper concludes that internal conflicts within political parties in Nigeria have profound electoral implications that significantly impact the democratization process, particularly during the 2019-2023 elections. The dominance of a commercialized political ethos, where personal ambitions overshadow collective interests, has intensified intra-party frictions and led to the emergence of rival factions. These factions often prioritize their own agendas over inclusivity and the welfare of the public, thereby undermining the parties' reputations and electoral viability. While some degree of conflict may be inevitable due to differing motivations and interests, such disputes detract from the parties' primary mission of genuine representation. The findings suggest that a lack of internal democracy discourages competent individuals from engaging with political parties, fostering an environment where less capable members often ascend to leadership positions. This scenario reinforces the adage that "the worst among us govern the finest," underscoring the urgent need for reforms that promote internal democracy. For that reason, by enhancing inclusive decision-making and prioritizing the collective welfare of the citizenry, political parties in Nigeria can strengthen

their foundations, improve their electoral prospects, and contribute meaningfully to the nation's overall democratic development.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively address the electoral implications of internal party conflicts in Nigeria, political parties should adopt the following recommendations:

1. Political party leadership should proactively address and resolve internal disputes by establishing protocols for discussing contentious issues, ensuring timely and constructive dialogue among party members.
2. Political parties should implement accountability measures for their leadership, subjecting those who disregard party unity and public interest to disciplinary actions or sanctions.
3. Political parties should develop robust internal structures to reinforce party cohesion and effectively address the needs of the Nigerian populace.
4. Nigeria's political system should undergo comprehensive re-engineering through aggressive educational and enlightenment programs targeting party members, voters, and stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the political landscape.

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