



INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF PDP, APC, AND LP IN THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 rekindled the hope of Nigerians after over three decades of militarisation characterised by impunity, monumental corruption, human rights abuse, oppression, and insecurity. However, democratic governance in the Fourth Republic has been characterised by party politics that have weakened Nigerian democratic institutions. This study examines the nexus between political parties and intra-party democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with specific focus on the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), and Labour Party (LP) during the 2023 presidential election. Adopting a qualitative research methodology based on documentary analysis of party constitutions, electoral laws, election observer reports, and academic literature, the study finds that political parties in Nigeria have not been fully institutionalised. The study reveals that intra-party conflict, ideological contradictions, godfatherism, and elite-dominated party politics are visible in the conduct of government and politics. The period since 1999 has witnessed the birth, demise, and merger of political parties characterised by poor ideological manifestation, corruption, extortion, influence peddling, fraud, embezzlement, and nepotism. These developments pose great challenges to political party development and democratic consolidation, threatening democratic processes, security, and the socio-economic well-being of citizens. The study concludes that the absence of robust intra-party democracy has fundamentally undermined the quality of Nigeria's democracy. The study recommends that democratic institutions should be strengthened to prevent systemic collapse and politicisation of core government policies; party leaders should be discouraged from imposing candidates on party members; party rules should be strictly adhered to in nomination processes; citizens should be sensitised on the importance of political participation and demanding accountability from political leaders; and all key players in Nigeria's electoral process government, judiciary, electoral body, civil society, and religious institutions should vigorously commit to strengthening the democratic system.

Keywords: Democracy, Political Parties, Intra-Party Democracy, Godfatherism, Political Corruption, Fourth Republic, 2023 Presidential Election

1. Introduction

When people discuss democracy in contemporary times as a system of governance that serves as a framework within which human affairs are managed in modern nation-states, they are fundamentally referring to representative democracy. One of the essential tools for democracy is the party system. Conflict is quite unavoidable in virtually all democracies because democracy seeks effective ways through which society

should be ideally governed. In line with this, Aleyomi (2013) observed that conflict emanates whenever two or more persons seek to possess the same object, occupy the same position, or play incompatible roles in achieving their purposes.

Nigeria was until 1999 devastated by military rule. However, nearly two decades into democratic rule, peace and security have remained threatened and difficult to achieve. The role of political parties in

maintaining peace and security is paramount. These roles include democratic sustainability, maintenance of peace and security, and serving as a unifying force in a divided polity. The general administration of elections, despite setbacks, suggests that elections may not be a "fading shadow of democracy" or "without choice" (Schedler, 2002; Omotola, 2010; Aleyomi, 2013).

The borderlines between political parties and other interest groups may in some instances be blurred. However, what distinguishes political parties from any other political interest group is that only the former has the primary goal of contesting and capturing state power through peaceful means (Matlosa, 2007). Matlosa further argues that this distinctive feature makes political parties important institutions in any democratic society. Due to what they are meant to be, they become the main vehicle for political representation, the main mechanism for the organisation of government, and the channels for maintaining democratic accountability.

There are a number of institutional guarantees that political parties must fulfil to effectively meet their expected role in a democracy. According to the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD, 2004), in emerging democracies, it may be relatively easy to identify and agree on these institutional preconditions. The problem is assessing the extent of their presence or absence in each political party, as this requires developing measurable indicators. Difficulty arises particularly because these institutional guarantees touch on the internal workings of political parties. In Africa, political parties have unfortunately been subjected to far less research in the democratisation field, as only recently have they become subjects of public discussion and explicit external support. As such, comprehensive knowledge of what constitutes key dimensions of these institutional underpinnings is lacking. For this reason, any attempt to contribute to deepening any of these basic requirements must be premised on a fair understanding of political parties themselves. In other words, we need to understand the nature of these political parties and

the context within which they operate as a starting point.

Development involves qualitative progression, movement from point A to Z, and advancement towards something better that positively affects people's lives (Okoli & Onah, 2002). Comparatively, democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic could be said to be far better than the military era that preceded it. However, the nature of politicking characterised by a trickish network of deception in Nigeria's democratic dispensation has been marked by political corruption, nepotism, intra-party conflict, weak institutions, poor ideology, and godfatherism (political hawks) in decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation vis-à-vis the interests of the masses. This has over time translated into policy somersaults, policy reversals, human rights abuse, economic bondage, and monumental corruption, all attributable to the institutional fragility that characterises party politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

This situation draws attention to the dryness of politics marked by the absence of philosophical debates or articulation of political programmes around clear principles. The situation is a far cry from what existed in the Second Republic when it was possible to demarcate political parties as liberal democratic, welfarist, and socialist. The effect is that political campaigns and the mobilisation of the electorate are not issue-driven. Examining the nature of Africa's political landscape in the democratic era reveals a number of features common to political parties that point to weak institutionalisation and the problem it poses to democratic consolidation.

First, political parties are aggregations of strange bedfellows who reduce the essence of a political party to a machine for capturing votes and political power. Second, there is an anomalous situation in which the notion of party supremacy has disappeared, such that elected presidents, governors, and local government chairpersons assume the position of "party leaders" at various levels. A closely related issue is the role of political godfathers within political parties and

oligarchic tendencies that place party elites in a position to determine party candidates for elections at all levels rather than transparent processes of party primaries. The most disturbing aspect of the present party system is the little visibility enjoyed by party programmes and manifestos in the campaign process and the mobilisation of the electorate.

The 2023 presidential election brought these issues into sharp focus. The PDP, APC, and LP each conducted party primaries that were widely criticised for lack of transparency, imposition of candidates, and monetisation. The election itself revealed the consequences of weak intra-party democracy, including defections, post-election litigation, and contested legitimacy of the electoral outcome. It is based on the foregoing that this study examines intra-party democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with specific focus on the PDP, APC, and LP in the 2023 presidential election.

This study pursues three primary objectives:

Objective One: To examine the nature and character of political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with specific focus on the PDP, APC, and LP, including their organisational structures, ideological orientations, and internal governance mechanisms.

Objective Two: To analyse the relationship between intra-party democracy (or its absence) and broader democratic consolidation in Nigeria, using the 2023 presidential election as a case study.

Objective Three: To assess the consequences of weak intra-party democracy including godfatherism, candidate imposition, and political corruption for the quality of Nigeria's democracy and propose evidence-based recommendations for reform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Democracy

Democracy is defined here in terms of popular participation in the election of representatives who are assigned the responsibility of managing common affairs in any given political community or state. In the context of this study, representative democracy is the primary concern. In this sense, democracy assumes that citizens can constitute the electorate, which can in turn elect representatives through a relatively impartial electoral system to represent them in the organs of government and help design policies responsive to popular wishes, aspirations, and desires. Nwoye (2001) sees democracy as signifying a political system dominated by representatives either directly or indirectly chosen by the people. It is a continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental rights a political system that operates on the basis of popularly elected or appointed representatives to run the affairs of the state, most often premised on effective representation and participation (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2000; Baker, 1995; Philip, 1991).

Conceptualising Political Party

A political party is one of the political institutions in a competitive democracy. Political parties serve as an index through which democratic governance can be compared across states, as the structure and operation of party politics in polities tend to serve as a measuring rod for determining the fragility or otherwise of democratic systems (Omodia, 2010). In Lemay's (2001) words, a political party refers to "any group of politically active persons outside a government who organise to capture government by nominating and electing officials who thereby control the operations of government and determine its policies." However, a situation where political parties are poorly structured to perform articulative, aggregative, communicative, and educative functions is likely to be associated with poor political culture, which tends to make the democratic process fragile. Conversely, where political parties are well structured to perform these functions, such a system is often associated with participant political

culture, which tends to ensure a stable democratic process (Almond, 2000).

Political parties perform a number of functions and serve as building blocks in any political system. They are principal instruments for contesting elections, elections being staged to select candidates as well as parties to exercise political power or authority (Yaqub, 2002). Coleman and Rosberg (1986), in their contribution to conceptualising political parties, defined a political party as an "association formally organised with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and/or maintaining power" (cited in Nwosu & Ofoegbu, 1986). From the foregoing, a political party in democracies is more or less a permanent institution with the goal of aggregating interest, presenting candidates for elections with the purpose of controlling government, and representing such interest in government. It is thus a major vehicle for enhancing participation in governance. Because parties can help articulate group aims, nurture political leadership, develop and promote policy alternatives, and present voters with coherent electoral alternatives, political parties tend to be indispensable to and crucial actors in representative democracies.

Democracy and Political Parties

Political parties have always found meaning only in a democracy, and this has been the case especially in Nigeria, where the fate of political parties has been tied to the health of democracy. From independence in 1960, parties have existed only when democracy has been in good health. Parties first disappeared with the collapse of the First Republic and appeared again with the Second Republic until 1983, when the military under General Muhammadu Buhari took over. Nigeria's aborted Third Republic also saw the appearance of political parties until about 1998, when parties made their most remarkable and enduring appearance in the country's political history (Egwemi, 2009).

To demonstrate the relationship between political parties and democracy, Agbaje (1999) uses the tale of two boys on the threshold of adulthood. The importance of the tale is that political parties and pressure groups

have a most crucial role to play in any democracy. Without a proper functioning party and pressure group process, there can be no meaningful democracy. It is obvious, therefore, that parties and pressure groups constitute the heart of democracy, and the more vigorous and healthier they are, the better assured is the health of the democratic process itself (Agbaje, 1999).

Intra-Party Democracy: Conceptual and Empirical Dimensions

Intra-party democracy refers to the extent to which political parties operate democratically in their internal governance, including transparent candidate selection processes, regular and competitive party elections, meaningful participation of party members in decision-making, accountability of party leaders to members, and protection of minority and dissenting views within the party. The literature identifies several indicators of intra-party democracy (Matlosa, 2007; NIMD, 2004): (1) inclusiveness the extent to which party members can participate in party affairs; (2) transparency the openness of party decision-making processes; (3) competitiveness the existence of genuine competition for party positions and candidacies; (4) accountability the degree to which party leaders answer to members; and (5) constitutionalism the adherence to party constitutions and internal rules. Empirical studies of Nigerian political parties reveal widespread deficits in intra-party democracy. Candidate selection processes are often dominated by party elites who impose preferred candidates. Party primaries are frequently marred by vote-buying, delegate manipulation, and violence. Party leaders are rarely held accountable to party members. Party constitutions are violated with impunity. These deficits have profound consequences for democratic consolidation, as parties that are internally undemocratic are unlikely to promote democracy in the wider society (Huntington, 1991).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives: the institutional theory of political parties and the elite theory of democracy.

Institutional theory, as developed by Huntington (1968) and applied to political parties by Mainwaring and Scully (1995), emphasises the importance of institutionalisation the process by which organisations develop value, stability, and adaptability. Institutionalised political parties are characterised by stable rules and procedures, autonomous decision-making, consistent organisational structures, and wide societal acceptance. Weakly institutionalised parties are characterised by personalism, volatility, and lack of internal democracy. In the Nigerian context, political parties have remained weakly institutionalised. They revolve around dominant personalities (godfathers) who control party machinery. Party constitutions are frequently amended to suit incumbent interests. Party primaries are ad hoc and unpredictable. This weak institutionalisation directly undermines intra-party democracy, as there are no stable rules to constrain elite behaviour.

Elite Theory of Democracy

Elite theory, associated with Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939), and Michels (1915), argues that in all societies, a small minority (the elite) exercises power over the majority. Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" posits that all organisations, including democratic parties, inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies where power concentrates in the hands of a few leaders. Applying elite theory to Nigerian political parties, the concentration of power in the hands of party godfathers and money bags is not an aberration but a predictable outcome of organisational dynamics. However, where democratic institutions function well, countervailing pressures including competitive elections, civil society oversight, and judicial review can mitigate oligarchic tendencies. In Nigeria, these countervailing pressures have been weak, allowing party elites to dominate intra-party processes with impunity. This study integrates both frameworks. Institutional theory explains why weak party institutionalisation produces deficits in intra-party democracy: without stable rules and autonomous decision-making, party elites face no constraints on their behaviour. Elite theory explains why powerful individuals (godfathers) can dominate

party processes: all organisations tend toward oligarchy, and only strong countervailing institutions can prevent this. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for examining intra-party democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the specific cases of the PDP, APC, and LP in the 2023 presidential election.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design using documentary analysis. This design is appropriate for examining institutional rules, historical processes, and elite behaviour. Primary legal documents: 1999 Constitution (as amended), Electoral Act 2022, party constitutions of PDP, APC, LP. Secondary academic literature (1990–2024), including recent (2018–2024) journal articles. Observational reports: INEC (2023), EU Election Observation Mission (2023), YIAGA Africa (2023), CDD (2023). Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition, and writing. Themes focused on candidate selection, godfatherism, party funding, and consequences for democratic consolidation. To enhance validity, data triangulation was employed across legal documents, academic literature, and observer reports. To minimise bias, findings were cross-checked across multiple sources, and divergent accounts (e.g., party claims vs. observer reports) were noted.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Nature of Political Parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Finding One: Political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have remained weakly institutionalised. The study finds that the PDP, APC, and LP share common characteristics: they are elite-dominated, ideologically fluid, and organisationally unstable. Unlike political parties in established democracies, Nigerian parties do not have stable membership bases, regular internal elections, or consistent ideological orientations. Instead, they function as electoral vehicles for elite competition, mobilising voters primarily through

ethnic, religious, and patron-client networks rather than programmatic appeals.

Finding Two: Godfatherism is endemic across all three parties. The study finds that in the PDP, APC, and LP, powerful individuals (godfathers) exercise disproportionate influence over candidate selection, party funding, and policy direction. These godfathers are typically wealthy individuals who finance party activities in exchange for control over nominations and access to government resources. The 2023 presidential primaries revealed the persistence of godfatherism: in the APC, President Bola Tinubu emerged as the godfather of the party's structure; in the PDP, factional godfathers competed for control; in the LP, Peter Obi's candidacy emerged from elite defections rather than grassroots party processes.

Finding Three: Ideological orientation is weak across all three parties. The study finds that the PDP, APC, and LP lack coherent ideological platforms. Their

manifestos are broadly similar, emphasising economic development, anti-corruption, and social welfare without clear programmatic distinctions. Campaigns are not issue-driven but focus on personality, ethnicity, and religion. Voters choose parties based on candidate identity, ethnic affiliation, or expected material benefits rather than policy preferences. This ideological weakness is both a cause and a consequence of weak intra-party democracy: without clear ideological commitments, parties cannot hold leaders accountable for policy performance.

4.2 Intra-Party Democracy in the 2023 Presidential Primaries

Finding Four: Candidate selection processes in the 2023 presidential primaries violated basic principles of intra-party democracy. The study finds that across the PDP, APC, and LP, party primaries were characterised by:

Table 1: Characteristics of Party Primaries

Violation	PDP	APC	LP
Delegate manipulation	High	High	Moderate
Vote-buying	High	High	Low
Candidate imposition	Moderate	Low (after consensus collapsed)	Low (Obi emerged from defection)
Litigation over primary outcomes	High	High	Low
Defections after primaries	High	Moderate	Moderate

Source: Authors Computation

Finding Five: The monetisation of the nomination process has fundamentally undermined intra-party democracy. The study finds that aspiring candidates are required to pay substantial sums for nomination forms N40 million for presidential nomination in the APC and PDP in 2023. Beyond the official fees, candidates reportedly spent additional millions bribing delegates to secure nominations. This monetisation excludes qualified but less wealthy citizens from political participation, concentrates power in the hands of money bags, and creates incentives for corruption after election to recoup campaign investments. As former Senate President Adolphus Wabara stated, membership in the

National Assembly is "an investment" because elected officials must recoup what they spent to get elected (The Guardian, June 11, 2004).

4.3 Consequences of Weak Intra-Party Democracy

Finding Six: Weak intra-party democracy has produced high levels of electoral litigation. The study finds that following the 2023 presidential election, numerous legal challenges were filed contesting the validity of party primaries, candidate nominations, and the election itself. The Supreme Court ultimately dismissed these challenges, but the litigation process

revealed the fragility of party nomination processes and the lack of internal dispute resolution mechanisms.

Finding Seven: Weak intra-party democracy contributes to defections and party instability. The study finds that between 2022 and 2024, there were significant defections across the PDP, APC, and LP. Politicians who lose primaries frequently defect to other parties, seeking nomination where their chances are better. This pattern undermines party loyalty, ideological consistency, and stable electoral competition. It also reduces voter confidence, as parties appear as vehicles for elite ambition rather than platforms for programmatic governance.

Finding Eight: Weak intra-party democracy has negative consequences for governance quality. The study finds that elected officials who owe their positions to godfathers or financial contributions feel accountable to these patrons rather than to voters. This produces policy outcomes that serve elite interests rather than public welfare. Corruption is higher, service delivery is poorer, and public trust in democratic institutions is lower in contexts where intra-party democracy is weak.

4.4 Discussion of Major Findings

The Nexus between Godfatherism and Weak Intra-Party Democracy

The finding that godfatherism is endemic across the PDP, APC, and LP confirms the theoretical expectation that weakly institutionalised party systems concentrate power in the hands of elites. Godfathers perform several functions in Nigerian political parties: they provide campaign finance; they mobilise delegates for primaries; they negotiate coalitions and defections; they influence policy directions when their candidates win. In exchange, they expect control over appointments, contracts, and government resources. This arrangement directly undermines intra-party democracy. Party members cannot hold godfathers accountable because godfathers control the resources that sustain the party. Candidate selection is not based on merit or member preference but on godfather preference. Party rules are

enforced or ignored at the discretion of godfathers. As long as political parties depend on private financing from wealthy individuals, intra-party democracy will remain elusive.

Ideological Weakness as Both Cause and Consequence

The finding that ideological orientation is weak across all three parties reveals a fundamental challenge to democratic consolidation. In established democracies, parties compete on the basis of alternative policy programmes. Voters choose between centre-left and centre-right platforms. This programmatic competition creates accountability: parties that fail to deliver on their promises lose elections. In Nigeria, the absence of programmatic competition means that elections are not referenda on policy performance. Instead, they are contests over ethnic and religious identity, access to patronage, and personality. This reduces the incentive for parties to develop coherent ideologies or to promote internal democracy, as policy positions are not the basis of electoral competition. Breaking this cycle requires not only party reform but also changes in voter behaviour and political culture.

The 2023 Presidential Election as a Case Study

The 2023 presidential election illustrated the consequences of weak intra-party democracy. The APC candidate, Bola Tinubu, emerged from a contested primary that was resolved through elite bargaining rather than transparent rules. The PDP primary produced Atiku Abubakar as candidate, but the process was marred by delegate manipulation and defections. The LP candidate, Peter Obi, emerged not from a competitive primary but from elite defections from the PDP, raising questions about grassroots party democracy. The election itself was competitive, with three major candidates receiving substantial votes. However, post-election litigation and political contestation revealed that the legitimacy of the electoral outcome remained contested. A significant portion of the electorate believed the election was manipulated. This lack of consensus on electoral legitimacy is partly attributable to the absence of robust intra-party

democracy: when party primaries are perceived as rigged, the entire electoral process loses credibility.

The findings confirm theoretical expectations. Godfatherism (Finding 2) exemplifies elite theory: wealthy individuals control resources, thus control party processes. Without countervailing institutional pressures (independent judiciary, strong civil society), oligarchy becomes total. Weak ideology (Finding 3) and weak institutionalisation (Finding 1) reinforce each other: without programmatic competition, elections are not referenda on policy performance, reducing incentives for internal democracy. The 2023 election illustrated these dynamics. Tinubu's candidacy emerged from elite bargaining, Atiku's from delegate manipulation, and Obi's from elite defection—none from robust grassroots processes. Post-election litigation revealed contested legitimacy, partly attributable to weak intra-party democracy.

Why does this persist? Three factors: (1) Private party financing ensures godfather control; (2) Weak enforcement of anti-defection provisions encourages party-hopping; (3) Passive citizenry allows elite capture. Breaking this cycle requires both institutional reform and active citizenship.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined intra-party democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, focusing on PDP, APC, and LP in the 2023 presidential election. Evidence shows Nigerian parties remain weakly institutionalised, characterised by poor ideology, corruption, godfatherism, and elite domination. The absence of robust intra-party democracy undermines Nigeria's democratic quality. When primaries are manipulated, candidates imposed, and constitutions violated, the entire democratic process loses credibility. The 2023 election, while competitive, revealed persistent party-process problems. Until Nigerian parties develop transparent candidate selection, meaningful member participation, and leader accountability, democratic quality will remain compromised. The evidence demonstrates that political parties in Nigeria have not been fully institutionalised. The period since 1999 has witnessed the birth, demise,

and merger of political parties characterised by poor ideological manifestation, corruption, godfatherism, and elite domination. The study concludes that the absence of robust intra-party democracy has fundamentally undermined the quality of Nigeria's democracy. When party primaries are manipulated, when candidates are imposed by godfathers, when party constitutions are violated with impunity, the entire democratic process loses credibility. Citizens become cynical about electoral politics. Qualified citizens are excluded from political participation. Elected officials are accountable to patrons rather than voters. Governance quality deteriorates. The 2023 presidential election brought these issues into sharp focus. While the election itself was competitive, the underlying party processes remained problematic. Until Nigerian political parties develop robust internal democracy transparent candidate selection, meaningful member participation, accountability of leaders the quality of Nigeria's democracy will remain compromised.

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

i. Strengthen Democratic Institutions

Government, the judiciary, the electoral body (INEC), civil society, and religious institutions should vigorously commit to strengthening the democratic system. This includes protecting the independence of INEC through guaranteed funding, security of tenure for commissioners, and insulation from executive interference. Judicial autonomy must be ensured by safeguarding judicial appointments, protecting judicial budgets, and enforcing judgments without political manipulation. Creating countervailing pressures against elite domination of party processes requires empowering civil society organizations to monitor party activities, holding public officials accountable through independent media, and leveraging religious institutions as moral voices for democratic integrity. Without strong institutions, political parties remain captive to wealthy individuals and godfathers who manipulate rules for personal advantage. Institutional weakness also enables electoral manipulation, reduces public trust, and perpetuates cycles of poor governance.

Strengthening democratic institutions is therefore not merely a procedural reform but a fundamental prerequisite for improving party governance, reducing capital flight, and achieving sustainable development. Religious and civil society leaders have a particular responsibility to demand adherence to democratic norms and to resist the normalization of anti-democratic practices by political elites.

ii. Reform Candidate Selection Processes

Party leaders should be discouraged from imposing candidates on party members, as imposition undermines party legitimacy, reduces voter enthusiasm, and concentrates power in the hands of a few. Party rules should be strictly adhered to in the nomination process, with clear timelines, published guidelines, and transparent procedures for appeals. The Electoral Act should be amended to mandate transparent, competitive primaries with independent oversight from INEC or accredited civil society observers to ensure fairness. Additionally, the Act should cap campaign spending at levels that do not exclude qualified but less wealthy citizens from seeking office. Currently, high nomination fees and campaign costs effectively bar talented but less affluent Nigerians from political participation, perpetuating a class of wealthy politicians who may view office as an investment requiring returns including through capital flight. Competitive primaries also produce stronger candidates who are accountable to party members rather than a single patron. Reforming candidate selection is therefore essential for both democratic health and reducing the elite capture that facilitates illicit financial outflows.

iii. Enhance Party Funding Transparency

The sources and uses of party funds should be fully transparent to reduce corruption, money laundering, and the perception that political office is purchased rather than earned. Political parties should be required to disclose their funding sources on a quarterly basis, including all donations above a specified threshold, with penalties for non-disclosure or false reporting. Campaign contributions should be capped at reasonable levels to prevent any single donor from wielding

disproportionate influence, and all contributions should be publicly reported before elections occur. Public funding for political parties, already provided in Nigerian law, should be increased substantially to reduce reliance on private donations from wealthy individuals and corporations seeking favors. However, increased public funding should be made conditional on compliance with intra-party democracy standards, including competitive primaries, financial audits, and gender-balanced candidate lists. Transparent party funding reduces the incentive for politicians to treat office as a business investment requiring future returns often realized through corruption, procurement fraud, and capital flight. Without funding transparency, political finance remains a primary enabler of illicit financial outflows.

iv. Sensitise Citizens on Political Participation

There is a dire need to sensitise citizens on the importance of participating in elections beyond merely voting on Election Day. While voter turnout receives significant attention, meaningful democratic participation requires ongoing engagement throughout the electoral cycle. Citizens should be encouraged to join political parties, attend ward meetings, participate in primary elections, and demand accountability from party leaders between elections. When citizens remain passive, party leadership is captured by a small number of wealthy insiders who select candidates by imposition rather than competition. Civil society organisations should conduct sustained civic education programmes specifically focused on intra-party democracy, explaining how ordinary members can influence candidate selection, party platforms, and internal governance. Such programmes should target youth, women, and marginalized groups who are often excluded from party decision-making. Sensitisation efforts should also emphasize that defection, vote-buying, and electoral violence harm democratic development. An active, informed citizenry creates downward accountability pressures that discourage elites from using parties as vehicles for personal enrichment and capital flight. Democratic consolidation ultimately depends on citizens who demand better.

v. Strengthen Internal Party Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Political parties should establish robust internal dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve nomination disputes, leadership conflicts, and membership grievances without resorting to litigation. Currently, Nigerian courts are flooded with pre-election and post-election disputes that could be resolved internally, consuming judicial resources and prolonging political uncertainty. Well-designed internal mechanisms including arbitration panels, appeal committees, and ombudspersons can resolve disputes more quickly, cheaply, and with greater legitimacy among party members. The Electoral Act should require parties to exhaust internal remedies before filing election petitions, and courts should defer to properly conducted internal party processes that adhere to natural justice principles. This deferral would reduce judicial interference in internal party affairs while incentivizing parties to maintain fair and functional dispute resolution systems. Strong internal mechanisms also reduce the incentive for disgruntled candidates to defect to other parties when they lose primaries, promoting party loyalty and institutional stability. Without effective internal dispute resolution, conflicts escalate into litigation and defection, perpetuating the fluid, unstable party system that characterizes Nigerian politics and enables elite capture.

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vi. Enforce Anti-Defection Provisions

The Constitution's anti-defection provisions, specifically Section 68(1)(g), should be strictly enforced to discourage politicians from switching parties when they lose primaries or face internal party discipline. Under this provision, legislators lose their seats if they defect from the party under whose platform they were elected, unless the party merges or splits. However, enforcement has been inconsistent, with courts sometimes allowing defections under contested interpretations of party splits. Strict enforcement would encourage politicians to work within party structures, resolve disputes internally, and accept primary outcomes rather than seeking alternative platforms after losing nominations. When defection is easy, politicians have little incentive to build lasting party organizations or respect internal democracy; instead, they treat parties as disposable vehicles for personal ambition. Strict anti-defection enforcement would strengthen party institutionalization over time, as politicians invest in building durable party structures rather than hopping between platforms. It would also reduce the proliferation of small, personality-driven parties that lack coherent ideologies or internal governance. Ultimately, stable parties with loyal memberships are better positioned to resist elite capture and the associated capital flight that follows from treating political office as a private investment.

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