

Political Parties And Internal Democracy: Problems, Challenges & Solution

Ukwumah John C.N., Chinwe Nwizu & A.O. Unagha
Abia State University, Uturu

Date of Submission: 12-10-2025

Date of Acceptance: 22-10-2025

I. History & International Relations

The study, political parties and internal democracy in Nigeria: Problem, Challenges & Solution synthesis a whole gamut of information on internal democracy and the difficulties encountered by political parties in entrenching the ideal in different political parties. The research benefits immensely from the information on the origin of the political parties and the reason for absence of internal democracy among political parties.

This study covered the five states of the Southeast zone namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. We conducted interviews among a plethora of individuals namely, party faithfuls, critical stakeholders, voters, unbiased observers and the electoral umpire. The objectives are to find out the behavioural traits among members of these political parties that made internal democracy an impossible task to attain. However, the challenges, conditions, obstacles and solutions to the enthronement of internal democracy in our society is of primal importance to the researchers. We are of the belief that opting for a common ground in resolving differences among party members is of great importance. The researcher shall offer suggestions on how to resolve, through formal and informal process, issues arising from differences among party faithful suggestions aimed at promoting changes through commitment and support to the process. Nevertheless, the researchers shall offer suggestions aimed at promoting changes through commitment and support for the process. The study avers that appropriate steps taken through thoughtful actions, devoid of any extraneous considerations so that we may get it right. The study believes that to sustain a leadership committed to pursue the goals of peace for democratic process and ushering a period of tranquility in our body politic is of great importance.

II. Objectives Of The Study

The general objectives of the study are to investigate the root causes of non-adherence to internal democracy in political parties in Nigeria and evaluate the factors, predisposition and contents of manifesto of political parties and challenges in actualizing the principles of democracy and its concomitant effects on the polity. Indeed, the study shall examine the concerns of members of the party and general body politic on lack of a political ideology among parties in Nigeria and suggest ways on how to foster internal democracy in political parties and strengthen democratic institutions. Despite the unwillingness of some contending forces in the political parties to adhere to party constitution and guidelines on electing party representatives or flag-bearers for elective positions.

The study shall also offer ideas on how to promote behavioural change on the part of member of the party, adherence to the rule of law and acceptance of electoral outcome. Meanwhile, the study focused its attention on how to strengthen democratic institutions and suggest common grounds for the political parties, its members and the democratic rights of Nigerians. The study assessed the changes faced in implementing the Electoral Act and insisting on the rule of law and filial respect for the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

III. Literature Review

In any democratic setting, the existence of political parties is very important. It is specifically part of the democratic process. The existence of modern democracy subsists on the formation or existence of political parties. People share the same ideology, opinions and preferences and beliefs come together to establish (for the purposes of pursuing a common goal) political parties. Indeed, participatory democracy simply infers that people are allowed to form political parties, canvass for votes, express freely their opinions and elect their respective flag-bearers (Ukwumah 2012, 272). The primary manner by which the people exercise their sovereignty is the vote (Appadorai, 2004, 523). The delinquency of politicians called for the establishment of

new standards, fine-tuning existing rules and saving the electoral system from further damage. Respect for party guidelines and constitution by politicians are panaceas for the smooth conduct of elections and observing the tenets of internal democracy in Nigeria. It has been noted that many political parties in Nigeria find it very difficult to adopt an open system that will not allow members of the party to participate in the decision-making but also give them unrestricted opportunity to contest in election under the party's platform. The problematic with rising incidences of political parties parallel primaries (Udeudeha: 2015) consequently, people become resentful of the ideals which were adhered more in the breach than in the observance. The question is why do politicians in their bid to remain relevant subvert the political process? This may be as a result of their unwillingness to follow due process on electoral matters. Many believed that contentious and inconclusive party primaries impacted negatively on efforts aimed at an inclusive and democratic electoral process. Some of the cases pending before the election tribunals were as a result of substitution of names of candidates and mindless disqualification of selected contestants. However, "research has shown that most Nigerians believe that internal democracy does not only affect the credibility of the elections but also the quality of leadership, governance and economic environment. (Ikhide 2012, 57). The contraction of the political space through the activities of party officials and god-fathers who are hell-bent on imposing their preferred candidates on their members negates the principles of fair-play, choice and the power of the people in a matter that was supposed to be a democratic process. Elimination of flawed or manipulated party primaries by political parties may to a large extent guarantee a free and fair election in Nigeria.

It is important for parties to do the needful by adhering to democratic, transparent and effective political parties (Aleyonomo, 2013, 286). It must be noted that "legal foundation for ensuring internal democracy within political parties are deeply prescribed in various institutional frameworks like the Constitution and Electoral Act. In essence it could be gleaned that the architects of Nigeria democracy were not oblivious of the centrality of internal democracy to the thriving of democratic enterprise" (Adekeye, 2017, 28).

IV. Methodology

We are using the South-East as our area of study and as a reflection of what happens in other parts of Nigeria. The Southeast geo-political region consists of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Three different political parties are in power in the zone named, PDP (Ebonyi, Enugu and Abia) APC (Imo) and APGA (Anambra).

The geo-political zone lies partly in the tropical rain forest belt of Southern Nigeria. Part of its physical features change gradually, from a tropical rainforest belt to derived savannah. Major geographical features include a range of hills running through Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra States. It is also made up of lowland hosting numerous streams and rivers such as Adada, Ebonyi, Imo Omambala and Oji rivers. These areas also consist of rich farmland that are continually watered by these perennial streams and rivers. The place witnesses high incidence of rainfall from May to October every year. There are dry spells between November and February each year during the rainy season, temperatures are low while the dry season witnesses high temperature with intermittent low temperatures during the Harmattan period. Agriculture became a major source of income and employment in the area apart from business activities and civil service jobs. The area shares common boundaries with Kogi, Benue, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Delta States.

To obtain the research objectives of the study the research methodology involved the use of qualitative, documentary method of data collection while content analysis was deployed in evaluating the data. The researchers generated information from interviews administered on individuals or informants versatile on the subject matter. The information provided by informants served as a gauge on expected returns on field work. Interviewees were chosen from a wide range of persons that includes individuals directly related to running a party or parties, politicians, members of these parties. Individuals were also selected from organizations charged with the responsibility of organizing party primaries and the general elections. Apart from party members and officials well-informed persons were also interviewed because of their knowledge on the subject matter especially the electoral body (INEC). The responses from these coterie of individuals helped to deepen our knowledge on the subject matter. It also enriched existing literature on the topic; strengthened research findings and evaluation of the outcomes.

The success of any electoral procedure ultimately enhances voter participation, freedom of choosing party representatives and political accountability. Restraining access to the party hierarchy tends to deny members the freedom to make an informed choice thus giving rise to imposition of preferred candidates, loss of confidence in the electoral process, widespread disenchantment, accusation and counter-accusation, rising tempers, acrimonious scenarios, internal discord and defections to other parties. In some intolerable situations, assassinations, murder and kidnapping of perceived opponents or rivals within the party and co-contestants from other political parties became rampant.

The endless cases in courts was a reflection of the crisis that engulfs a political party if it refuses to tow the line of openness and imbibing internal democracy. It is the firm belief of the researchers that the above

scenarios is in reaction to the circumvention of party constitution, extant rules and other decisions inimical to the enthronement of true democracy ideals, principle, ethics and adherence to internal democracy. The researchers identified some germane reasons that further negate the principles of internal democracy in political parties. The lack of internal democracy (Yahaya & Ibrahim 2015:3) and undue interference from critical stakeholders such as party big wigs, state governors and the president. The practice of imposition of candidate that are overtly unpopular and disreputable during party primaries thus denying members input into decision-making process. This attitude has led to a situation whereby most political parties lack subsisting ideology.

Theoretical Framework

To put the matter in proper perspective, the theory of internal democracy was considered by the authors. It provides a broader perspectives on the matter under consideration. It explains why there is the need for political parties to be internally democratic. The policy goals should be determined by members.

There are five platforms that act as a guide for the existence, function and activities of political parties in Nigerian namely;

- (a) The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
- (b) The constitution of differing political parties,
- (c) Electoral Act as amended by the parliament
- (d) INEC Rules
- (e) Other rules (Udeudeha 2015, 115).

The Constitution

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigerian gave vent for the formation of political parties in Nigeria.

The Constitution of Nigeria Section 40 sub-section 221 and 222 made generous provisions for the formation of the political parties by citizens. The citizens are allowed by law to form associations with the aim of pursuing a common goal and foster their common interest without let or hindrance. The Constitution provides in sub-section 221 that:

“no other association other than the political party shall canvass for any candidates or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election of any candidate at any election”.

Further provisions were made in sub-section 222, that:

“No association by whatever name shall function as a party”. (Jegede & Idiaru).

However, a political party plays a prominent role in modern day government “It is usually formed by men of identical ideological in public affairs if patriotically inclined to, is to assume political leadership and be vested with authority to govern the state and experiment with and implement the group’s ideological beliefs and policies in public administration (Ibezute, 2003, 96). However, one of the basic functions of a party is to

- (a) To educate the masses and get them informed on the affairs of governance, their rights and commitment as citizens and how to choose their leaders through election.
- (b) To help in choosing persons who would participate in governance through election processes and by this minimizing rowdiness and imposition of bad leaders or a dictator (Ibezute, C.C, 2003, 96).

But in Nigeria, the intention of many political parties was ways and means of wresting political powers and the financial blessing that comes with it.

Meanwhile, there is a regulator of all party activities in Nigeria. Independent National Electoral Commission is saddled with the function of regulating of all party activities in the country. INEC is empowered statutorily as the regulator by the Constitution. Backed by the Constitution, INEC from time to time issue out guidelines to political parties prior to the 2015 general elections. INEC on October 27, 2014, issued a number of regulations as a guide for all registered political parties to organize their party primaries according to the law. There were about eighteen guidelines for the parties to follow (INEC, 2014). Three of their guidelines are of great importance namely:

- (a) The political parties must ensure that those seeking for elective positions are qualified and has requisite qualifications ((INEC Regulations, 2014).
- (b) The political parties must duly inform INEC 21 days before the convocation of the primaries stating the names of aspirants, members of the party, election board, list of delegates and register of members of the party.
- (c) The Commission may with or without prior notice to the political party monitor and attend any convention/congress for the purposes of electing members of its executive committees or approving merger with any other registered political parties.

Apart from the above, the legislature, promulgated Electoral Act to cement further the demand for openness and fairness by political parties in its operations. For instance though not the first Electoral Act, the 2014 Electoral Act of 2014 as amended made provision for the following regulations.

Consciously, government provided several bulwarks to safeguard the existence and sustenance of political parties without any let or hindrance. These are,

- (a) The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- (b) The Constitution of political parties that regulates its activities.
- (c) The electoral umpire, Independence National Electoral Commission
- (d) Regulations issued by INEC from time to time to guide the activities of these political parties.
- (e) The various Electoral Acts as amended.

These are several other ways that were used in order to preserve the sanctity of the electoral process in an organized society.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Chapter six of the Constitution dealing with the matter of political parties and in section 221 stated quite clearly that:

“no association other than a political party shall canvass for votes for any candidates at any elections or contribute to friends of any political party or held election expenses of any candidate at any election”.

The Constitution provides further clarification in Section 222 No association by whatever name was called function as a party unless (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria)

- (a) It national officers are registered with INEC.
- (b) Membership are open to all Nigerians
- (c) Has a constitution

Section 224 insists that “the programmes as well as the arms and objectives of a political party shall conform with the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The above are the Constitutional provisions for political parties in Nigeria.

Constitution of Political Parties

Most of these political parties operate a constitution drawing mainly from the Nigeria Constitution. The importance of political parties in the success of democracy cannot be overemphasized. It is ambience of peace and democracy surrounding a party that enable it to adhere to the universally recognized democratic tenets.

The electoral umpire Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is constitutionally empowered to organize elections (general and party provisions for political parties). The body is also saddled with the responsibility of registering political parties in Nigeria are provided by Section 221 and 222 of the 1999 Constitution. From time to time, the electoral body issue guidelines to political parties on the conduct of primaries of political parties and the general elections.

Electoral Act

What is an Electoral Act? “An electoral act is the necessary legislative instrument that guides, oversees and manages the administration of an election. It includes rule and regulations that empower relevant agencies especially INEC to conduct the elections legally. Electoral act are passed at the national level when they affect INEC, a federal institution (Steers Explains 2022). Over the years, the Electoral Act have, suffered several amendments by the Legislature in order to ensure fairness to all involved

The Major Findings

Our research outcome merely confirmed or completed available literature on the matter we discussed the major findings. In fairness to the state, these institutional bulwarks were provided to strengthen the existing provision made for the performance of its duties. But like in every human activity, the loopholes it created was exploited to the detriment of others. Political parties are the harbingers of democracy in an organized society. It provides the platform for all members affiliated to it, to deliberate and contribute to the party’s democratic process. The findings made by the researchers were rather befuddling and unexpected. Political parties are of primal importance to modern political process. They are the conveyors of hope to party members seeking inputs to the decision making process while creating an unhindered opportunity to contest using the platform provided by the particular/party. Our findings showed that the major problem of most if not all the political parties are lack of internal democracy. This inability to keep to the provisions of the constitution of Nigeria and the party’s constitution have instigated crisis of monumental dimensions in various parties in Nigeria. This has led to series of defection by dissatisfied members of the party and created factionalization among party faithful. There are sordid tales of imposition of candidates, violation of party constitution, god-fatherism and other undemocratic practices that are inimical to the growth of the party.

This tendency towards exclusivity does not bode well for political parties that are enmeshed in crisis. It has created a situation of disaffection for members. Inclusivity is a better option for all and sundry.

There is an absence of an ideology among most if not all political parties in Nigeria. The ideology of most politicians is enlightened self-interest. A politician cannot stay in a party for so long unlike what obtains in Western democracies. This has not augured well for representative governance in our clime. Most of these party leaders run these parties like personal estates where they decide what happens to the detriment of many party members. Party faithfuls yearned for more openness on party matters but felt disappointed by the reality of the situation they have found themselves.

There is the need to instill discipline in the party. It is important that party should be reinforced and impose party discipline. The state backed electoral act should be continually fine-tuned in order to attain the desired result. It is high time that political parties develop their ideologies. The challenges facing these parties include but not limited to poverty, party primaries, tribal politics, transparency and accountability. Other isolated factors include: exclusiveness, corruption and dominance of the public space by elites.

References

- [1]. Adekeye, M.A. (2017). Party Primaries, Candidate Selection And Intra-Party Conflict In Nigeria: PDP In Perspective. *Covenant University Journal Of Politics And International Affairs* 5(1), 28.
- [2]. Aleyomo, M.B. (2013). Intra-Party Conflicts In Nigeria. The Case Study Of People's Democratic Party (PDP). *Journal Of Sustainable Development In Africa* 15(14) 286.
- [3]. Appadorai A., (2004). *The Substance Of Politics* Oxford; OUP.
- [4]. Ibezute, C.C. (2003). *Nigeria Leadership, Political Development And Democracy*. Owerri: Cel-Bez Didactic Books.
- [5]. Ikhide, I.P., (2012). Quest For Internal Party Democracy In Nigeria: Amendment Of Electoral Act, 2010 As An Albatross. *International Journal Of Peace And Development Studies* 3(17), 57.
- [6]. Obah-Akpogwghala, (2012). Party Politics And The Challenge Of Democratic Consolidation In Nigeria. *Research On Humanities And Social Science* 3 (16), 71.
- [7]. Odigwe, D.A. *Nigerian Political Parties And Internal Democracy*. *African Journal Of Governance And Development* Vol. 14 No 2., 2015.
- [8]. Ojukwu, C. & Olaifa, T. (2011). Challenges Of Internal Democracy In Nigeria's Political Parties: The Bane Of Intra-Party Conflict In The People's Democratic Party Of Nigeria. *Global Journal Of Human Social Sciences* 11(3);3.
- [9]. Omoruyi Aigbe, (2016). "Internal Party Conflict: The Effect Of Lack Of Internal Party Democracy In Nigeria's Political Parties – The Way Forward" LinkedIn.
- [10]. Stears. Explains What Is An Electoral Act? www.stears.com.
- [11]. The 2010 Electoral Act As Amended.
- [12]. The Constitution Of The Federal Republic Of Nigeria Online Version nigeriarights.gov.ng→File.
- [13]. Udeuheha, G.I., (2015). Party Parallel Primaries And Its Implication To Political Development In Nigeria. *Developing Country Studies* 5(10), 1.
- [14]. Ukwumah J.C.N. (2006). "The 2007 Elections And Electoral Due Process In Nigeria": Issues In Contemporary Social Discourse Onuoha J.I. & Ezeribe S.N. (Eds) Owerri: Liu House Of Excellence, 2012.
- [15]. Yahaya, A. & Ibrahim, B.S. (2015). *Political Parties And Intra-Party Conflict In The Fourth Republic: The Experience Of The PDP In Patterns And Dynamics Of Party Politics In Nigeria Fourth Republic* Mohammed, H. (Eds). Hallmark Publisher, 2015, 1.