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Examining the Impact of Party Primaries on Local Government Elections and Democratic Development in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines how party primaries are conducted in Nigeria's main political parties, exploring how fair they are and what impact they have on strengthening democracy. Using a mix method, the research combined surveys with in-depth interviews involving local party officials, and party members, civil society groups, community leaders, and representatives of youth and women across Osun State. The findings show that, although primaries are officially organized, they are often dominated by a few elites, with practices like candidate imposition, vote buying, and weak oversight undermining the process. These issues hurt internal democracy, often exclude women and young people from meaningful participation, and lead to candidates of questionable quality running in elections. The study also found that when primary processes are flawed, public trust in parties' declines, voter turnout drops, and party unity suffers—making it harder to strengthen democracy overall. On the other hand, primaries that are transparent and inclusive tend to foster greater party cohesion, attract capable leaders, and boost confidence in elections. The conclusion is clear: reforming party procedures to promote fairness, accountability, and broader participation is essential for Nigeria's democratic progress. Improving internal democracy within parties can rebuild public trust, improve candidate selection, and create a more active, resilient democracy.

Keywords: Party primaries, internal democracy, candidate selection, electoral credibility, democratic consolidation

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Introduction

The primary elections that take place within political parties are a critical component of the democratic process.[1]These elections serve as the primary means by which political parties select their candidates for various elections, and they play a significant role in shaping the internal dynamics of parties.[2] By examining the intricacies of primary elections, we can gain a deeper understanding of how parties' function and the impact they have on the broader democratic system.

Research has shown that primary elections are essential for the health and stability of political parties. These elections not only provide a platform for parties to select their most promising candidates but also serve as a means of testing the strength and unity of the party.[3] By engaging in a competitive primary process, parties can assess the capabilities and ideologies of their potential candidates, which can ultimately lead to the selection of a more effective and representative leader.[4]

Moreover, primary elections have a profound impact on the broader political environment.[5] By influencing the selection of candidates, these elections can shape the direction and tone of a party's campaign, which in turn can impact the overall trajectory of the election.[6] As such, primary elections can be seen as a crucial mechanism for determining the course of a party's policy and platform, as well as its overall approach to governance.

In recent decades, the push for democratization around the world has highlighted the importance of having transparent and fair political processes.[7]This includes ensuring that primary elections are conducted in a manner that is free from corruption and manipulation,[8] and that all candidates have a fair opportunity to participate.[9]By prioritizing the integrity of primary elections, parties can help to build trust with their constituents and strengthen the overall legitimacy of the democratic process.

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[1]Ikeanyi, C., and Nzube, P., *Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria* (Abuja: Centre for Democratic Studies, 2023).
[2]Francis Amoako-Addae, "Political Party Primaries and Democratic Outcomes in Emerging Democracies," *African Journal of Political Studies* 12, no. 1 (2021): 23–39.
[3]Musa John Ayoade, *Elite Manipulation and Democratic Politics in Nigeria* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2008).
[4]Florence Faucher, "Democratization and Party Processes: Lessons from Global Elections," *Political Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2015): 145–160.
[5]Ikechukwu, O., "Electoral Irregularities and Party Primaries in Nigeria," *Journal of African Electoral Studies* 10, no. 1 (2015): 33–50.
[6]Philipp Engler, Carolina Plescia, and Daniel Schäfer, "Manipulated Primaries and Voter Confidence," *Journal of Democracy and Governance* 18, no. 2 (2022): 88–102.
[7]Itu, A., F. Atiye, and S. Micah, *Party Politics and Electoral Governance in Nigeria* (Abuja: Nigerian Electoral Institute, 2024).
[8]Obaje-Daniels, E., "PDP Primaries Spark Controversy in Taraba State," Nigerian Tribune, May 12, 2023
[9]Ofurum, C., "Delegate Manipulation in Abia PDP Primaries Raises Concerns," *Daily Post Nigeria*, April 20, 2023.

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A major challenge confronting many political systems lies in reconciling internal party interests with wider democratic ideals. Political parties must, on the one hand, retain autonomy to choose candidates in ways that reflect the preferences of their members and supporters. On the other hand, they are also expected to uphold democratic standards by ensuring that primary elections are open, fair, and inclusive, providing all aspirants with a meaningful chance to compete.[10]

In response to these challenges, several countries have introduced reforms designed to enhance openness and participation in primary elections. Some have adopted electronic voting platforms or online voter registration systems to lower participation barriers and encourage broader engagement in the selection process. In other cases, independent bodies or electoral commissions have been established to supervise party primaries and guarantee that they are administered transparently and without bias.

In sum, primary elections constitute a vital component of democratic governance and significantly influence the quality of representation within political systems. A careful examination of how primary elections operate offers valuable insight into party organisation and their broader effects on democratic practice. Consequently, it is imperative that primary elections are conducted in ways that promote transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness, while ensuring that all candidates are afforded a genuine and equal opportunity to participate.

Literature Review

Parties are integral components within democratic governments, and political primaries serve as a first gateway within which aspirants for political election are identified.[11] Political primaries make democracy within political parties possible because they allow members of political parties to have a voice within political decision-making and reduce domination by party leaders within parties.[12]By making credible selections within political parties, political primaries improve political election credibility[13] and make political participants highly dependent on societal needs.[14] There is evidence that organizational elements within political parties make democracy within political elections highly dependent on political party organizational variables. According to Omodia,[15] elitist domination within political strategy formulation, monetarism, and low societal mobilization make democracy within political parties highly doubtful.

[10]Luis Ramiro, "Party Primaries and Electoral Outcomes: A Comparative Study," *European Journal of Political Research 55*, no. 4 (2016): 702–718.
[11]Akindele, S., *Party Primaries and Democratic Governance in Nigeria* (Lagos: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, 2011).
[12]Schmidt, M., H. Bauer, and R. Klein, "Internal Democracy and Candidate Selection," *German Political Science Review* 15, no. 1 (2013): 55–75.
[13]Olaifa, T., *Candidate Selection and Internal Party Democracy in Nigeria* (Lagos: National Electoral Institute, 2011).
[14]Aluoma, T., J. Nwankwo, and L. Akinyemi, "Internal Democracy and Candidate Selection in Nigerian Political Parties," *Journal of African Politics* 9, no. 2 (2014): 45–63.
[15]Sam Omodia, *Internal Party Democracy and Candidate Selection in Nigeria* (Abuja: Centre for Electoral Studies, 2019).

Regarding Nigeria, party primaries have often been disputed, thereby causing party crises and litigations.[16]The electoral act and political party constitutions, including PDP Constitution, have guidelines on candidate nomination and dispute resolution, thereby emphasizing internal party democracy and democracy sustenance (PDP Constitution, Sections 17.1-17.2a-i). Party primaries would be considered closed, semi-closed, and open. These have varying levels of contention and opportunities for abuse and irregularities. Despite these norms and guidelines, Nigeria experiences various instances wherein internal democratic standards were violated due to candidate imposition against opposing members' wills within political parties[17]

Democratic consolidation goes beyond election cycles. It also needs an understanding on the part of the people about political processes and a good understanding and articulation of democracy as an institution. Political parties play a vital role here.[18] These parties act as aggregators and articulators of societal demands, provide leaders, and help ensure competitive elections.[19]Party democracy leads to competent leadership, relevance, and success at elections (Scarrow, 2004; Matlosa, 2008). However, Nigerian political parties have regularly disregarded these standards, thus ensuring people's choices are instead influenced by elitism and godfatherism at the candidate selection stage. Yet there have been historical proofs about these standards and their effects on democratic consolidation within Nigeria[20] at the presidential and gubernatorial stages of political life as seen at political primaries conducted within the Fourth Republic and beyond.[21]

Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored on Elite Theory and Realist Group Conflict Theory, which explain, among other things, the phenomenon under review. According to Elite Theory, a theory founded by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Roberto Michels, political power resides within a small and structured elite who control politics, often at the expense of the common man and woman.[22]According to Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy," no political organization can eschew domination by a privileged class who would then control and manipulate political processes for personal and class goals. To cite an instance within Nigeria, military officers, politicians, and elites vie and

[16]Larry Bartels, "Intra-Party Disputes and Electoral Litigation in Nigeria," *Journal of Political Conflict* 15, no. 4 (2020): 55–72.
[17]Daniel Omoweh, "Internal Democracy in Nigerian Political Parties: Challenges and Prospects," *Journal of Social and Political Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012): 44–60.
[18]Michael, J., *Electoral Competitiveness and Political Representation in Nigeria* (Abuja: Democracy and Governance Institute, 2013).
[19]Michael Haralambos and Robin Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, 5th ed. (London: HarperCollins, 1997).
[20]Adeyeke, A., *Political Party Primaries and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 2017).
[21]Emmanuel Ojo, *Intra-Party Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2018).
[22]Michael Haralambos and Robin Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, 5th ed. (London: HarperCollins, 1997).

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manipulate political parties with the aims of influencing election outcomes and "purchasing" votes on an election day.[23]

To augment Elite Theory, there is Realist Group Conflict Theory, which argues that people and social groups engage in competition for limited resources and that conflict arises because of differing interests with a zero-sum game result. Examples include Nigeria and its struggles with political party factionalism and interventionism, notably inside the PDP and APC parties, as seen in Obasanjo's third-term ambitions for president within the 2007 PDP primaries and again inside 2019 APC primaries, with outbreaks of violence as there were competing political party elections within multiple Nigeria provinces.[24]

By synthesizing these theoretical approaches, it can be argued that the research encompasses both the structural domination of political elites and competition among factions within political parties. Elite Theory explains why a small group of influential people hold control over candidate nomination and party resources, while Realist Group Conflict Theory can be seen as an explanation for the challenges and zero-sum battles among political party members. Together, these theories offer an interpretative lens on Nigeria political party primaries as a manifestation of structural domination and competition within political parties.

Methodology

This research work adopted a descriptive and exploratory research design with a mixed-methods approach to explore the impact and role of party primaries on democratic consolidation in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the APC and PDP parties in Osun State. The descriptive method documented visible facts and processes surrounding party primaries ahead of the 2019 and 2023 local government elections, while also exploring beyond these facts and processes into more delicate issues such as internal democracy within political parties, manipulation, imposition, and democratic consolidation. A mixed-methods research approach was employed, combining and benefiting from both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The target population included party members and stakeholders from both APC and PDP who had experienced party primaries directly or indirectly. The research focused on two senatorial districts, namely Osun East and Osun West, covering a total of four local government areas purposively selected due to their political importance and historical records of internal party struggles, which included Ife East, Ilesa West, Ede North, and Iwo.

The sample size was set at 350 respondents, determined using Taro Yamane's formula. The sample was proportionately allocated among the parties at a ratio of 204 for APC and 146 for PDP. A multi-stage research method involving purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling was adopted. Data collection

[23]Oghenevwede E. Obah-Akpowoghaha, *Elite Dominance and Political Power in Nigeria* (Lagos: Centre for Governance Studies, 2013).
[24]Kaura, M., *Intra-Party Conflicts and Candidate Selection: The Nigerian Experience* (Kaduna: University Press, 2011).

was conducted through structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and secondary sources including constitutions of political parties, reports from INEC, and academic reviews.

Analysis of data gathered from questionnaires was carried out using a descriptive and inferential approach based on statistics such as frequency and percentage tables, chi-square, and regression analysis. Data from focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Meanwhile, secondary sources were examined through qualitative procedures. Triangulation of these three data sources was employed to ensure reliability, accuracy, and a deeper understanding of party primaries and democratic consolidation within Osun State.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

It presents a representation dominated by males compared to females: two-thirds are male (66.3%) and one-third female (33.7%), indicating a gender imbalance. Regarding age distribution, there are more active participants within the 31-45 age group (44.9%), 18-30 group (21.1%), with older people contributing less. Education-wise, half of the study population have bachelor's degree or above. More than half have SSCE/OND/ NCE qualifications (49.9%) indicating a high level of literacy and political consciousness. Professionally, respondents are dominated by party members (39.4%) and delegates (27.7%), with aspirants (11.4%) and political observers (21.4%) representing diverse standpoints. Party affiliation-wise, it is dominated by APC at 47.1%, followed by PDP at 40.6%, indicating a two-party system with very limited representation.

Political Party Primaries and Democratic Norms

A large percentage (55.1%) of these respondents believe that the party primaries conducted in Nigeria have procedures they follow, indicating that there are internal mechanisms, such as election committees and nomination forms, and these are based on a constitutionally stipulated timeline. However, 31.6 % of these respondents do not agree and indicate inconsistencies within these internal procedures and practices.

Regarding internal democracy within the primaries, a mere 40.9% believe it is upheld, against 42.6% who disagree. Resulting perceptions are almost evenly split. It might be that within these primaries, party leaders, political godfathers, and major stakeholders end up making most, if not all, decisions, making Nigerians perceive a lack of internal democracy. Whether 16.5% who chose not to agree or disagree are relatively new members who have less direct involvement with party matters, it appears that internal democracy within Nigeria's political arena still lags.

It also brings to light some problematic tendencies that have become common practice during these primaries. These include the imposition of candidates, vote buying, and altering delegate lists. All these have been shown to undermine internal election credibility. It is vital that these factors be addressed as a first step towards developing more democratic internal primaries for parties that

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would improve internal democracy and internal election credibility for a more stable democracy within Nigeria.

Participation and Constitutional Compliance in Party Primaries

The research shows that a majority (64.6%) of respondents trace active participation in primary elections among party members, indicating a high degree of inclusivity in internal party politics. The statistics reflect the rising political consciousness among citizens and demonstrate an attempt by some political parties to engage members at the grassroots level. Active participation enhances democracy and accountability and helps achieve legitimacy within political parties because members believe they are making decisions. Active participation also mirrors democracy because it specifies that good governance will be promoted if political actors at different levels participate in decision-making.

On the contrary, 22.9% disagreed, and 12.5% were undecided, suggesting an imbalanced representation and that sometimes participation might be limited to selected representatives or patronage networks favouring some aspirants. Limitations might result in exclusion, internal party division, or indifference among regular members, suggesting that problems still exist in fully engaging with democratic participation at party primaries.

Regarding compliance with constitutions, 49.5% agreed with the statement that primaries are carried out in accordance with guidelines set out within constitutions. Although not completely satisfied with internal rules as tools for ensuring that there is internal order and legitimacy, there is an understanding at some level that they are useful. Nevertheless, 33.7% disagreed with it because there have been violations with regards to imposing candidates, delegacy, and zoning. All these violate internal accountability.

The implications of these findings lie in strengthening enforcement and oversight and imposing sanctions for violations. By addressing these gaps, political parties would be able to improve inclusivity and make primaries more consistent with internal democratic standards and improve the groundwork necessary for overall democracy in Nigeria.

Alignment of Party Primaries with Democratic Values in Nigeria

From the result, fewer than half of respondents (46.4%) agree that party primaries are reflective of democratic ideals, with 35.7% who are in dissent and 18.0% who are still undecided. The fact that there is a moderate level of agreement with these ideals can be seen as a hopeful sign about internal democracy within Nigeria's ruling political parties because it implies that while these frameworks are put in place, their implementation sometimes fails. The low level of compliance with these ideals within party primaries can be attributed to various structural and systemic issues.

These methods affect transparency and limit the powers and interests of regular members. Moreover, ineffective internal dispute resolution systems worsen animosities and make it difficult for members to challenge injustices

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effectively. The three respondents who have not made up their minds are members who are confronted with a gap between the ideals associated with democracy, as espoused by political parties, and what they experience at primaries.

To make party primaries useful and meaningful tools for democratic consolidation, it is necessary that there be changes geared at making them more transparent, more accountable at the institutional level, and more member participatory. Ensuring that these primaries remain more democratized will have several implications. It will not only make internal party politics more legitimate but also make democracy more practicable as a form of government in Nigeria.

Party Primaries, Procedural Structure and Members Involvement in Grassroots Participation

The respondents clearly showed that party primaries within Osun State begin with the selling of nomination forms and strict observation of timetables, followed by exercises for screening. Although they form a structured process, Local Party Officials (Respondent 1) argued that godfathers frequently influence these processes against consistency. Civil Society Actors (Respondent 2) agreed on the observation, with strong emphasis on selective observation of party guidelines and manipulative factors that leave aspirants without political or financial influence marginalized. Community Leaders (Respondent 3) insisted that members at the local levels have no significant influence in making decisions, with consultations amounting to mere rituals. Youth and Women Representatives (Respondent 4) argued that marginalized sections, including women and young aspirants, are discouraged from taking active roles.

It was brought to light that common members within political parties have very limited involvement within primaries. Local Party Officials (Respondent 5) portrayed that delegate-based primaries result in very limited people being involved as selected personally, and not involving most members. Civil Society Actors (Respondent 6) pointed out that members have very nominal representation, and leaders make all major decisions. Community Leaders (Respondent 7) emphasized that common members belonging to rural areas remain aware of the result somewhat without being involved. Youth/Women Representatives (Respondent 8) pointed out that they are restricted within their roles of mobilizing people and cannot acquire political experience.

Democratic Inclusiveness, Primaries and Role of Party Structures in Candidate Selection

Perceptions on inclusivity and democracy within the primaries were restricted. Local Party Officials (Respondent 9) pointed out that the impact of godfatherism reduces democracy within parties, while Civil Society Actors (Respondent 10) pointed out that "the result is usually predetermined." Community Leaders (Respondent 11) pointed out that the rich have an advantage and that these primaries are mere rituals and not real competition. Youth and Women Representatives (Respondent 12) cited very limited

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women's involvement because of cost and cultural factors, emphasizing the importance of deliberate efforts at ensuring inclusivity.

Party organizational structures, such as screening committees and appeal tribunals, have very important but sometimes fraught roles. Local Party Officials (Respondent 13) recognized their powers relating to the vetting and approval of aspirants, but corruption sometimes occurs against unloyal aspirants. Civil Society Actors (Respondent 14) pointed out that these structures regularly consolidate elite domination, with appeal tribunals rarely overturning wrong decisions. Community Leaders (Respondent 15) were aware that these committee members are short on independence. The Youth/Women Representatives (Respondent 16) pointed out intimidation against weaker aspirants, women and youth, and a need for more transparency and more representation on these committees from independent observers.

Challenges to Transparency and Integrity in Nigerian Party Primaries

The findings highlight significant challenges undermining the transparency and integrity of party primaries in Nigeria. Only 38.2% of respondents believe that primaries are free from external interference, while 47% perceive substantial influence from political elites, government officials, or wealthy sponsors. This interference manifests through manipulation of delegate lists, pressure on candidates, or undue involvement of incumbents, suggesting that party autonomy is frequently compromised despite formal procedural safeguards. The 14.8% undecided respondents may indicate variability in interference across parties or levels of government, but the dominant perception underscores a weakened internal democracy and declining confidence in the fairness of the nomination process.

Vote buying emerges as a pervasive problem, with 76.3% of respondents acknowledging its prevalence during primaries. This practice shifts the focus from candidate competence and merit to financial capacity, reinforcing elite dominance and corrupt practices. The small proportion of dissenting respondents likely reflects limited firsthand exposure rather than absence of the phenomenon. Vote buying not only undermines democratic norms within parties but also fosters a culture of transactional politics, which erodes public trust in political institutions.

Transparency in declaring primary results is also inconsistent, as only 40.9% of respondents affirmed that results are announced openly, while 40.8% disagreed. This near-equal split indicates that some parties adhere to transparent practices, whereas others engage in secrecy or manipulation. The 18.3% undecided may reflect uncertainty or reliance on indirect information. Lack of transparent result declaration fosters suspicion, fuels post-primary disputes, and diminishes confidence in the credibility of both the primaries and subsequent general elections.

Collectively, these findings reveal that external interference, vote buying, and opaque result management remain persistent barriers to internal democracy, highlighting the urgent need for stronger regulatory oversight and institutional

reforms to enhance transparency and accountability in Nigeria's party primaries.

Delegate Selection and the Influence of Political Godfathers in Party Primaries

The study reveals a contested perception of fairness in the selection of delegates for party primaries in Nigeria. Only 43.8% of respondents believed that delegates are chosen through fair processes, while 42% disagreed, indicating near parity and reflecting widespread uncertainty about the integrity of delegate nomination. Delegates play a crucial role in determining party nominees, and any manipulation in their selection can disproportionately benefit favored aspirants. The data suggest that, although some parties attempt transparent selection procedures, many rely on favoritism, political loyalty, or financial inducements. The 14.2% of respondents who were undecided likely reflect limited exposure to internal procedures or differences in practices across parties. The findings indicate that without reforms to democratize delegate nomination and ensure inclusivity, party primaries will remain heavily influenced by elite interests rather than grassroots choice.

The influence of political godfathers in primary elections is pronounced, with 75.6% of respondents agreeing that they significantly shape outcomes. Political godfathers, often wealthy individuals or powerful incumbents, exert control through financial backing, coercion, or manipulation of party organs, thereby undermining merit-based selection. This practice discourages credible aspirants lacking elite sponsorship and reinforces patronage networks that dominate Nigeria's political system. The 15.4% who disagreed may either belong to dominant factions or perceive godfatherism as stabilizing rather than obstructive. Nonetheless, the overwhelming perception confirms that godfatherism remains a major barrier to transparency and fairness in party primaries. Effective internal reforms, legal safeguards, and civic engagement are necessary to reduce elite dominance, promote independent decision-making, and strengthen internal democracy within Nigerian political parties.

Participant Narratives on Factors Affecting Transparency and Fairness in Party Primaries

(a) Internal Democracy and Party Compliance: Respondents highlighted that adherence to party constitutions, internal democracy, and the neutrality of electoral committees are critical for fair primaries. A local party official noted that manipulation of delegate lists and sudden changes in venues compromise transparency, while civil society actors emphasized that weak oversight and godfatherism allow vested interests to dominate. Community leaders added that limited political education among members enables elites to control outcomes, and youth/women representatives stressed that gender bias and exclusion of young people reduce inclusivity in candidate selection.

(b) Financial Inducement ("Money Politics"): Participants stressed that financial inducement distorts primaries. Local party officials and civil society actors noted that candidates with greater financial resources often dominate, undermining merit and discouraging competent aspirants. Community leaders

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reported that in rural areas, monetary gifts are normalized, skewing democratic intent, while youth/women representatives pointed out the exploitation of young people as agents of money politics, which entrenches corruption and misrepresents political competition.

(c) Role of Party Structures: Respondents agreed that structures such as screening committees and appeal panels could ensure fairness, but their effectiveness is compromised by political interference. Local party officials explained that top-down directives erode credibility. Civil society actors and community leaders emphasized that loyalists often fill these panels, undermining impartiality. Youth/women representatives highlighted the exclusion of young people and women, noting that their inclusion would diversify perspectives and reduce bias.

(d) Recommended Reforms: Participants proposed concrete reforms to enhance transparency. Local party officials recommended digital systems for delegate registration and voting, alongside stronger internal sanctions. Civil society actors advocated independent oversight by media and civic organizations. Community leaders emphasized empowering grassroots members to select delegates genuinely, while youth/women representatives recommended quotas or affirmative action for women and young people to ensure fairer and more inclusive participation.These narratives collectively underscore that transparency in party primaries is influenced by elite dominance, financial manipulation, weak institutional checks, and exclusion of marginalized groups, necessitating systemic reforms for democratic consolidation.

Violence, Legal Disputes, Party Primaries and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The data indicates that violence and intimidation are pervasive during party primaries in Nigeria, with 75.4% of respondents (43.5% strongly agree; 31.9% agree) affirming their frequent occurrence. Such practices create an environment of fear that discourages credible participation, fosters voter apathy, and undermines trust in democratic institutions. The prevalence of legal disputes, as noted by 78.3% of respondents, further underscores systemic weaknesses in internal conflict resolution. Parties often fail to manage disputes internally, resulting in prolonged court cases that disrupt electoral timelines, reduce cohesion, and weaken organizational capacity.

Internal crises post-primaries are also significant, with 75.4% of respondents asserting that factional disputes weaken party structures. These divisions can persist into general elections, limiting party effectiveness and reducing the ability to mobilize support, which in turn undermines democratic consolidation. Similarly, unfair primary processes discourage competent candidates, as agreed by 78.2% of respondents. Candidate imposition and manipulation of nomination procedures demoralize aspirants, reduce competition, and compromise the quality of leadership.

Flawed primaries have broader implications for public trust in democracy. Nearly 80% of respondents affirm that manipulative or irregular primaries

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erode citizens' confidence in the political system. Perceptions of corruption, favoritism, and exclusion within party structures diminish transparency and accountability, leading to cynicism and disengagement among voters. These findings highlight that internal party democracy is crucial not only for credible candidate selection but also for sustaining the legitimacy and resilience of democratic governance in Nigeria. Ensuring transparent, fair, and inclusive primaries is therefore central to fostering democratic consolidation and public trust in the electoral process.

(a) Irregularities and Manipulation in Party Primaries

Participants consistently highlighted procedural inconsistencies and elite manipulation as major challenges. Respondent 1 (Local Party Official) observed that political parties frequently switch between direct, indirect, or consensus primaries without consulting members or aspirants, creating confusion and suspicion. Delegate lists are often manipulated, with loyalists replacing legitimate delegates to ensure pre-determined outcomes. Respondent 2 (Civil Society Actor) added that vote-buying, militarization of the process, and restricted access for monitors further compromise transparency. Respondent 3 (Community Leader) noted that primaries are sometimes mere formalities, with outcomes decided beforehand, fostering frustration among aspirants and eroding grassroots trust. Respondent 4 (Youth/Women Representative) emphasized the systematic exclusion of women and youth, making primaries elitist and limiting democratic renewal.

(b) Conflicts from Primaries and Their Electoral Implications

Internal disputes often spill over into general elections, weakening party cohesion and campaign effectiveness. Respondent 5 highlighted that aggrieved aspirants may defect or sabotage their party, reducing electoral competitiveness. Respondent 6 observed that unresolved disputes lead to court cases, delaying elections and confusing voters. Respondent 7 explained that grassroots supporters are left divided, while Respondent 8 noted that repeated conflicts discourage youth and women, undermining participation and threatening democratic sustainability.

(c) Voter Apathy and Erosion of Public Trust

Participants linked flawed primaries to declining civic engagement. Respondent 9 indicated that imposed candidates reduce interest in political activities, affecting voter turnout. Respondent 10 confirmed growing public skepticism, especially among first-time voters. Respondent 11 reported a shift in perception where elections are seen as monetary transactions rather than merit-based contests, and Respondent 12 emphasized that youth disengagement threatens long-term democratic consolidation.

(d) Ineffectiveness of Internal Dispute-Resolution Mechanisms

Internal party mechanisms like appeal panels were widely deemed ineffective. Respondent 13 observed that appeals are rarely successful, particularly when influential figures are involved. Respondent 14 noted that panels are biased toward leadership, while Respondent 15 explained that petitions are often ignored, deepening mistrust. Respondent 16 highlighted that women and youth face additional barriers, as panels lack transparency and gender sensitivity, rendering them largely symbolic rather than functional.

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These narratives collectively reveal systemic weaknesses in Nigerian party primaries, including manipulation, exclusion, conflicts, and weak internal mechanisms, all of which hinder democratic consolidation, voter trust, and inclusive political participation.

Impact of Party Primaries on Candidate Quality, Party Unity, and Electoral Performance

The findings indicate that party primaries play a critical role in determining the quality of candidates that emerge for elections, with 76.8% of respondents affirming that well-conducted primaries promote competent leadership. Fair and merit-based primaries enhance governance by ensuring that qualified candidates are presented to the electorate, while poorly managed or manipulated primaries allow unqualified aspirants to gain nominations, undermining electoral credibility and weakening democratic consolidation.

The study further reveals that 76.8% of respondents believe popular candidates often lose due to unfair practices within primaries, highlighting how favoritism, elite manipulation, and internal party politics compromise the legitimacy of candidate selection. Such practices breed electoral apathy, diminish confidence in internal democracy, and reduce the overall quality of political leadership.

Transparency in primaries is strongly linked to party success, with 81.1% of respondents asserting that open and credible internal elections boost electoral outcomes. Transparent processes enhance public confidence, foster unity among party members, and strengthen the party's competitiveness during general elections. Conversely, candidate imposition negatively affects electoral performance, as confirmed by 79.7% of respondents. When party elites override popular choice, it fractures internal cohesion, discourages grassroots participation, and weakens the party's electoral standing.

Finally, fair and credible primaries are pivotal for sustaining party unity, with 78.3% of respondents agreeing that inclusive internal elections promote solidarity. By allowing members to participate meaningfully, parties can reconcile differences, build collective purpose, and present a unified front during elections. Unfair primaries, in contrast, sow division, internal resentment, and long-term reputational damage, ultimately undermining democratic practices and the party's electoral prospects.

This discussion underscores that transparent, merit-based, and participatory primaries are essential not only for producing capable candidates but also for fostering party cohesion and enhancing democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

(a) Candidate Selection and Meritocracy: Respondents consistently highlighted that party primaries often fail to produce candidates who genuinely reflect party members' or the electorate's aspirations. Respondent 1 noted that financial capacity and connections to party elites, rather than merit, dominate the nomination process, sidelining popular or competent aspirants. Respondent 2 confirmed that manipulation of delegate lists and direct imposition of candidates undermines internal democracy, while Respondent 3 emphasized

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that imposed candidates alienate local communities, reducing trust and electoral performance. Respondent 4 further observed that youth and women are systematically marginalized, limiting innovation and sustaining recycled leadership. Collectively, these narratives reveal that meritocracy is weak, with leadership selection heavily influenced by patronage and elite control.

(b) Influence of Internal Party Politics and Interests: Participants indicated that internal party dynamics, loyalty, patronage, and factional dominance, heavily shape candidate emergence. Respondent 5 explained that dominant factions control nominations and sidelining competence. Respondent 6 described the role of political godfathers who expect loyalty in exchange for financial support, perpetuating clientelistic politics. Respondent 7 highlighted factional rivalries as decisive, often resulting in intra-party sabotage. Respondent 8 added that these power dynamics discourage youth and women, reinforcing gender and generational inequalities. This theme underscores that internal party interests frequently override popular support and merit, weakening democratic principles.

(c) Impact on Electoral Outcomes and Voter Participation: Participants emphasized that candidate imposition and unfair primaries affect general election results. Respondent 9 explained that demoralized members reduce campaign effectiveness, while Respondent 10 noted that public perception of fairness directly shapes voter turnout. Respondent 11 observed that alienated grassroots members often abstain or vote opposition, and Respondent 12 stressed that youth disengagement diminishes democratic vibrancy. This theme illustrates the link between internal party democracy and broader electoral participation.

(d) Party Primaries and Democratic Consolidation: Respondents concluded that current primary practices weaken democracy. Respondent 13 described a lack of transparency and inclusivity, breeding distrust. Respondent 14 emphasized manipulation and exclusion as undermining democratic foundations. Respondent 15 noted candidates' allegiance to sponsors rather than citizens, eroding accountability. Respondent 16 highlighted the discouragement of youth and women, stressing the need for reforms to strengthen democracy. The narratives collectively suggest that party primaries, as presently conducted, reinforce elite control and inhibit meaningful democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between party primary procedures and candidate selection in Nigeria ($\chi^2 = 6.42$, df = 1, p = 0.011), highlighting that transparent and credible primaries enhance electoral outcomes and democratic credibility. However, no significant difference was observed in factors affecting transparency and fairness across major parties ($\chi^2 = 5.87$, df = 2, p = 0.053), indicating that similar irregularities, including elite dominance, vote buying, and weak internal democracy, are pervasive nationwide.

Regarding the processes of party primaries, the study found that Nigerian political parties largely fail to uphold democratic principles. Inconsistent use of

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direct, indirect, and consensus nomination methods creates confusion and intra-party disputes, while formal guidelines in party constitutions and the Electoral Act of 2022 are often manipulated by party elites. Interviews with local officials and civil society actors revealed that primaries are frequently marred by delegate list manipulation, candidate imposition, and disregard for due process. These findings corroborate earlier research by Omotola[25]and Ayoade[26], indicating that primaries have become instruments of elite control rather than genuine participatory processes. From the perspective of Democratic Consolidation Theory, such practices undermine the institutionalization of democracy, as credible elections begin with credible candidate selection.

Factors influencing transparency and fairness were identified as financial inducement, political godfatherism, weak oversight mechanisms, and exclusion of youth and women. Delegates often treat primaries as transactional events, favoring wealthy aspirants over competent ones, while screening committees lack independence. This monetization and exclusion contradict the principles of inclusivity and equal representation, as emphasized by Participatory Democratic Theory.

Challenges facing party primaries, including vote buying, factional crises, weak conflict resolution, and security threats, further compromise democratic consolidation. Disputes frequently spill over into general elections, leading to defections, litigation, and weakened party cohesion. Finally, flawed primaries were shown to affect candidate quality and electoral outcomes, with imposed aspirants facing legitimacy deficits that lead to voter apathy and poor electoral performance. Democratic Representation Theory underscores that when the citizen-representative link is broken, governance deficits ensue, highlighting the centrality of credible primaries for democracy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that while party primaries in Nigeria are formally designed to enhance internal democracy and electoral legitimacy, their practical implementation remains largely undemocratic. Evidence from questionnaires and key informant interviews indicates that the processes are dominated by party elites, with ordinary members, especially women and youth, playing marginal roles in decision-making. Candidate selection is heavily influenced by financial resources, political godfathers, and factional interests, undermining meritocracy and fairness.

The analysis revealed that irregularities such as vote buying, delegate manipulation, candidate imposition, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms compromise the integrity of primaries. Such practices not only diminish the credibility of internal party processes but also affect the broader democratic system. Imposed or unpopular candidates erode voter confidence, discourage political participation, and contribute to low electoral turnout. These

[25]J. Shola Omotola, "Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic…"
[26]Musa John Ayoade, *Elite Manipulation and Democratic Politics in Nigeria…*

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deficiencies highlight a disconnect between the formal structures of democracy and their implementation in practice, fostering public cynicism and reinforcing elite dominance.

The study further emphasizes that transparent, inclusive, and credible primaries are essential for consolidating democracy in Nigeria. Fair internal processes ensure that competent candidates emerge, strengthen party unity, and enhance public trust, thereby improving general election outcomes. Reforming party primaries to prioritize internal democracy, gender and youth inclusion, and accountability is crucial for promoting representative governance and democratic consolidation. The findings therefore underscore that Nigeria's democratic development is contingent upon the institutionalization of robust, transparent, and merit-based primary processes.

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