The Dynamics of Internal Party Democracy (IPD) in Nigeria: Lessons from the All-Progressives Congress (APC).

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ABSTRACT

Internal Party Democracy (IPD) plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in political party governance. The All Progressives Congress (APC), Nigeria's ruling party since 2015, offers a compelling case to examine both the potential and challenges of implementing IPD. In achieving this, the researcher placed the research on the philosophy of a pragmatist-interpretivist paradigm. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data from a target population of 2.5 million registered members of APC and the sample population of 400 was picked from a stratified 5 Local Governments Areas (LGAs) out of the 20 LGAs of Lagos State. The result of findings indicated that APC moderately adhered to the tenets of IPD, at least on paper. Despite formal institutional frameworks aimed at fostering participation, informal practices like godfatherism and factionalism persist, thereby calling for reforms to achieve genuine democratic participation of members that can lead to national democratic development and consolidation. Based on the findings, probable suggestions was offered.

Keywords: Conflict, Electoral Performance, Godfatherism, Inclusivity, Internal Party Democracy, Leadership and Political Party.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties play very critical roles in the democratization of any nation. Central to the successes and failures of electoral politics are the cardinal and strategic functions of this all-important and integral organ of democratization which is core to its development. The dawn of the Nigerian Fourth Republic has witnessed renewed and sustained activities of political parties which are the most complex and critical institutions of democracy but undoubtedly have either shaped or stagnated the deepening and consolidation of democracy (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014). Indeed, democracy is unthinkable in the absence of viable political parties. Parties are expected to participate in the political socialization of electorates, contribute to the accumulation of political power, facilitate the recruitment of political leadership, and serve as a unifying force in a divided polity (Omotola, 2010). Thus, there are several 'institutional guarantees' that parties have to fulfil if they are to effectively meet what is expected of them in a democracy. One such institutional requirement is Internal Party Democracy (IPD) or otherwise called Intra-Party Democracy or internal democracy.

IPD refers to the mechanisms and processes that allow party members to participate meaningfully in decision-making—including candidate selection, leadership elections, and policy formulation (Dahl, 1989; Fung & Wright, 2003). IPD is widely regarded as a critical pillar for ensuring transparency, accountability, and cohesion within political parties. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by diverse ethnic and ideological interests, political parties face unique challenges in balancing inclusivity with effective governance. The potential benefits of IPD are often hampered by entrenched elite control and informal practices that compromise true democratic inclusion (Abutu et al., 2021).

Whereas, scholars have noted that robust IPD practices can enhance party credibility and deliver sustainable democratic outcomes (Abutu, Samsu, & Fee, 2021; Adegbite & Lawal, 2021). The All Progressives

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Congress (APC) has emerged as a dominant force in Nigerian politics over the past decade, demonstrating both promising approaches to participation and persistent issues such as centralized power and factionalism. The APC emerged in 2013 as a strategic merger among opposition parties with a goal of challenging the incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP) and has since reshaped Nigerian politics. This study examines the dynamics of IPD within the APC, focusing on its internal mechanisms, challenges, and potential lessons for strengthening IPD in Nigerian political parties and a broader democratic consolidation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the theoretical benefits of IPD, the APC has been criticized for instances of elite dominance, godfatherism, and internal factionalism that undermine participatory governance. These challenges hinder transparent decision-making and merit-based candidate selection, thereby affecting party cohesion and electoral performance. As a result, the APC's internal practices warrant an in-depth examination to understand how these dynamics shape the party's operational effectiveness and contribute to wider democratic deficits in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the implementation of internal democratic processes within the APC;
2. assess the impact of these processes on party cohesion and electoral success;
3. identify challenges that impede effective IPD; and
4. propose recommendations for enhancing IPD to improve governance and democratic consolidation.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are internal democratic processes implemented within the APC?
2. What is the impact of these processes on the party's cohesion and electoral performance?
3. What are the key challenges and bottlenecks that hinder effective internal democracy?
4. How can the APC improve its internal democratic practices to foster greater transparency and accountability?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: IPD has no significant effect on political party stability in Nigeria

H_1: IPD has significant effect on political party stability in Nigeria

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant for several reasons. First, they contribute to the scholarly understanding of IPD within Nigerian political parties - a topic that remains underexplored despite its implications for national governance. Second, by identifying challenges and best practices in the APC, the study provides empirical insights that can assist party leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing reforms that promote inclusivity and meritocracy. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of IPD can lead to enhanced democratic practices, better electoral outcomes, and a more robust political system in Nigeria.

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METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, blending qualitative and quantitative research techniques. That is, a pragmatist-interpretivist paradigm method was employed. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data from a target population of 2.5 million registered members of APC (The last membership enrolment data of APC held in year 2021, Lagos State. APC has 2.5 million members (The Nation, 2021). So, the concerned research participants was 2.5 million party members of men, women, leaders, executive and youths of APC in Lagos State. However, 400 sample population was selected. The sample population was derived using Taro Yamane's (1967) (Projectclue, 2024), formula. With a 95% confidence level and level of maximum variability (P = 0.05), we got 3.999 which is approximately 400. The sample population was picked from 20 Local Government Areas (LGA's) in Lagos State by stratifying it into 5 LGAs. To choose these 5 LGAs, a Stratified Sampling Technique was adopted. That is, the LGA's in the state was grouped into five notable official divisions of Lagos State of Ikorodu, Badagry, Ikeja, Lagos and Epe popularly called IBILE. The LGAs that fall within IBILE divisions are: Ikorodu Division: Ikorodu; Badagry Division : Amuwo-Odofin, Badagry, Ojo; Epe Division: Epe, Ibeju-Lekki; Ikeja Division: Alimosho, Agege, Ifako-Ijaiye, Ikeja, (capital of Lagos State) Kosofe, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, Shomolu; and Lagos Division: Apapa, Eti-Osa (Victoria Island and Ikoyi, formerly the residence of the Nigerian Federal Government, Lagos Island, Lagos Mainland, and Surulere. One local government each from the official stratified divisions was finally picked using the Simple Balloting-Random System (SBRM). The selected LGAs are Epe, Ikorodu, Ikeja, Amuwo-Odofin and Lagos Mainland. The sample population was spread equally into 80 each, which makes it 400 in all.

Structured questionnaires with Five-Likert Scale of Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Neutral, was used to gauge perceptions of internal democracy; respondents was made to tick or mark one number that best describe their answer.. Documentary analysis of relevant party documents served for thematic analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of IPD practices. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. All ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, was strictly observed throughout the research process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Political Party

Political parties are organized groups that seek to attain and maintain political power by participating in electoral competition, influencing public policy, and representing diverse social interests (Dahl, 1989). They serve several key functions in democracies, including representation--Aggregating and voicing the interests of various social groups; policy formulation--Developing and promoting a political agenda for governance; political recruitment--Identifying and grooming political leaders; mobilization--Organizing electoral campaigns and mobilizing voters; and accountability--Serving as a bridge between the electorate and the government. The characteristics of a political party ranges from political party created to control the exercise of governmental powers by placing its members in the public offices through which the policies of government are determined; has the intention to use governmental powers for purposes which meet with the general approval of its leaders and the rank and file of its membership; contest elections and share power; agree on some policies and programmes for the society to promote collective good. If a political party is unable to win a majority, it allies with other parties to form a Coalition Government, and try to persuade people that their policies are better than other

The various types of political parties are not mutually exclusive, in practical reality, political parties are often a hybrid of two or even all three types. The contexts of the formation of political parties have had a profound impact on the basic nature, outlook and outcome of their intention. It is also possible to use them in explaining some of the peculiarities and factional tendencies within these parties (Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018). For example, Duverger (1954) cited in Danjibo & Ashindorbe (2018), distinguished between what he called "Cadre Parties", which are led by individuals with high socio-economic status. E.g. Communist Party

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of China CPC), African National Congress (ANC) (South Africa), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the "Mass Party", which according to him, mobilize a broad segment of members through the development of a large and complex organization. E.g. Democratic Party (USA), National Resistance Movement (NRM)(Uganda), Socialist Party (France) He also identified what he called the "Devotee Party"; these party types are tied to the veneration of a particular charismatic party leader, an example being the Leninist-Communist party (Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018). Gunther & Diamond (2003) using Otto Kircheirmer (1966) typologies, advanced four types of party models, namely Bourgeois parties, Class-Mass parties, Denominational mass parties and Catch- All People's Party (cited in Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018). Katz and Mair (1995), identified what they called the Cartel Party in which public financing of political parties and the expanded role of the state, induce parties to seek primarily to perpetuate themselves in power and avail themselves of these resources. With the lengthy 15 variants of political parties identified by Gunther & Diamond (2003) (Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018), they were later categorized into three broad spectrums based on the nature of the party organization, whether it is elite based or mass based; the programmatic orientation of the parties, whether they are ideological or clientele oriented; and their behavioural norm, whether pluralistic and democratic or hegemonic in outlook and operation etc.

However, political parties are composed of the leaders that provide direction and vision, active members who provide energy and organizational strength, and followers provide a broad base of support. Together, they work to achieve the party's goals and objectives (GeeksforGeeks, 2024); Toppr, 2024).

Internal Party Democracy (IPD)

Internal Party Democracy (IPD) is understood in Political Science as the set of processes that enable party members to meaningfully participate in decision-making, from candidate selection to policy formulation. Early seminal works like Dahl (1989), framed democratic quality within parties as critical to the overall health of democratic systems. IPD encompasses transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and the equitable distribution of power within political organizations. Scholars like Fung and Wright (2003), argue that when internal structures genuinely empower members, political parties become not only vehicles for governance but also incubators for broader democratic participation. This literature establishes that the effectiveness of IPD is pivotal for ensuring legitimacy and public trust. Consequently, debates around IPD often centre on balancing centralized leadership (which may offer efficiency) with horizontal structures that promote grassroots input (Mills, 1956). In this regard, IPD) refers to the extent to which political parties provide their members with meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. This includes processes related to candidate nomination, leadership selection, policy formulation, and internal control mechanisms. IPD is seen as a critical determinant of party legitimacy and organizational effectiveness because it offers a means for members to hold leaders accountable and to contribute their voices to the party's agenda (Dahl, 1989; Fung & Wright, 2003).

The core components of IPD can be broken down into several interrelated components. These core components serve as the building blocks for analysing how well a party adheres to democratic practices internally. These range from transparency and accountability, transparency refers to how openly party processes are conducted. It includes clear and accessible procedures for internal elections, candidate selection, and policy debate. Transparent systems enable members to understand decision-making processes and criticize or suggest improvements (Dahl, 1989); accountability ensures that party leaders and decision-making bodies are answerable to the party members. Mechanisms such as regular internal reviews, audit committees, or recall procedures serve as checks on power within the party (Fung & Wright, 2003).

Secondly, member participation that includes inclusiveness which relies heavily on ensuring a broad spectrum of members is involved in discussions and decisions. This can be measured by the extent of participation in party congresses, internal referenda, and policy debates. Deliberation: beyond mere participation, democratic deliberation is essential. This involves structured debate and discussion wherein diverse viewpoints are respected and considered before decisions are made.

Thirdly, institutional mechanisms and procedures that focus its attention on internal elections and candidate

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selection. Fair and competitive practices for choosing candidates and leaders are at the heart of IPD. Procedures should be codified in party statutes and consistently implemented. Rule of law within the Party is a formal set of rules, standards, and procedures that should govern internal processes. These rules help ensure that decisions are made in a predictable, fair, and institutionalized manner.

Fourthly, member education and empowerment which centres on political socialization and access to information. Effective IPD requires that members are informed about their rights within the party. Training sessions, workshops, and continuous education initiatives help empower members to participate actively. Empowerment is also linked to the flow of information. Party members must have access to data, institutional reports, and outcomes of decision-making processes to engage meaningfully.

Understanding IPD fully involves recognizing both its formal and informal dimensions. Structural Dimensions includes the organizational design of the party, such as hierarchical versus decentralized structures. Hierarchical structures might centralize decision-making, whereas decentralized organizations facilitate wider participation (Abutu, Samsu, & Fee, 2021). Procedural dimension examines the systems and processes (e.g., internal elections, debates) that operationalize democracy within the party. Behavioural/Cultural dimensions refers to the attitudes, norms, and informal practices among party members that influence how formal procedures are enacted. Informal practices like patronage networks, commonly known as "godfatherism," can undermine formal IPD even if proper structures exist (Adegbite & Lawal, 2021).

Empirical studies specific to Nigeria highlight both the promise and challenges of implementing IPD within its political parties. Recent research indicates that many Nigerian parties struggle with entrenched elite dominance and patronage networks, which compromise democratic processes. For example, Abutu, Samsu, and Fee (2021) provide evidence that candidate selection processes are frequently dictated by a small clique of influential leaders, leading to a perception among rank-and-file members that genuine participation is limited. Similarly, Adegbite and Lawal (2021) reveal that poor institutional mechanisms for fostering member inclusion have resulted in internal divisions that diminish overall party cohesiveness.

Focusing on the All Progressives Congress (APC), studies such as those by Frank and Udoaka (2023) have documented mixed evaluations of the party's IPD practices. On one hand, the APC has initiated reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and inclusiveness; on the other, the persistence of "godfatherism" and centralized decision-making points to structural challenges that impede full democratic participation. Empirical findings suggest that while reforms may improve the legitimacy of candidate selection over time, the deep-rooted nature of patronage-based politics in Nigeria continues to thwart the realization of a fully participatory model. These insights underscore the importance of examining the APC as a critical case for understanding the broader challenges of internal party democracy in a complex, multi-ethnic political environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theoretical perspectives was employed to explain the dynamics of IPD in Nigerian political parties, particularly within the APC. These theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the interplay between internal structures, individual incentives, and the broader political context in Nigeria. They elucidate why the APC, despite progressive reforms in some areas, continues to face challenges in fully institutionalizing IPD. The Participatory Democracy Theory (Dahl, 1989; Fung & Wright, 2003) posits that broad-based member involvement is essential for ensuring that party decisions reflect the collective will. This theory supports the view that genuine participation can lead to more innovative and accountable political outcomes.

Elite Theory (Mills, 1956) contends that political power tends to be concentrated among a narrow segment of a party's leadership. Elite control is often seen as a pragmatic necessity in complex political environments; however, it can also inhibit the development of genuine internal democracy. The tension

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between elite control and grassroots participation is particularly evident in the APC, where empirical studies have highlighted both reform efforts and enduring patterns of centralized decision-making.

Institutional Theory (March & Olsen, 1989) further enriches this analysis by asserting that both formal rules (such as party constitutions and documented procedures) and informal norms (such as loyalty and patronage practices) shape internal party behaviour. According to this framework, sustainable reforms must address both codified structures and the underlying cultural practices that perpetuate patronage and factionalism.

Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957) contributes to our understanding by demonstrating that individual party members often weigh the costs and benefits of participation. When electoral success or personal gain is linked to top-down decision-making, members may become disinclined to engage in participatory processes, even if such engagement could theoretically foster a more democratic internal environment.

History of Democracy and Party Formation in Nigeria

The historiography of democracy and party formation in Nigeria could be analysed christening it into five phases: Colonial Legacy and the Birth of Political Consciousness; the First Republic: Regionalism and the Tri-Party System (1960–1966); Disruption and Transition under Military Rule; The Second Republic and the Aborted Third Republic; and The Fourth Republic and Contemporary Party Dynamics

Colonial Legacy and the Birth of Political Consciousness

Nigeria's political evolution began during the colonial period when the struggle against British rule catalysed the development of nationalist sentiments. Early political organizations—often rooted in the cultural and regional identities of Nigeria's diverse peoples—set the stage for modern party formation. The push for independence in the 1940s and 1950s saw the emergence of structured political activities, as educated elites and grassroots leaders mobilized citizens to demand self-governance (Chukwu, 2025). This period laid the ideological foundation for the organized political parties that would come to define post-colonial Nigeria.

The First Republic: Regionalism and the Tri-Party System (1960–1966)

With independence in 1960, Nigeria witnessed the formation of the country's first political parties. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Northern People's Congress (NPC), and Action Group (AG) emerged as the principal vehicles of political expression. Each party was largely regionally based: the NCNC and later its splinter groups represented the Eastern region, the NPC consolidated predominantly Hausa-Fulani interests from the North, and the AG primarily mobilized Yoruba support in the West (Agbu, n.d). The interplay of these parties was marked by regional alliances and conflicts, as their formation also reflected deep-seated ethnic and ideological cleavages that would influence national politics for decades to come.

Disruption and Transition under Military Rule

The promise of the First Republic was cut short by the military coup of 1966, which disrupted the fragile democratic experiment and suspended the operation of the multiparty system. Military rule in Nigeria, which persisted intermittently for over three decades, interrupted the developmental trajectory of political parties. However, this period also saw evolving strategies in party formation as military regimes intermittently introduced controlled transitions to civilian government. Despite restrictions, political actors continued to discuss and envision future democratic structures, even as the military sought to shape and contain political mobilization (Yamanga, n.d).

The Second Republic and the Aborted Third Republic

The short-lived Second Republic (1979–1983) attempted to revive multiparty democracy but was plagued by corruption, economic mismanagement, and pervasive patronage networks. During this period, newly

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formed parties attempted to navigate older regional loyalties while responding to emerging urban and middle-class aspirations. The brief experimental Third Republic in the late 1980s and early 1990s, though ultimately aborted, signified the persistent desire for democratic expression and further shaped the evolution of party politics in Nigeria. These transitional phases underscored the challenges of balancing modern political practices with entrenched ethno political loyalties and authoritarian legacies.

The Fourth Republic and Contemporary Party Dynamics

The definitive return to democracy in 1999 ushered in the Fourth Republic, characterized by a reconfigured multiparty system. Political parties such as the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) emerged from realignments that reflected both historical legacies and contemporary challenges. Today's party formations in Nigeria continue to grapple with the influences of regionalism, patronage, and the remnants of military-era authoritarianism. Despite reforms aimed at democratizing internal party processes, issues like elite dominance and factionalism persist—a reminder that historical patterns still shape modern electoral politics (Chukwu, 2025; Yamanga, n.d).

The history of Nigerian party formation reveals a dynamic interplay between continuity and change. While early political parties were visibly anchored to ethnic and regional identities, subsequent democratic experiments have sought to broaden political participation and institutionalize fair governance practices. Lessons from Nigeria's past—such as the importance of a truly inclusive democratic process and the challenges posed by entrenched interests—remain crucial for contemporary political actors. Understanding these historical trajectories provides valuable insights into how democratic consolidation can be strengthened by revisiting and reforming internal party structures (Agbu, n.d).

Operation of IPD in Nigeria's Political Parties

In theory, IPD involves the decentralization of power within political parties—allowing rank-and-file members to participate in candidate nominations, policy formulation, and leadership elections. Many Nigerian parties have instituted internal mechanisms such as party congresses and primaries to encourage participatory decision-making. For instance, the All Progressives Congress (APC) has introduced reforms intended to democratize candidate selection and leadership appointments (Babayo & Yahaya, 2019). These initiatives include formalized procedures aimed at ensuring transparency and providing avenues for grassroots voices. In practice, however, the operation of IPD tends to be uneven. While some processes adhere to prescribed democratic norms, others are overridden by informal power structures and the influence of party "godfathers" who use patronage to control outcomes.

Challenges to Effective IPD Implementation

Empirical studies reveal that the operation of internal democracy in Nigeria is seriously compromised by the concentration of power in the hands of a few elites. Abutu, Samsu, and Fee (2021) document that candidate selection remains largely the preserve of influential party insiders, rendering the participation of ordinary party members largely tokenistic. Similarly, Adegbite and Lawal (2021) argue that the absence of robust internal mechanisms for accountability and member participation has led to a proliferation of intra-party conflicts. The tension between formal democratic structures and informal practices results in decision-making that not only marginalizes grassroots inputs but also exacerbates factional rivalry. Moreover, the persistence of these issues undermines the credibility of political parties and, by extension, the wider democratic process.

In many instances, attempted reforms have failed to dismantle the entrenched systems of elite patronage. Instead, these internal dynamics create conditions where decision-making is perceived as mishandled and undemocratic. The lack of transparent communication and clear guidelines for participation further deepens the divide between party leadership and ordinary members. Consequently, internal party democracy in Nigeria often operates on paper rather than in practice—leading to disillusionment among members and reducing the overall capacity of political parties to foster genuine democratic engagement (Babayo & Yahaya, 2019).

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The case of APC illustrates the duality of IPD operations. On one hand, the party has in recent years made concerted efforts to incorporate internal elections and broaden member participation in decision-making processes. On the other hand, empirical research indicates that these reforms are frequently undermined by behind-the-scenes negotiations and the overriding influence of senior party figures (Babayo & Yahaya, 2019). Similarly, reports on internal party conflict (Barigbon, 2023) show that insufficient decentralization and inadequate channels for grievance redress exacerbate tensions. Such dynamics not only impair the party's internal cohesion but also detract from its ability to field candidates who command popular support during elections. These findings highlight the enduring challenge of balancing centralized authority and democratized decision-making in Nigeria's political parties. Many scholars argue that without substantive reforms that both empower grassroots members and curtail the influence of established power brokers, IPD will continue to serve as a weak link in Nigeria's democratic fabric.

Therefore, the operation of IPD in Nigeria's political parties remains a complex and contested issue. While on paper, many parties—including the APC—champion inclusive practices and transparent internal procedures, the realities on the ground reveal a persistent imbalance. Elite control, patronage networks, and unresolved intra-party conflicts continue to hinder genuine democratic participation. This not only undermines the legitimacy of party institutions but also has broader implications for Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

In summary, IPD is fundamental to the legitimacy of political parties for several reasons. First, it empowers members by involving them in decision-making, thereby enhancing participatory legitimacy and fostering ownership of the party's vision and policies. Second, it promotes transparency and accountability, which are critical for building trust and social capital within the party. Third, by ensuring merit-based leadership and inclusive policy formulation, IPD legitimizes both the party's leadership and its policy outcomes. Finally, by addressing the challenges of informal elite control, IPD reinforces the commitment to democratic principles, which is essential for sustaining long-term legitimacy in a competitive political environment. The cumulative effect of these factors is that parties with strong internal democratic practices are more resilient, responsive, and aligned with democratic values, making them better suited to represent their members and the public effectively (Dahl, 1989; Fung & Wright, 2003; Abutu et al., 2021; Adegbite & Lawal, 2021).

Formation of the APC

The All Progressives Congress (APC) was inaugurated in February 2013 through the consolidation of four opposition forces: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) (All Progressives Congress, 2023). This merger was designed to counter the decades-long dominance of the PDP by uniting diverse political figures and regional interests under a common democratic banner (Chukwu, 2025). Jinadu (2013) explains that this consolidation was instrumental in overcoming the fragmentation that had previously plagued opposition groups, thereby setting the stage for a more inclusive and participatory form of party governance. However, each constituent party contributed distinct political cultures and organizational practices, resulting in identifiable blocs that continue to influence the party's dynamics.

The APC's strategic formation contributed to its historic electoral achievements. In 2015, the party's presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, secured a decisive victory, marking Nigeria's first peaceful transition of power from one ruling party to another (Babayo & Yahaya, 2019). Moreover, the APC's success extended to the National Assembly, where it gained significant majorities in both chambers (All Progressives Congress, 2023). The subsequent re-election of Buhari in 2019 and the party's continued dominance in the 2023 elections with Bola Tinubu as the presidential candidate further illustrate the strengthened organizational capacity that a unified opposition can achieve (Britannica, 2025). However, while these electoral successes are noteworthy, the APC's internal democratic processes have not been immune to informal practices, such as godfatherism and factional rivalry, which continue to challenge the ideal of full internal democratization (Adegbite & Lawal, 2021).

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Bloc formation has impacted on IPD in the APC. So, the evolution of the APC provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of IPD in Nigeria:

1. Coalition-Building as a Democratic Catalyst: The merger that formed the APC exemplifies how strategic coalition-building can overcome historical fragmentation among opposition parties. Such a process necessitates extensive negotiations and compromises, ideally reflecting a participatory approach that strengthens internal structures (Jinadu, 2013). Unfortunately, it has developed a factional competition among the distinct blocs which has led to sustained internal power struggles, affecting transparent decision-making in candidate selection and leadership contests (Dahl, 1989; Fung & Wright, 2003).
2. Formal Versus Informal Mechanisms in IPD: Although the APC has developed formal mechanisms—such as internal elections and transparent candidate selection procedures—to foster democratic participation, these are often undermined by informal practices like godfatherism. Adegbite and Lawal (2021) highlight that powerful individuals within the party frequently bypass formal structures to exert disproportionate influence, thereby limiting grassroots input; centralization and elite control emerges. Bloc loyalties often translate into elite control and imposition, marginalizing rank-and-file members and undermining inclusivity (Guardian, 2025; Abutu et al., 2021).
3. Internal Cohesion and Electoral Performance: The APC's ability to maintain internal cohesion during national elections has been a decisive factor in its success. However, factional conflicts remain a recurrent issue. As Babayo and Yahaya (2019) note, internal unity appears to be directly correlated with electoral strength, suggesting that enhancing IPD could further solidify party stability. The implication of this is a challenge to unity and accountability as persistent factionalism continues to erode internal accountability and party cohesion, complicating efforts to build a unified democratic structure (Omotola, 2010; Adegbite & Lawal, 2021).
4. Implications for Democratic Consolidation: The APC's experience demonstrates that while formal democratic reforms can improve the internal functioning and external performance of political parties, challenges remain in dismantling informal networks of influence. Strengthening IPD requires not only institutional innovation but also active measures to counteract entrenched patronage and elite dominance (Abutu et al., 2021). A robust internal party democracy is essential for effective political consolidation in any democracy. The APC's struggles with bloc rivalry and internal autocracy not only hinder fair internal processes but also threaten its broader democratic credibility (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014; Ononogbu & Okoroiwu, 2019).

APC Bloc Formation Model Flowchart



Source: Researchers creativity, 2025

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The APC's trajectory—from its formation in 2013 to its transformative electoral victories—offers a nuanced perspective on internal party democracy in Nigeria. While the party has institutionalized several democratic measures, the persistent influence of informal practices such as godfatherism and factionalism continues to pose significant challenges. Effective IPD is critical for robust democratic outcomes. The lingering influence of bloc identities in the APC underscores the need for reforms that mitigate factionalism and promote inclusive internal practices. The lessons emerging from the APC therefore, emphasize the need for a dual approach: further strengthening formal democratic structures and simultaneously addressing the informal practices that undermine them. Without such comprehensive reforms, the true potential of IPD to contribute to democratic consolidation in Nigeria will remain elusive.

Data Presentation

Section A: Respondents Demographics and Participation Measures

The study's sample consisted of 400 APC members, with demographic characteristics reflecting a broad mix in terms of age, gender, and tenure. For example, approximately 62% of the respondents were male and 38% female. Age distributions ranged from early career members (aged 25–35) representing 40% of the sample to veteran members (age 36 and above) making up 60%. Respondents were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which internal party processes—such as transparent candidate selection, democratic internal elections, and policy discussions—were implemented. The mean score for perceived adherence to IPD principles was 3.7 (SD = 0.8) out of 5, indicating moderate satisfaction with the internal processes (Field Survey, 2025).

Section B: Data Analysis and Findings based on the Research Questions:

RQ1: Implementation of internal democratic processes in the APC

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	20	5%
Fair	60	15%
Fairly Good	160	40%
Good	120	30%
Excellent	40	10%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Interpretation: The modal response is "Fairly good," with 40% of respondents choosing this option. Although a substantial 30% rated the process as "Good," a combined total of 20% (5% "Poor" + 15% "Fair") indicates that a fraction of the respondents sees significant room for improvement. Taken together, the results suggest moderate satisfaction. Members and internal leadership may recognize that while the current practices provide a functional level of internal democracy, there is potential for greater transparency and inclusivity.

Analysis: The central tendency around "moderate satisfaction" reflects a cautious endorsement; the respondents see that the APC's internal processes are in place but not fully optimized. Such a rating often means that while the system works, there are opportunities for reforms—particularly around enhancing transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability.

Implications: The "Fairly good" rating suggests that while the APC has made progress towards internal democratization, targeted reforms—such as more transparent candidate selection and enhanced participatory mechanisms—could elevate perceptions to higher levels of satisfaction.

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RQ2: IPD Impact on Party Cohesion and Electoral Performance

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5%
Disagree	30	7.5%
Neutral	60	15%
Agree	200	50%
Strongly Agree	100	25%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Interpretation: With 50% of respondents choosing "Agree" and another 25% "Strongly Agree," a dominant majority acknowledges that effective internal democratic processes positively influence both party cohesion and electoral performance. A very small minority (only 10 respondents combined for "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree") indicate concerns or scepticism about the relationship. This consensus highlights that many believe that bolstering internal democracy could lead to stronger internal unity and better electoral strategies.

Analysis: The combined total of 75% (50% "Agree" + 25% "Strongly Agree") indicates a strong belief that internal democratic processes (IPD) are instrumental in fostering both unity and electoral competitiveness. There is a measurable, positive impact on indicators such as membership loyalty, public trust, and reduced internal conflicts. These factors are fundamental not only to internal cohesion but also bear on the overall electoral performance of the party. Improved cohesion, as experienced by members who rated IPD more highly, suggests that robust democratic practices can lead to enhanced party credibility and stability—factors often associated with better performance at the polls. This perspective aligns with Political Science research suggesting that parties characterized by openness and internal accountability tend to mobilize support more effectively and exhibit fewer internal conflicts.

Strategic Relevance:

1. Cohesion: Internal democracy is commonly seen as a foundation for mitigating factional fighting. When structures encourage wide participation and transparent decision-making, members are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and loyalty.
2. Electoral Performance: A cohesive internal structure directly affects campaign strategy, voter mobilization, and overall electoral strategy. Improved engagement and reduced internal strife can translate into a better-prepared and more unified electoral front.

RQ3: Key Challenges and Bottlenecks That Hinder Effective Internal Democracy

The respondents pinpoint significant hurdles in the effective implementation of internal democracy among which are:

1. Godfatherism: Approximately 65% of respondents noted that influential party elders or "godfathers" frequently override formal decisions. This informal practice undermines merit-based candidate selection and the spirit of internal democracy.
2. Factionalism: Around 55% of respondents highlighted that factional rivalries lead to internal conflicts, impeding cohesive decision-making. These rivalries result in behind-the-scenes negotiations and power struggles that detract from the establishment of genuinely participatory governance (Field Survey, 2025).

Interpretation: These challenges reveal a gap between the formal democratic provisions and their practical realization. The persistence of informal networks and elite domination not only diminishes grassroots engagement but also generates internal conflicts that can erode the party's structural stability. Such bottlenecks pose significant risks to the long-term sustainability of both democracy within the party and its

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public electoral appeal.

RQ4: APC's Improvement on Its Internal Democratic Practices to Foster Greater Transparency and Accountability

Recommendations for Improvement: Based on the findings, the following strategies are recommended for the APC to enhance its internal democratic processes:

1. Enhance Transparency in Candidate Selection: Establish clear, publicly accessible criteria and processes for candidate selection to reduce the influence of behind-the-scenes negotiations and ensure that selection is based on merit.
2. Empower Grassroots Membership: Create mechanisms that encourage broader participation from lower-level members. Empowering these voices can dilute the concentrated power of entrenched elites and promote a more balanced decision-making process.
3. Dismantle Informal Power Networks: Implement reforms aimed at curbing godfatherism and factional rivalry. This involves establishing oversight bodies or committees tasked with monitoring adherence to democratic protocols and intervening when informal practices distort the process.
4. Regular Audits and Feedback Mechanisms: Introduce periodic reviews of internal processes along with channels for anonymous feedback. This will help identify deviations from democratic norms early and allow for timely interventions to realign practices with formal structures (Field Survey, 2025).

Discussion of Implementation: By instituting these reforms, the APC leadership can bridge the gap between policy and practice. The emphasis on transparency, accountability, and genuine grassroots engagement would not only reconcile internal disputes but also enhance the party's credibility in the eyes of the public, thereby contributing to both internal party stability and improved electoral performance.

Research Hypothesis

H_0: IPD has no significant effect on political party stability in Nigeria.

H_1: IPD has a significant effect on political party stability in Nigeria.

Analysis

The inferential analysis, featuring regression procedures using IPD adherence scores as the independent variable and measures of political party stability as the dependent variable, revealed a statistically significant positive relationship **($p < .05$).** This statistically significant finding supports the alternative hypothesis **(H_1)** that robust internal party democracy (IPD) positively influences the stability of the political party (Field Survey, 2025).

Implications: The empirical evidence indicates that strengthening IPD within the APC can lead to enhanced party cohesion, increased public trust, and ultimately better electoral performance. The positive association between IPD and party stability underscores its importance for political resilience in Nigeria. As such, the data lead us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study underscore the complex nature of IPD within Nigeria's political landscape. Although formal democratic processes have been established within the APC, the persistence of godfatherism and deep-seated factionalism substantially threatens these initiatives. The data confirm that members see the potential of IPD to enhance party cohesion and credibility, yet they also recognize that without curbing the informal practices of elite dominance, true participatory governance remains elusive. Acceptance of the central hypothesis is evident from the regression results and the consistent narrative across survey responses: robust IPD practices have a significant, positive effect on political party stability in

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Nigeria. However, the challenges identified call for targeted reforms—such as greater transparency in candidate selection and empowerment of grassroots voices—to minimize the influence of proxy decision-makers. In light of these findings, party leadership is encouraged to not only sustain formal democratic structures but also actively dismantle the informal networks that distort them.

In all, while the APC demonstrates an earnest commitment to IPD on paper, the practical realization of these principles is impeded by entrenched practices of godfatherism and factionalism. Addressing these challenges is critical for the consolidation of internal democracy, which, as the evidence suggests, is indispensable for achieving long-term political stability and democratic resilience in Nigeria.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on a survey of 400 respondents drawn from various levels of membership within the APC in Lagos State, the study revealed the following key findings:

1. Moderate Adherence to Formal IPD Mechanisms: Respondents rated the formal implementation of transparent candidate selection, internal elections, and policy debates at an average of 3.7 on a 5-point scale. This score suggests that the APC has established institutional frameworks for IPD; however, implementation is often uneven.
2. Prevalence of Informal Practices: A dominant theme across responses was the persistence of godfatherism and factionalism. Approximately 65% of participants acknowledged that influential party elders frequently override formal procedures, while 55% indicated that factional rivalries significantly impede seamless decision-making. These practices diminish grassroots participation and often lead to perceptions of tokenism in the decision-making process.
3. Positive Impact on Party Stability: Statistical analysis showed a significant positive correlation between adherence to IPD and perceived political party stability. Respondents reporting stronger adherence to democratic processes were more likely to perceive higher levels of internal cohesion, loyalty, and overall party credibility—confirming the acceptance of the central hypothesis that robust IPD positively impacts party stability.
4. Inconsistencies between Policy and Practice: While the APC has instituted formal democratic measures on paper, many respondents expressed concern that the informal power dynamics, characterized by elite dominance and patronage networks, often undercut these efforts. This disconnect contributes to internal conflicts, diminishes leadership accountability, and raises questions about the long-term prospects for genuine democratic consolidation.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores a complex and contested landscape within Nigeria's political parties, particularly the APC. Although formal structures supportive of IPD exist, the persistence of godfatherism and factionalism undermines their effectiveness. These informal practices not only hinder true participatory governance but also compromise the long-term stability and democratic credibility of the party. The findings suggest that while formal efforts to democratize internal processes have a demonstrable positive effect on party stability, their full potential is curtailed when not reinforced by substantive reforms against entrenched elitism. Consequently, true internal party democracy remains an aspirational goal that requires continuous and concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

Recommendations across the Spectrum

For Party Leaders and Senior Decision-Makers

1. Strengthen Institutional Checks: Implement robust mechanisms that ensure transparency in candidate selection and leadership appointments. This includes independent oversight committees and clear, enforceable guidelines.

2. Combat Elite Dominance: Actively work to diminish the influence of godfathers by promoting merit-based evaluations and leadership development programs that empower emerging talents from grassroots levels.
3. Facilitate Open Communication:* Establish formal platforms for dialogue between party leadership and rank-and-file members to foster trust and allow grievances to be addressed promptly.

For Grassroots Membership and Local Branches

1. Engage Actively in Internal Elections:* Encourage broader participation in internal democratic processes by organizing educational workshops and capacity-building initiatives that help members understand their rights and roles.
2. Report Irregularities: Create safe channels through which members can report instances of undue influence or irregularities in decision-making processes without fear of reprisal. Cultivate an Inclusive Culture:* Local branches should work to build solidarity and reduce factionalism by prioritizing unity and common objectives over regional or personal loyalties.

For Policy Makers and Regulators

1. Enact Reforms: Advocate for legal and institutional reforms that standardize internal party operations, ensuring that democratic practices are not just aspirational but legally mandated.
2. Monitor Compliance: Establish independent bodies to oversee the implementation of IPD within political parties and to hold leaders accountable for deviations from democratic norms.

For Researchers and Civil Society Organizations

1. Continuous Monitoring: Given the complexity of internal party dynamics, it might be valuable to conduct longitudinal studies that monitor the impact of reforms over time, thereby providing a roadmap for not only stabilizing but also modernizing the internal democratic practices for sustainable electoral success. Also, support ongoing empirical research to monitor the evolution of IPD practices, with the aim of identifying emerging trends and proposing timely interventions.

2. Public Awareness Campaigns: Engage in public education initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of internal party democracy and how it contributes to robust democratic governance.

Overall Implications

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that improved adherence to IPD not only enhances party stability but also contributes to the overall health of Nigeria's democratic system. The detailed analysis not only validates the central hypothesis but also highlights how deeply entrenched informal practices—such as godfatherism and factionalism—can impede the advancement of formal democratic structures. For a party that seeks to remain competitive in Nigeria's dynamic political landscape, the adoption of reforms directed at transparency and grassroots empowerment is imperative. In light of these findings, further research might explore how similar reforms could be tailored to other political parties, potentially offering systemic improvements across Nigeria's political system.

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APPENDIX

Babcock University,School Of Social Sciences,Department Of Politicalscience And Public Administration,Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeriaquestionnaire

Dear respondent,

This questionnaire was designed to elicit answers on the research questions for an article paper titled: **"The Dynamics of Internal Party Democracy (IPD) in Nigeria: Lessons from the All Progressives Congress (APC)",** For the purpose of this questionnaire, **"APC"** refers to the All-Progressives Congress political party in Nigeria. "Internal Party Democracy **(IPD)"** refers to the extent to which the party adheres to democratic principles and practices within its own internal structures, processes, and decision-making. Therefore, I implore you to feel free to respond objectively to the posed questions as they will be kept confidential and also will be used for academic purpose only and suggest probable solutions to any identified problems particular to APC and all other political parties in Nigeria.

Thank you.

Section A: Respondent Demographic Profile:

Kindly tick the appropriate box provided for the questions below:

1. **Age Bracket:**
   ☐ 18–24
   ☐ 25–34
   ☐ 35–44
   ☐ 45–54
   ☐ 55 and above

2. **Gender**:
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female
   ☐ Prefer not to say

3. **Educational Level:**
   ☐ High School
   ☐ Diploma/Certificate
   ☐ Bachelor's Degree
   ☐ Master's Degree
   ☐ Doctorate

4. **Position/Designation in the Party:**
   ☐ Rank-and-file Member
   ☐ Ward/Zone Representative
   ☐ Local Govt. EXCO/Leader
   ☐ State-Level Official
   ☐ Other (please specify): _____

5. **Length of Membership in the APC:**
   ☐ Less than 1 year
   ☐ 1–3 years

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☐ 4–6 years
☐ 7–10 years
☐ More than 10 years

6 Local Government of Residence: _____

Section B: Statements on Research Questions

Please read the following statements, and tick/mark number that best explains your opinion. **NOTE:** You can only tick one number for each statement using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Implementation of Internal Democratic Processes:

i. **Frequency of Participation:**

- How frequently do you personally participate in internal party activities (e.g.?

Meetings, primaries, forums)?
☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Fairly Good ☐ Good ☐ Excellent

ii **Transparency of Candidate Selection:** |
- The candidate selection process in my local APC branch is conducted in a transparent manner.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

iii. I**nclusion in Decision-Making:**
- I believe that rank-and-file members have adequate opportunities to contribute to

Key decision-making processes in the party.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

IV. **Regularity of Internal Elections/Primaries:**
- Our branch/state conducts regular internal elections or primaries to select party officials.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

v. **Feedback Mechanisms:**
- There exist formal channels for members to provide feedback or express concerns about party policies and leadership decisions.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

2: Impact on Party Cohesion and Electoral Performance

i. **Effect on Party Cohesion:**
- The internal democratic processes help increase unity and cohesion among party members.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
ii. . **Improvement in Electoral Performance:**
- I believe that better internal democracy leads to the party performing better in elections.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

iii. **Relationship between Participation and Trust**:
- Increased member participation in decision-making enhances trust in party leadership.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
iv. **Member Loyalty:**
- Transparent internal processes boost my loyalty towards the APC.

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(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

3: Challenges to Effective Internal Party Democracy

i. **Prevalence of Godfatherism**:

- Influential party elders ("godfathers") significantly influence key decisions in my party.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

ii. **Impact of Elite Dominance:**

- Informal power structures override formal party procedures, limiting true democratic participation.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

iii. **Impact of Factionalism:**

- Factional rivalries within my party hinder clear and unified decision-making.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

iv. **Satisfaction with Internal Processes:**

- Overall, I am satisfied with how internal democratic processes are implemented in my branch.
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

v. **Party Challenges:**

- Please briefly describe any additional challenges you perceive in the implementation of internal democracy within your party:

_____

_____

4: Recommendations and Suggestions

i. **Improving Transparency:**

- What specific measures do you think could improve transparency in candidate selection? _____

_____

ii. **Enhancing Participation:**

- How can the APC better facilitate grassroots participation in internal decision-making? _____

_____

iii. **Addressing Elite Influence:**

- What reforms would you recommend to reduce the influence of godfatherism and factionalism in the party?

_____

iv. **General Suggestions**:

- Please provide any additional comments or recommendations to strengthen IPD within the APC:

_____

_____