

Research Article

Strong Men, Weak Institutions: X-Raying Intraparty Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

The consolidation of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has remained a subject of intense scholarly debate, particularly in relation to the internal functioning of political parties. While Nigeria has sustained uninterrupted civilian rule since 1999, the quality of its democracy is often questioned due to persistent deficiencies in intraparty democracy. This study interrogates the interplay between "strong men" and "weak institutions" in shaping intraparty democracy in Nigeria. It argues that the dominance of powerful political elites, combined with fragile institutional frameworks, had significantly undermined democratic practices within political parties. Drawing on Elite Theory and Institutional Theory, the study adopted a qualitative research approach using secondary data sources, including academic literature, electoral reports, and documented cases from major political parties such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The findings reveal that intraparty democracy in Nigeria is largely characterized by elite manipulation, lack of transparency, and the monetization of political processes. Party primaries are frequently marred by irregularities, including vote buying, imposition of candidates, and exclusion of grassroots members from decision-making processes. The study further finds that weak institutional structures exacerbate these challenges. Again, the study observed that frequent party defections, factional crises, and electoral disputes are symptomatic of deeper structural issues within the party system. This study therefore concludes that, strengthening intraparty democracy is essential for democratic consolidation in Nigeria and finally, recommended

critical reforms, aimed at enhancing institutional capacity, promoting transparency in party processes, and reducing the influence of money in politics. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can move towards a more inclusive and sustainable democracy

Keywords: Strong men, Weak institutions, intraparty democracy, Democratic consolidation

Introduction

Political parties are central to the functioning of modern democracies, serving as vehicles for political participation, representation, and governance in general. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, political parties have played a crucial role in facilitating electoral competition and political transitions. However, the internal dynamics of these parties raise significant concerns about the quality of democracy in the country. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed the emergence and evolution of several political parties, with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominating the political landscape for over a decade before the rise of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2015. Despite these developments, the internal functioning of political parties has been characterized by a lack of democratic practices. Issues such as candidate imposition, factionalism, and lack of transparency in party primaries have become pervasive (Ojo, 2008).

A critical factor contributing to these challenges is the dominance of "strong men"—powerful individuals who exert significant influence over party structures and decision-making processes. These individuals often act as political godfathers, controlling access to party resources and determining electoral outcomes. Their influence undermines institutional norms and weakens democratic practices within parties (Joseph, 1991). At the same time, the weakness of institutional frameworks within political parties exacerbates these challenges. Institutions are expected to provide rules and procedures that guide political behavior. However, in Nigeria, these institutions are often weak, poorly enforced, or easily manipulated. This creates an environment where personal interests override collective goals (North, 1990). Despite over two decades of democratic governance, Nigeria continues to face significant challenges in achieving effective intraparty democracy. Political parties, which are expected to serve as democratic institutions, often operate in ways that undermine democratic principles. The persistence of these challenges raises concerns about the sustainability of democracy in the country. One of the key problems is the dominance of strong political actors in party affairs. These individuals often manipulate party structures to serve their personal interests, thereby undermining democratic processes. Candidate selection processes, for

instance, are frequently influenced by powerful elites who impose their preferred candidates, sidelining grassroots participation (Omotola, 2010). Another major issue is the weakness of institutional frameworks within political parties. Party constitutions and guidelines are often ignored, and mechanisms for accountability and conflict resolution are either ineffective or nonexistent. This institutional weakness allows for the proliferation of undemocratic practices, including vote buying and electoral manipulation (Aiyede, 2013).

The monetization of politics further complicates the situation. The high cost of political participation excludes many potential candidates and concentrates power in the hands of wealthy individuals. This not only undermines fairness but also affects the quality of leadership. Additionally, frequent internal conflicts and party defections reflect the instability of party structures. These conflicts are often driven by power struggles among elites and are exacerbated by weak institutional mechanisms for resolving disputes. The persistence of these problems highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis of the factors undermining intraparty democracy in Nigeria. Without addressing these challenges, efforts to consolidate democracy in the country will remain ineffective. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between strong men, weak institutions, and intraparty democracy in Nigeria. By analyzing these dynamics, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on democratic consolidation in Nigeria and Africa at large. The study therefore poses the following research questions: How does the dominance of strong political actors affect intraparty democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Street? To what extent do weak institutional frameworks contribute to poor intraparty democratic practices in Nigeria? Lastly, what are the implications of weak intraparty democracy on democratic consolidation in Nigeria? These research questions are guided by the study objectives which serve as road map for the study.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The Concept of Strong Men

The concept of “strong men” in political discourse refers to individuals who wield disproportionate power within political systems, often overshadowing formal institutional structures. In Nigeria, strong men are commonly associated with the phenomenon of political godfatherism. These individuals exert influence over party structures, electoral processes, and governance outcomes through networks of patronage and loyalty (Joseph, 1991).

Strong men derive their power from various sources, including financial resources, social networks, and control over state institutions. They often finance political campaigns and, in

return, demand loyalty and control over decision-making processes. This creates a patron-client relationship that undermines democratic principles such as meritocracy and accountability. The dominance of strong men leads to the personalization of power, where political authority is concentrated in individuals rather than institutions. This weakens institutional frameworks and creates a culture of dependency and loyalty rather than competence and accountability (Michels, 1915). Furthermore, strong men often manipulate party rules and procedures to maintain their dominance. They may influence the selection of party executives, control access to party resources, and determine the outcomes of primaries. This undermines the credibility of political parties and erodes public trust in the democratic process.

Weak Institutions

Weak institutions are characterized by their inability to enforce rules, ensure accountability, and sustain democratic processes. In the Nigerian context, institutional weakness is evident in the functioning of political parties, electoral bodies, and other governance structures. According to North (1990), institutions are the “rules of the game” that shape human interaction. When these rules are weak or poorly enforced, they create opportunities for manipulation and abuse. In Nigeria, political parties often lack strong internal mechanisms for enforcing discipline and ensuring compliance with democratic norms. One manifestation of institutional weakness is the failure to conduct credible party primaries. Despite the existence of guidelines, these processes are frequently manipulated by party elites. Additionally, regulatory bodies such as INEC often lack the capacity or political independence to enforce compliance effectively (Aiyede, 2013). Weak institutions also contribute to political instability. The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms leads to frequent internal crises and party defections. This undermines the stability of the political system and hampers democratic consolidation.

Intraparty Democracy

Intraparty democracy refers to the processes and mechanisms through which members of a political party participate in decision-making. It encompasses activities such as the selection of candidates, election of party leaders, and formulation of policies.

A democratic political party is expected to operate transparently, inclusively, and accountably. However, in Nigeria, intraparty democracy is often compromised by elite dominance and

financial influence. Party primaries, for instance, are frequently characterized by irregularities, including vote buying and manipulation of delegate lists (Ojo, 2008).

The lack of intraparty democracy has significant implications for the broader political system. It limits political participation, reduces the quality of leadership, and undermines public trust in democratic institutions.

Elements of Intraparty Democracy

Intraparty democracy refers to the internal processes and mechanisms through which political parties operate in a democratic manner. It encompasses the structures, procedures, and practices that allow party members to participate in decision-making, leadership selection, and policy formulation. The presence of robust intraparty democracy is essential for the overall health of a democratic system, as political parties serve as the primary link between citizens and government (Sartori, 1976).

One of the core elements of intraparty democracy is inclusive participation. This involves the active involvement of party members in decision-making processes, including the selection of candidates and party leaders. Inclusive participation ensures that the interests of a broad spectrum of members are represented, rather than being dominated by a small elite group. However, in Nigeria, participation is often limited due to the influence of strong men and the monetization of politics, which excludes less affluent members (Ojo, 2008).

Another critical element is transparency. Democratic political parties are expected to conduct their activities openly, with clear rules and procedures guiding their operations. Transparency in processes such as party primaries and financial management enhances accountability and builds trust among members. In Nigeria, however, lack of transparency in delegate selection and voting processes often leads to disputes and allegations of manipulation (Omotola, 2010). Accountability is also a fundamental component of intraparty democracy. Party leaders and elected officials must be answerable to party members for their actions. This requires the existence of mechanisms for monitoring performance and sanctioning misconduct. In weak institutional environments, accountability mechanisms are often ineffective, allowing leaders to act with impunity (Aiyede, 2013).

The rule of law within parties is another essential element. This involves adherence to party constitutions, guidelines, and regulations. When party rules are consistently applied, they create predictability and fairness in decision-making processes. However, in Nigeria, party

rules are frequently ignored or selectively applied, particularly during candidate selection processes.

Competitive and credible party primaries are perhaps the most visible expression of intraparty democracy. Primaries provide an opportunity for party members to choose their representatives through a fair and transparent process. In Nigeria, however, primaries are often characterized by irregularities such as vote buying, intimidation, and imposition of candidates. These practices undermine the credibility of the process and weaken democratic outcomes (Ojo, 2008).

Another important element is internal conflict resolution mechanisms. Political parties inevitably experience conflicts, but the ability to manage these conflicts effectively is crucial for maintaining stability. Democratic parties establish institutionalized mechanisms for resolving disputes, such as disciplinary committees and arbitration panels. In Nigeria, weak conflict resolution mechanisms often lead to factionalism and party defections.

Internal autonomy and institutionalization are also key elements. Political parties must operate independently of undue external influence, including interference from powerful individuals or state actors. Institutionalized parties are characterized by stable structures, clear rules, and continuity over time. However, in Nigeria, parties are often highly personalized and lack strong institutional foundations (North, 1990).

Finally, ideological coherence is an often-overlooked element of intraparty democracy. Political parties are expected to have clear ideological orientations that guide their policies and actions. In Nigeria, the absence of strong ideological foundations contributes to opportunistic behavior, including frequent party switching and lack of policy consistency.

In conclusion, the elements of intraparty democracy—participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, credible primaries, conflict resolution, institutionalization, and ideological coherence—are critical for the functioning of democratic political parties. In the Nigerian context, the weakness of these elements, exacerbated by the dominance of strong men, undermines the democratic process and hinders democratic consolidation.

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation is a central concept in the study of political development, particularly in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. It refers to the process through which a new democracy matures and becomes stable, enduring, and unlikely to revert to authoritarian rule. In consolidated democracies, democratic norms, institutions, and practices become

deeply institutionalized and widely accepted by both political elites and citizens (Diamond, 2008).

Scholars have conceptualized democratic consolidation from multiple perspectives. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), a democracy is consolidated when it becomes “the only game in town,” meaning that no significant political actors seek to overthrow it or replace it with a non-democratic system. This definition emphasizes the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions of consolidation. Behaviorally, political actors must resolve conflicts within democratic frameworks; attitudinally, citizens must believe in the legitimacy of democratic governance; and constitutionally, institutions must function effectively and independently.

In a similar vein, Huntington (1991) links democratic consolidation to the institutionalization of democratic procedures, particularly the regular conduct of free, fair, and credible elections. However, beyond elections, consolidation requires the strengthening of institutions such as political parties, the judiciary, and electoral management bodies. Without strong institutions, democracy remains fragile and vulnerable to elite manipulation.

In the context of Nigeria, democratic consolidation remains incomplete despite over two decades of uninterrupted civilian rule. While elections are regularly conducted, the quality of these elections and the processes leading up to them—particularly intraparty activities—raise concerns. Political parties, which are expected to serve as vehicles for democratic participation, often exhibit undemocratic tendencies such as candidate imposition, vote buying, and exclusion of grassroots members (Omotola, 2010).

The relationship between intraparty democracy and democratic consolidation is particularly significant. Political parties are the building blocks of democratic systems, and their internal functioning has direct implications for the broader political system. When parties operate democratically, they promote accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness. Conversely, when parties are dominated by strong men and characterized by weak institutional frameworks, they undermine democratic consolidation.

Furthermore, democratic consolidation is closely tied to the rule of law and institutional strength. According to North (1990), institutions provide the rules that govern political and social interactions. In weak institutional environments, these rules are often ignored or manipulated, leading to instability and governance challenges. In Nigeria, weak institutional

frameworks within political parties and regulatory bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) contribute to the persistence of undemocratic practices.

Another critical dimension of democratic consolidation is political culture. A democratic political culture is characterized by tolerance, participation, and respect for the rule of law. However, in Nigeria, the prevalence of patron-client relationships and prebendal politics undermines the development of such a culture (Joseph, 1991). These practices reinforce the dominance of strong men and weaken institutional norms. The implications of weak democratic consolidation are far-reaching. They include political instability, electoral violence, and poor governance outcomes. Moreover, the lack of internal democracy within political parties reduces public trust in democratic institutions and discourages political participation.

In conclusion, democratic consolidation in Nigeria is constrained by the interplay between strong political actors and weak institutions. Strengthening intraparty democracy is therefore essential for achieving sustainable democratic governance. This requires not only institutional reforms but also a shift in political culture towards greater accountability and inclusiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE STUDY

This study is anchored on Elite Theory and Institutional Theory, which together provide a robust analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of intraparty democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. These theories are particularly relevant in explaining the interaction between powerful political actors ("strong men") and weak institutional structures within political parties.

Elite Theory, as propounded by scholars such as Pareto, Mosca, and later expanded by Michels (1915), posits that in every society, power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites who dominate decision-making processes. Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" argues that all organizations, including democratic ones, inevitably become oligarchic as leaders consolidate power and marginalize ordinary members. This theory is highly applicable to the Nigerian political context, where political parties are often controlled by a few influential individuals.

In Nigeria, elite dominance manifests in the form of political godfatherism, where powerful individuals control party structures, finance political activities, and determine electoral outcomes. These elites often manipulate party primaries, impose candidates, and influence leadership selection processes. As a result, intraparty democracy is significantly undermined,

as decisions are made based on elite interests rather than collective participation (Omotola, 2010). Elite Theory therefore helps to explain why democratic procedures within parties are frequently subverted by powerful actors.

Complementing Elite Theory is Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the role of formal rules, procedures, and organizations in shaping political behavior. According to North (1990), institutions are the “rules of the game” that structure human interaction. Strong institutions are characterized by their ability to enforce rules, ensure accountability, and provide stability. Conversely, weak institutions lack the capacity to regulate behavior effectively, leading to unpredictability and governance challenges.

In the Nigerian context, Institutional Theory provides insight into the structural weaknesses of political parties and regulatory bodies. Party constitutions, electoral guidelines, and legal frameworks often exist but are poorly enforced. This institutional weakness allows elites to manipulate processes without consequences. For example, despite clear rules governing party primaries, violations such as vote buying and candidate imposition are widespread due to weak enforcement mechanisms (Aiyede, 2013).

The integration of Elite Theory and Institutional Theory offers a comprehensive explanation of intraparty democracy in Nigeria. While Elite Theory highlights the dominance of powerful individuals, Institutional Theory explains why these individuals are able to operate with minimal constraints. The interaction between strong men and weak institutions creates a cycle in which elite dominance is reinforced, and institutional development is stunted.

The relevance of these theories to the study lies in their ability to explain the persistence of undemocratic practices within political parties. They provide a framework for analyzing how power is distributed and exercised within parties, as well as the structural conditions that enable or constrain democratic behavior. Furthermore, they help to identify the underlying causes of weak intraparty democracy, including the personalization of power, lack of accountability, and institutional fragility.

By applying these theoretical perspectives, the study is able to move beyond descriptive analysis and provide a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges facing Nigeria’s democracy. The theories also have practical implications, as they highlight the need for both elite restraint and institutional strengthening in order to promote democratic governance.

In sum, Elite Theory and Institutional Theory are highly relevant to this study because they capture the dual realities of Nigerian politics: the dominance of powerful individuals and the

weakness of institutional frameworks. Addressing these issues is essential for improving intraparty democracy and achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data sources such as academic journals, books, policy reports, and media publications. Content analysis is employed to examine patterns of intraparty democracy and elite dominance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The study focuses on major political parties, particularly the PDP and APC, analyzing their internal processes, candidate selection methods, and leadership structures. Data are interpreted within the framework of institutional theory.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Answer to Research Question One: How does the dominance of strong political actors affect intraparty democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic?

The dominance of strong political actors—commonly referred to as “strong men” or political godfathers—has had a profound and largely negative impact on intraparty democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. These actors wield disproportionate influence over party structures, decision-making processes, and electoral outcomes, thereby undermining democratic norms and practices within political parties.

One of the most significant ways in which strong men affect intraparty democracy is through the control of candidate selection processes. In theory, party primaries are designed to provide a platform for fair competition among aspirants, allowing party members to choose candidates based on merit and popular support. However, in practice, these processes are often manipulated by powerful elites who impose their preferred candidates. This phenomenon, widely documented in Nigerian politics, reduces primaries to mere formalities and disenfranchises ordinary party members (Omotola, 2010).

The imposition of candidates is closely linked to the patron-client nature of Nigerian politics, where loyalty to powerful individuals is prioritized over competence and ideological alignment. Strong men often sponsor candidates financially, expecting political loyalty and access to state resources in return. This dynamic reinforces prebendal politics, where public offices are treated as avenues for personal gain rather than public service (Joseph, 1991). Consequently, intraparty democracy is weakened, as decisions are driven by personal interests rather than collective deliberation.

Another critical dimension of elite dominance is the monopolization of party resources. Political parties require substantial financial resources to operate, and in Nigeria, these resources are often controlled by a few wealthy individuals. This concentration of financial power enables strong men to dictate party agendas, influence internal elections, and marginalize dissenting voices. As Ojo (2008) notes, the monetization of politics has become a defining feature of Nigerian party politics, effectively excluding individuals who lack financial capacity from meaningful participation.

Furthermore, the dominance of strong men contributes to internal party conflicts and factionalism. Competing elites often form rival factions within parties, each seeking to control party structures and access to political power. These conflicts frequently lead to parallel party executives, legal disputes, and, in some cases, violent confrontations. The inability of parties to manage these conflicts effectively reflects the absence of democratic norms and institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution (Aiyede, 2013).

The influence of strong men also undermines internal accountability mechanisms. In a democratic party system, leaders are expected to be accountable to party members. However, when power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, accountability is weakened. Party leaders often owe their positions to elite patrons rather than the broader membership, reducing their incentive to act in the collective interest. This lack of accountability fosters corruption, inefficiency, and poor governance outcomes.

Moreover, elite dominance discourages grassroots participation and political engagement. When party members perceive that decisions are predetermined by powerful individuals, they are less likely to participate in party activities. This leads to voter apathy and weakens the democratic culture within parties. Over time, this disengagement can extend to the broader political system, undermining democratic consolidation (Diamond, 2008).

The implications of strong men dominance extend beyond intraparty democracy to the broader political system. By undermining democratic processes within parties, strong men contribute to the emergence of leaders who lack legitimacy and accountability. This, in turn, affects governance outcomes and public trust in democratic institutions.

In summary, the dominance of strong political actors in Nigeria significantly undermines intraparty democracy through candidate imposition, resource control, factionalism, weak accountability, and reduced participation. Addressing this challenge requires not only

institutional reforms but also a shift in political culture towards greater inclusiveness and accountability.

Answer to Research Question Two: To what extent does weak institutional frameworks contribute to poor intraparty democratic practices in Nigeria?

Weak institutional frameworks play a central role in shaping the nature and quality of intraparty democracy in Nigeria. Institutions, as defined by North (1990), are the formal and informal rules that structure political and social interactions. When these institutions are weak, poorly enforced, or easily manipulated, they create an environment in which undemocratic practices can thrive. One of the most evident manifestations of institutional weakness in Nigeria is the poor enforcement of party rules and regulations. Political parties typically have constitutions and guidelines that outline procedures for candidate selection, leadership elections, and conflict resolution. However, these rules are often disregarded or selectively applied. For instance, party primaries are frequently conducted in violation of established guidelines, with little or no consequences for those responsible (Aiyede, 2013). This lack of enforcement undermines the credibility of party processes and erodes trust among members.

Another dimension of institutional weakness is the limited capacity of regulatory bodies, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). While INEC is mandated to oversee party activities and ensure compliance with electoral laws, it often faces challenges such as political interference, inadequate resources, and limited enforcement powers. As a result, it is unable to effectively regulate party primaries or sanction violations. This regulatory gap allows political elites to manipulate processes with impunity.

Weak institutions also contribute to the lack of internal democracy within party structures. Many political parties in Nigeria lack well-defined and functional organizational frameworks. Decision-making processes are often centralized, with little input from grassroots members. This centralization of power is facilitated by weak institutional checks and balances, which would otherwise ensure inclusiveness and accountability (Omotola, 2010).

The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms is another consequence of institutional weakness. Political parties frequently experience internal disputes arising from leadership struggles, candidate selection controversies, and ideological differences. However, the mechanisms for resolving these disputes are often ineffective or biased. This leads to prolonged conflicts, factionalism, and, in some cases, party fragmentation.

Additionally, weak institutional frameworks contribute to the monetization of politics. In the absence of strict regulations and enforcement mechanisms, financial inducements have become a common feature of party politics. Delegates are often bribed during primaries, and party officials may manipulate processes in favor of the highest bidder (Ojo, 2008). This not only undermines fairness but also reduces the quality of candidates emerging from party processes.

Institutional weakness also affects the ideological coherence of political parties. Strong institutions typically provide a framework for articulating and sustaining party ideologies. However, in Nigeria, the lack of institutionalization has resulted in parties that are largely indistinguishable in terms of ideology and policy orientation. This encourages opportunistic behavior, including frequent party switching, which further weakens party structures.

Furthermore, weak institutions hinder the development of internal accountability mechanisms. Without effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the performance of party leaders, there is little incentive for accountability. This creates opportunities for corruption and abuse of power, further undermining intraparty democracy.

In conclusion, weak institutional frameworks significantly contribute to poor intraparty democratic practices in Nigeria. They enable elite manipulation, weaken accountability, and undermine the credibility of party processes. Strengthening institutions is therefore essential for improving intraparty democracy and promoting democratic consolidation.

Answer to Research Question Three: What are the implications of weak intraparty democracy for Nigeria's democratic consolidation?

Weak intraparty democracy has far-reaching implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. As political parties are the primary vehicles for political participation and governance, deficiencies in their internal functioning have direct consequences for the broader democratic system. One of the most significant implications is political instability. Weak intraparty democracy often leads to internal conflicts, factionalism, and leadership crises within parties. These conflicts frequently spill over into the broader political system, resulting in electoral disputes, governance challenges, and, in some cases, violence. The inability of parties to manage internal disagreements democratically undermines the stability of the political system (Omotola, 2010).

Another major implication is the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions. When party processes are perceived as unfair, manipulated, or exclusionary, citizens lose confidence in the

political system. This lack of trust can lead to voter apathy, reduced political participation, and disengagement from democratic processes. As Diamond (2008) argues, public trust is a critical component of democratic consolidation, and its erosion poses a significant threat to democratic stability. Weak intraparty democracy also affects the quality of political leadership. When candidates are selected based on loyalty, financial capacity, or elite endorsement rather than competence and merit, the quality of governance suffers. Leaders who emerge through undemocratic processes are often more accountable to their patrons than to the electorate. This undermines effective governance and contributes to poor policy outcomes.

Furthermore, weak intraparty democracy perpetuates the cycle of elite dominance and institutional weakness. When political parties fail to operate democratically, they reinforce the power of strong men and weaken institutional frameworks. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle that hinders democratic development and makes reform efforts more difficult. Another important implication is the weakening of political competition. In a healthy democracy, political parties compete based on ideas, policies, and performance. However, when intraparty democracy is weak, competition is often based on financial power and elite influence. This reduces the quality of political discourse and limits the choices available to voters.

Additionally, weak intraparty democracy contributes to the lack of ideological clarity in the political system. Without strong internal democratic processes, parties are unable to develop coherent policy platforms or articulate clear ideological positions. This leads to a situation where parties are indistinguishable, and political competition becomes superficial. The implications also extend to electoral integrity. Flawed party primaries often set the stage for irregularities in general elections. When candidates emerge through undemocratic processes, they are more likely to engage in electoral malpractice to secure victory. This undermines the credibility of elections and weakens democratic consolidation. Weak intraparty democracy has broader implications for national development. Effective governance requires competent leadership, accountability, and citizen participation—all of which are undermined by undemocratic party practices. As a result, weak intraparty democracy can hinder socio-economic development and exacerbate existing challenges.

In conclusion, weak intraparty democracy poses a significant threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It undermines political stability, erodes public trust, reduces the quality of leadership, and weakens institutions. Addressing these challenges requires

comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening party structures, promoting transparency, and enhancing accountability.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the dynamics of intraparty democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic through the lens of the interplay between strong men and weak institutions. The analysis reveals that despite over two decades of uninterrupted democratic rule, the internal functioning of political parties remains largely undemocratic. This contradiction underscores the gap between the formal existence of democratic structures and the actual practice of democracy within political institutions.

A major finding of the study is the pervasive influence of strong political actors in shaping party processes. These individuals, often referred to as political godfathers, wield significant power over party structures, candidate selection, and decision-making processes. Their dominance has led to the personalization of power, where loyalty and financial capacity take precedence over competence and merit. As highlighted by Michels (1915), this concentration of power is consistent with the oligarchic tendencies of organizations, even those that are ostensibly democratic.

The study also finds that weak institutional frameworks significantly contribute to the erosion of intraparty democracy. Political parties in Nigeria often lack effective mechanisms for enforcing rules, ensuring accountability, and resolving conflicts. Although party constitutions and electoral guidelines exist, they are frequently ignored or manipulated by elites. This institutional weakness creates an environment in which undemocratic practices thrive, including vote buying, candidate imposition, and exclusion of grassroots members (Aiyede, 2013).

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the monetization of politics has exacerbated these challenges. The high cost of political participation limits access to political opportunities and concentrates power in the hands of wealthy individuals. This not only undermines fairness but also affects the quality of leadership, as capable individuals without financial resources are excluded from the political process.

The implications of weak intraparty democracy for Nigeria's democratic consolidation are profound. First, it undermines political stability by fostering internal conflicts, factionalism, and frequent party defections. Second, it erodes public trust in democratic institutions, as citizens perceive political processes as unfair and manipulated. Third, it negatively impacts

governance outcomes by producing leaders who are more accountable to elite patrons than to the electorate.

In addition, the study highlights the interconnectedness of intraparty democracy and broader democratic development. Political parties serve as the foundation of democratic systems, and their internal practices have direct implications for the quality of governance. When parties fail to operate democratically, the entire political system is weakened.

However, the study also suggests that these challenges are not insurmountable. Strengthening intraparty democracy requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both elite behavior and institutional capacity. On the one hand, political elites must demonstrate a commitment to democratic principles and refrain from manipulating party processes for personal gain. On the other hand, institutions must be strengthened to ensure the effective enforcement of rules and accountability.

Ultimately, the future of democracy in Nigeria depends on the ability to transform political parties into truly democratic institutions. This requires not only legal and institutional reforms but also a change in political culture. As Diamond (2008) argues, democratic consolidation is achieved when democratic norms become deeply embedded in both institutions and society.

In conclusion, the study reaffirms that the persistence of strong men and weak institutions remains a major obstacle to intraparty democracy in Nigeria. Addressing this challenge is critical for achieving sustainable democratic consolidation. Without meaningful reforms, Nigeria's democracy will continue to face significant limitations, despite the regular conduct of elections. Strengthening intraparty democracy is therefore not only a political necessity but also a prerequisite for national development and stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Strengthening Internal Party Institutions:** Political parties should enforce clear rules, transparent procedures, and accountability mechanisms to reduce arbitrary control by powerful individuals.
2. **Legal and Regulatory Reforms:** Bodies like INEC should be empowered to monitor and sanction parties that violate internal democratic standards, especially in primaries.
3. **Promotion of Internal Elections:** Adoption of credible, transparent, and technology-driven primary elections to reduce manipulation and elite imposition.

3. Civic and Political Education: Party members and citizens should be educated on democratic norms to demand accountability and resist authoritarian tendencies within parties.
4. Limiting Godfatherism: Campaign finance reforms and stricter disclosure requirements should be implemented to curb the influence of wealthy political patrons.

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