

Internal Democracy and Opposition Party Politics in Nigeria: The Case of Labour Party (LP) and the People Democratic Party (PDP)

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ABSTRACT

Original research paper

This article discussed internal democracy and opposition politics among Nigeria political parties focusing on the two leading opposition parties, the Labor Party and the Peoples' Democratic Party. The paper examined the role played by historical development, ethnic politics, godfatherism, ideological clarity and internal democracy in influencing the effectiveness of these opposition parties in Nigeria political parties' politics in the Fourth Republic. Using in-depth interviews, 60 respondents were purposively selected from six states that represent the six (6) geo-political zones in Nigeria: Ekiti, Bayelsa, Enugu, Kwara, Zamfara, and Yobe. The analysis showed that there were significant differences between the two parties. Anchored on elite theory which is premised on the belief that in every society irrespective of whether they are autocracies, democracies, or transitional regimes, political power always ends up being concentrated in the hands of a small cohesive minority. This paper then found that PDP is more firmly elite-controlled and historically conditioned while the LP is seen as having greater democratic potential despite organizational constraints. The results showed that the two parties are affected by systemic challenges that undermine their ability to perform as an opposition, which are expressed in different ways in accordance with institutional maturity and organisational culture. It was also found that the PDP's established networks are stable but undemocratic and the LP's youth-led emergence is democratically innovative but constrained by institutional inexperience. The paper advocated radical internal party restructuring, empowered democratic institutions, foster ideological clarity and comparative learning programmes to improve opposition performance and contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. These findings have implications for the study of opposition politics in transitional democracies and offer empirical models for institutional capacity building in Nigeria's evolving democratic environment.

Keywords: Internal Democracy, Political Parties, Opposition Politics, Labour Party, People Democratic Party.

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Introduction

The Political Parties in the Fourth Republic had their take off point after, the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. The transition to civil rule programme of Abdulsalami's administration lasted for only eleven months, the shortest in the country's history and ushered in the fourth republic. Political parties of this dispensation in the words of Nigeria's first executive President, Shehu Shagari "were created in a matter of weeks and prepared for elections in a matter of

days" (Nwoye & Okafor, 2015). In other words, parties of this era did not evolve organically to produce a prior long term political association between the various groups and individuals that came together. This has impacted on their internal democracy, operation and performance such that despite the return to party politics after a long stint of military rule, the relevance of such parties has remained contested. Even those that have acquired governmental control have not

significantly contributed to good governance and better quality of life for the generality of Nigerians nor have they robustly espoused ideas and ideals aimed at strengthening the fragile nationhood ((Nwoye & Okafor, 2015); rather, they have violated every known rule of decency and probity both in the management of electoral processes and in the conduct of the affairs of State. This assertion is aptly captured in the political antics and gimmicks of the political parties which emerged during this epoch.

A watershed within the Nigerian political scene, was the approval of new political parties by the electoral commission between 1998 and 1999 when it registered the People's Democratic Party (PDP) alongside the All-People's Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The PDP became the ruling political party by winning the 1999 presidential seat and most of the gubernatorial positions according to Omotola (2009). Under Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and President Umaru Musa Yar'adua (2007-2010) along with President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) the PDP retained its position as Nigeria's foremost political party for sixteen continuous years. The PDP maintained its political dominance because it had substantial patronage networks and control over state resources and the ability to support various elite interests throughout Nigeria's diverse ethno-regional areas (Adejumobi, 2007).

The PDP experienced its initial major opposition threat when the All-Progressives Congress (APC) came into existence in 2013. The All-Progressives Congress (APC) formed in 2013 through a union of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) faction (Olowojolu, 2015). The political coalition of opposition parties defeated the PDP dominance by electing Muhammadu Buhari of the APC as president over PDP sitting President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 elections. The electoral victory of 2015 marked a historical turning point in Nigerian democratic evolution because it was the first instance when an opposition party defeated an incumbent president in a direct ballot election according to Omotola and Nyuykonge (2015). After losing the 2015 elections the PDP became the leading opposition party, yet it has sustained its position through continuous internal power struggles and factional disputes (Katsina, 2016).

Multiple political parties emerged after the Supreme Court struck down parts of restrictive electoral provisions in 2002 (Omotola 2010). The court ruling allowed the formation of new political groups including the Party for Social Democracy (PSD) which later transformed into the Labour Party in 2004. The Labour Party of Nigeria established itself as a crucial political evolution in Nigerian democracy by offering distinctive political policies which confronted established political forces. A collective group of trade unionists and progressive intellectuals with labour activists developed the political party to establish an authentic

representative platform for Nigeria's working class and marginalized communities (Babayo, 2025). Sylvester Ejiofor who held numerous labor struggles became the first national chairman of the Nigerian Labour Congress which shaped the development of the Labour Party (LP) (LP, 2006).

Labor organizations provided the Labour Party with worker support while showing their dedication to resolve Nigeria's social and economic issues from a labor-based standpoint. The Labour Party seeks to use political power to transform Nigeria while maintaining governance principles based on Social Democratic ideology according to their foundational documents (LP, 2006). This core vision established Labour Party as an agent of transformation beyond its role as an entity for power acquisition. The Labour Party achieved its first nationwide electoral victory when Olusegun Mimiko of the PDP party defected to LP and won the Ondo State gubernatorial election in 2009 after a prolonged court battle (Jegade, 2025). The party gained increased national recognition after this victory which proved its ability to challenge established political groups in Nigeria. The Labour Party faced organizational obstacles and nationwide recognition challenges after winning its first gubernatorial election because internal factionalism weakened its performance in the 2011 and 2015 general elections (Yagboyaju and Simbine, 2020). Nevertheless, the Labour Party continues to exist within Nigeria's political framework by securing limited victories at state and local levels.

The popularity of Labour Party as one of the national mainstream parties was achieved after the youth-led movement of the EndSARS protest that emerged in Nigeria on 20th October 2020. Irede (2022) opined that nearly two years after the historic EndSARS protests of Nigerian police brutality, the youth arrowheads of the campaign have become an army of political supporters with acronym call 'Obidients', many of the notable figures of EndSARS channel their energy towards the presidential campaign of the Labour Party candidate, Peter Obi. With Nigeria's Presidential election a mere seven months away, they have ignited the political candidature of a man who, without their zeal, would have remained a marginal contestant. The grievances and demands expressed during the protest resonated with Obi's campaign platform, and the protest fueled a sense of political consciousness and mobilization among the youth, who were eager for reforms, change, and accountability in governance. This result is in agreement with (Obadare, 2023; Mokuye, 2023; Onwunyi, 2023; and Okonkwo, 2023) that explored the emergence of the "Obidient Movement" as Nigeria youth that participated in the EndSARS protest in 2020 mobilizing support for Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi in the 2023 elections and how it altered Nigeria's political trajectory from APC and PDP rivalry to three party rivalry (APC, PDP and LP) in Nigeria.

Akindiyo (2013) opined that the Obidient Movement under the Labour Party created a new wave in Nigerian politics

which enhanced public understanding about political execution and the activation of civic rights. The political atmosphere in Nigeria changed as this new party showed that it could challenge existing political groups while staying true to its founding principles. The Labour Party increased its national presence through youth participation and social media tactics which elevated the public interest in its candidate by promoting new ideas and political transformation. The Labour Party proved successful in this period through its ability to break down ethnic and religious barriers that traditionally separated Nigerian political factions.

Literature Review

Opposition politics in Nigeria has evolved along a path which has been influenced by colonial legacies, regional differences, military interventions and the weak nature of democratic institutions. The opposition parties are at the center of offering viable alternatives, accountability, and the creation of dynamic policy debates in established democracies (Adebani, 2017). But the institutional manipulation, domination by the elites, ethnic segregation and unequal distribution of resources has so far restricted the opposition politics in Nigeria. This has given rise to a political culture in which electoral contestation has regularly been used as a cover to more structural imbalances.

The political opposition in pre-independence times was defined mainly regionally and ethnically. National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Northern People Congress (NPC) and Action Group (AG) were regional and ethnic and not ideologies (Coleman, 1958). Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who fronted the Action Group, was opposed to the domination of NPC but was restricted to the southwest which was dominated by the Yoruba. These separations coupled with a poor inter-regional collaboration preconditioned the political instability and led to the failure of the First Republic (Diamond, 1988; Joseph, 1991).

The Second Republic was also supposed to change these trends by establishing a presidential system whereby parties had to be registered nationally. However, ethnic and regional alignments were replicated in large part by parties like the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian People Party (NPP) and the Great Nigeria People Party (GNPP). The ruling party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), consolidated itself through state resources and through malpractices in elections reducing the space of opposition (Sklar, 2004). The military that takes over government in 1983 was attributed to the disputed 1983 elections that were characterized by violence and rigging. The military rule between 1983 and 1999 left the opposition politics in the fringe of the formal political process. June 12, 1993, third republic presidential election that was generally seen as free and fair was annulled, which deprived Moshood Abiola of the presidency and led to nationwide protests. One of the most dominant pro-democracy opposition groups was

the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) that emerged to confront military rule was an amalgamation of the home-based opposition as well as the international advocacy (Ihonvbere, 1996). Resistance of this period was non-conventional in nature- underground writings, diaspora activism, and civil mobilization, even though they were not organized as party structures, they prepared the terrain on which the democratic transition became possible.

With the restoration of the civilian regime in 1999, the opposition politics entered a new stage in the Fourth Republic. The People Democratic Party (PDP) had ruled the political arena by 16 years of incumbency advantages, control of the state institutions, and a disunities opposition. The local parties such as Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) offered some opposition at local levels but they failed to formulate a national opposition (Omotola, 2009). The opposition parties were further rendered ineffective by electoral malpractices that included ballot stuffing, falsification of results and intimidation of voters (Suberu, 2007).

In 2013, a significant change was witnessed when several opposition parties merged to come up with the All-Progressives Congress (APC), which included the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), a break-away faction of the All-Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the ANPP. This alliance managed to displace the PDP in the 2015 elections, which is the first democratic change of power between parties in the history of Nigeria. Adebani (2017) explains this breakthrough as the result of elite coalition building, strategic use of internal divides within the PDP, and general popular discontent with the way the government is run, but not with ideological transformation. Following its loss in the elections, the PDP became the primary opposition party, but it was not credible because of its own track record of governance. The conflicts within the organization, the power play and the feeling of corruption undermined its strength in portraying a persuasive alternative.

According to Ibrahim (2006), Nigerian opposition parties are usually programmatically vague, and they serve as platforms through which the political elite bargains to gain access to power in the state. This is a trend that has persisted in the 2019 and 2023 elections with opposition campaigns largely based on personality rather than any form of policy platform.

Jegade, (2025) opined that emergence of Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 general elections and especially with Peter Obi as a candidate was a major upset to the APC-PDP duopoly. The LP managed to win a large following among the urban youths, the diasporas and the middle-class voters who were unhappy with the status quo.

According to Olorunnisola and Martin (2023), digital media is vital when it comes to mobilizing the youthful voters, grassroots fundraising, and sustaining the momentum beyond

established political orders. However, the LP had weaknesses as far as organization was concerned, especially in rural outreach and institutional capacity. Likewise, New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) led by Rabiu Kwankwaso did well in Kano and other northern states proving that regionalized opposition parties have the capacity to threaten the incumbents in their regions. However, the case of both LP and NNPP proves that it is hard to sustain any electoral breakthrough without properly developed party organizations, depth of policy and interregional coalitions. Institutional and structural barriers are relentless.

Electoral reforms such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) that have been made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have been a step in the right direction but at times, there have been logistical failures and inconsistent application of the reforms that have undermined transparency in elections (Olurode, 2015). Judiciary is also a big challenge to the opposition parties in challenging election results. According to Nwankwo and Okafor (2019), executive interference and patronage in judicial independence in Nigeria contribute to the lack of confidence by citizens in the electoral adjudication process.

Access to the media is also another major constraint. Although the growth of internet sites has diversified channels of opposition communication, the mainstream media, especially state-owned broadcasting media, tend to cover and frame incumbents. Ismail and Okoro (2019) reported how the shape of media regulation and ownership in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria has been deployed to suppress the visibility of opposition, such as sanctions against outlets by the regulatory bodies against dissenting voices.

Another shortcoming for opposition politics in Nigeria is lack of internal party democracy. This manifested in imposition of candidates, factionalism and leadership wrangles are prevalent in opposition formations, and this has weakened the unity and readiness to contest (Usuanlele and Ajisebiyawo, 2025; Ojo, 2006). Such crises tend to end up in courts taking away resources to be used in the grassroots and policy making. Internal governance that lacks transparency lowers the credibility of the opposition and discourages its members from remaining loyal to the party over a long period of time. Non-party actors and civil society are also gaining significance in broadening the frontiers of opposition politics.

The 2020 EndSARS protests that were not associated with a formal party proved that civic mobilization could influence the political agenda and challenge the state power. According to Mustapha (2005, 2006), opposition should be expanded to cover civic organizations, unions and independent media to develop a more pluralistic and stronger democratic environment. This is because governance and federalism can produce platforms of innovative opposition at the sub national level. The opposition-led state governments have used their track record in governance to gain political capital

such as those in Oyo, Rivers, and Kano states to confront federal hegemony. Nevertheless, the concentration of the fiscal resources and security authority constrains the independence of opposition states, and the federal interventions have sometimes been employed to undermine jurisdictions controlled by the opposition (Obiyan & Akindele, 2021).

Ethno-religious forces are also a constant that influences opposition politics. Electoral coalitions based on identity are more likely to be built around a non-ideological basis, limiting the potential of developing national platforms on a broad basis (Eboigbe and Ajisebiyawo, 2024). This was the situation during the 2023 elections where the candidates had an unrealistic number of supporters in their home areas. According to Mustapha (2005), unless there are specific attempts to integrate the regions, opposition politics is likely to serve as a factor to strengthen the same divisions and rifts that break up democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory, as presented by political science literature, originated as a reactionary approach to the classical democratic ideal that political power is highly decentralized among the citizens. This assumption was refuted by early theorists including Vilfredo Pareto (1968), Gaetano Mosca (1939) and Robert Michels (1911) who believed that in every society, irrespective of whether they are autocracies, democracies, or transitional regimes, political power always ends up being concentrated in the hands of a small cohesive minority: the elite. The idea of the circulation of elites, as put forward by Pareto, was that political and social change can be seen less as a matter of widespread change and more of the substitution of one elite layer by another and that little has really changed in the power structures.

Mosca supported this position by his concept of the political class, arguing that a small group of people with better organizational and strategic abilities always controls the governance. The iron law of oligarchy, formulated by Michels, introduced a structural component, and states that even such organizations that are based on democratic principles are likely to evolve, over time, to have hierarchical leadership systems that resist change. These ideas were expanded later in the following decades by C. Wright Mills (1956) in his study on the power elite of the United States, where he emphasized interlocking interests held by political, economic and military elite. Taken together, these views present a strong theoretical framework through which the workings of elite dominance can be comprehended across different political settings and how it influences decision-making, institutional behaviour and the future of democratic governance.

The Elite Theory is especially relevant in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria. A good illustration of elite influence in party

politics and government is the case of the People Democratic Party (PDP) that dominated federal power between 1999 and 2015. The PDP has remained a party that is dominated by a relatively small number of political heavyweights who dictate selection of candidates, resolution of internal disputes, and access to party resources despite its long tenure and wide national reach (Omotola, 2022; Katsina, 2016). These elites tend to pursue personal and factional interests as opposed to programmatic or ideological commitment and this leads to frequent internal crises, factional defections and the sidelining of grassroots voices. The Elite Theory aids in explaining such trends as not anomalous but as systemic aspects of political organization in circumstances where power, resources and legitimacy are mediated through patronage networks of elites. By contrast, the Labour Party (LP) is a fringe party that has been built since the EndSARS protests in 2020 and the 2023 general elections that articulate the general unrest with elite domination. It became more popular, particularly with the young people, urban and politically awakened Nigerians and appeared to disrupt the well-established APC and PDP two-party system (Obadare, 2023; Nnamani, 2024).

The Nigerian political domain equally strengthens elite dominance through political organization flowing from structural and constitutional means that cuts across party lines. Political elites in the ruling and opposition parties are often linked through personal, ethnic, regional and economic networks that promote cross-party coalitions especially during periods of political crisis or insecurity of elections (Ojo, 2018; Erude & Onofere, 2024). These coalitions can undermine the opposition capabilities of the opposition parties, since leaders might exchange long-term objectives of political reforms with short-term gains of individuals or groups. This is evident in the history of PDP defections to the ruling APC, which is high profile and often timed immediately before general elections, and in the practical coalition-making that opposition members of parliament are likely to engage in to obtain committee chairmanships or policy concessions. In the case of LP, the issue is how to maintain its reformist image and operate within the confines of elite dominated institutions like the National Assembly where the power of legislating rests on making coalitions with members whose political interests are influenced by the established elites. The Elite Theory can therefore be used to explain how the internal party politics and the politics of the whole political marketplace within which the ruling and opposition elites play out interact to create conditions where the opposition can be rendered ineffective even when the people are on their side.

Methodology

The study was designed to look at the internal democracy and opposition politics in Nigeria with reference to the Labour Party (LP) and the People Democratic Party (PDP). It

adopted an in-depth interview which enables one-on-one, open ended qualitative research designed. The use of qualitative methods is justified mainly due to the multifaceted nature of the political processes and for the researcher to have the necessary finesse and adeptness to investigate deeply into the case under study. The research design hinges on cross-sectional comparison which compares the level of internal democracy within the PDP and LP that have assumed the position of opposition parties in Nigeria.

The qualitative research and case study method was adopted. Content analysis was used to present and analyse respondents' responses to in-depth interviews to achieve elaborate analysis of internal democracy among the opposition parties as conditions of effectively playing the role of oppositions healthy democracies demands.

Two research questions were developed to guide the investigation of this paper, and these are:

1. Does ethnic politics and godfatherism influence the decision-making processes, candidate selection, and internal democracy in LP and PDP?
2. Does lack of clear ideological distinctions, the quality of its electoral processes and internal democracy within LP and PDP parties affected the two political parties from playing vibrant opposition politics in Nigeria?

The research design employed a multi-state research environment of six strategically chosen states to represent each of the geo-political zones of Nigeria to achieve national representativeness and capture the various political, cultural, and socio-economic environments which determine the dynamics of the opposition party in the federation. The chosen states are Ekiti State (South-West), Bayelsa State (South-South), Enugu State (South-East), Kwara State (North-Central), Zamfara State (North-West), Yobe State (North-East).

The multi-state design offers several methodological benefits compared to single-location research designs by ensuring the geographic representativeness of all major ethnic groups, religious groups, and regional political cultures that characterize Nigerian politics, and by avoiding bias that can be concentrated in one area and allowing the generalization of results on the national scale. The states sampled are characterized by different levels of internal parties' democracy and party opposition ranging between strongholds to competitive zones, economic profile ranging between oil-producing to agricultural hubs, and cultural heterogeneity between major language families such as Yoruba and Ijaw, Igbo, Middle Belt ethnic groups and Hausa-Fulani populations.

The study employed the purposive sampling method to select 10 respondents among party executives of LP and PDP, elected politicians and Civil society practitioners from six of the thirty-six states of the federation, making 60 in-depth interviews altogether.

Table 1: Analysis of number of respondents to in-depth interviews

States →	Ekiti	Bayelsa	Enugu	Kwara	Zamfara	Yobe	Total
Geopolitical Zone →	Southwest	South- South	Southeast	North Central	Northwest	Northeast	
Labour Party	5	5	5	5	5	5	30
People Democratic Party	5	5	5	5	5	5	30
Total	10	10	10	10	10	10	60

Source: Researcher' Computation (2025)

1. The influence of ethnic politics and godfatherism on internal democracy in LP and PDP

This section examines how ethnic considerations and political godfatherism shape internal democracy and opposition politics. The analysis draws primarily from responses to the interview questions. The survey participants acknowledged ethnicity had strong influence within both parties, but their descriptions varied regarding intensity and specific expressions of this influence.

Table 2: A comparative analysis of the influence of ethnicity on internal democracy and opposition politics in LP AND PDP.

Aspect	Labour Party (LP)	People's Democratic Party (PDP)
Leadership Selection	The influence is moderate while the leadership attempts to represent all Nigerians and now places more value on competence than ethnic representation.	The system maintains high power through established zoning mechanics together with established North-South power rotation protocols.
Candidate Nomination	Limited formal ethnic criteria; de facto ethnic considerations in competitive constituencies; emphasis on candidate electability.	Ethnic power-sharing formulas exist in an unwritten form while ethnic balancing requirements are established and constituency-level ethnic calculations guide decision-making.
Resource Allocation	The distribution of resources remains relatively fair across ethnic groups and ethnic patronage networks are scarce, but regional support bases continue to differ.	Ethnic patronage systems operate at extensive levels since resource allocation nurtures ethnic power bases which directs funding towards ethnic stronghold areas.
Party Structure	The national structures exhibit limited ethnic segregation, but some areas show unequal membership distribution, and the party works to maintain ethnic diversity throughout its leadership.	The party shows strong ethnic partitioning within its governing bodies while maintaining distinct ethnic blocs throughout its organizational structure and makes ethnic factors a priority in selecting secretariat personnel.
Internal Communications	The political party uses multi-lingual communication approaches combined with minimal ethnic framing of issues while focusing on national messaging.	Strategic ethnic-specific messaging; language-based communication channels; occasional ethnic framing of national issues.

Table 3: A comparative finding on influence of godfatherism in LP and the PDP

Aspect	Labour Party (LP)	People's Democratic Party (PDP)
Candidate Selection	The presence of new godfather influences restricts party leadership choices while candidates depend on different sources of legitimacy and leaders maintain limited control.	The integrated network of godfathers and their extensive power to choose candidates results in formal consultation processes with powerful community leaders.
Resource Control	Party financial resources remain divided among individual patrons while financial gatekeepers appear, and party funding relies on multiple sources.	A few people hold absolute control over party finances while financial gatekeepers have been officially recognized, and party resources are tightly concentrated.
Succession Patterns	New mechanisms to guarantee leadership replacements remain scarce while political godchildren are infrequent and individual accomplishments rule succession pathways.	Political succession paths have existed since long ago; political "godsons" maintain recognized paths of inheritance and inherited political frameworks.

Geographical Distribution	The party maintains its main stronghold in urban areas while its presence remains limited in rural regions, and it develops digital and virtual networks of patronage.	The patronage networks operate throughout the entire country with rural areas having stronger connections and the state-level systems and cross-regional networks are firmly established.
Interaction with Formal Party Structures	The political activities operate parallel to governmental systems although stakeholders receive minimal official recognition while clashes between informal and official procedures sometimes occur.	The stakeholders maintain official recognition of their consultative role and their activities align with official procedures.

Table 4: Summary of Findings on Ethnic Politics and Godfatherism

Aspect	PDP	LP	Impact on Internal Democracy and opposition politics
Ethnic Considerations	The policies are institutionalized through official zoning arrangements which implement systematic North-South rotational principles.	The practice of de facto ethnic balancing occurs through unorganized methods which attempt to hide ethnic considerations.	The system reduces available leadership candidates while placing emphasis on geographic background instead of qualifications in both major political factions.
Manifestation of Godfatherism	Traditional model with governors and former leaders controlling party structures; control of delegate selection process.	The emerging political operation model integrates public popularity through endorsements as well as social media influence and resulting public assessment.	This process weakens the choice of democratic candidates and reduces the competition based on merit.
Candidate Selection Process	The candidate selection process in Nigeria remains heavily influenced by godfather endorsements combined with financial capabilities of running candidates and manipulated delegates.	The process depends more on support from well-known public figures in addition to popular backing and support from higher-up leaders.	The process selects candidates who hold power positions rather than being chosen by genuine member votes.
Party Cohesion Mechanisms	The primary cohesion tools include the practice of granting power by negotiation as well as unseen "family meetings" alongside resource distribution promises.	The parties use ideological mobilization to build agreements between the public through shared visions of the future.	The organization maintains unity above democratic principles while strengthening the patronage networks.
Management of Ethnic and Factional Interests	The party achieves accommodation through appointment systems while occasionally removing opposing factions before allowing them to defect when accommodation fails.	Parties try to resolve disputes through their official bodies and parallel organizational systems are forming in certain states.	The conception of ideological competition within Nigerian democracy remains limited which forces officials to adopt pragmatic solutions instead of upholding fundamental convictions.

The examination of ethnic politics along with godfatherism practices between Nigeria's People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) shows both phenomena persist throughout the Nigerian political landscape through distinct methods of development and institutional processes. The PDP and LP represent two political forces which maintain their core position within Nigeria's ethno-political realities through different approaches to these realities. The PDP has established ethnic considerations as formal guidelines through zoning systems which determine position assignments based on geographic and ethnic factors. The institutionalization serves as a practical recognition of Nigeria's diverse makeup and operational structure to prevent social conflict. A PDP presidential candidate admitted openly

that ethnicity stands as an essential organizing principle within their party.

The practice of strategic ethnic considerations serves the necessary needs of a diverse nation whose population desires to witness their representation. The LP presents itself as a non-ethnic party in the 2023 elections by putting forward candidates based on skills and policy agreements instead of ethnicity. The LP party delegate reported that voters together with party members continue to judge party choices based on ethnicity which requires the party to find practical solutions between representation and competence-based selection. The enduring ethnic consciousness overrides party ideologies because it represents fundamental structural elements of

Nigerian political awareness which political parties must handle despite their declared positions.

The study revealed that godfatherism continues to evolve rather than disappear from Nigerian political parties since different godfather models persist throughout the political landscape. The PDP uses traditional patronage networks to display godfatherism through the combination of business elites and former governors together with current governors who control party resources and candidate selection. The godfather system within the PDP has reached such institutional status that candidates seeking nomination must understand its mechanisms according to direct statements from PDP House of Representatives nominees.

Power brokers use their endorsements to subdue formal democratic protocols while disregarding delegate backing during the selection process. The LP displays a new form of godfatherism where power rests on media power together with diaspora relationships and strong social media audiences. According to a senatorial nominee from the LP "Various candidates in the 2023 primaries gained nomination without traditional godfather support due to their strong social media presence and diaspora funding sources." The emergence of new political circumstances has driven godfatherism to evolve into a public-based system that deploys different sources of political power beyond state resources rather than marking its demise. Both political parties maintain a basic system where major figures control candidate selection processes thus proving godfatherism survives in Nigerian politics even though its operational mechanisms have changed. Academic scholars recognize this practice as an informal institution that fills formal party institution gaps by giving political capital and financial resources and security to candidates in situations where formal processes fail to deliver credibility or effectiveness.

The research illustrated different methods parties employ to maintain unity despite ethnic and factional dynamics which demonstrates contrasting organizational practices and similar struggles between democratic principles against practical requirements. The PDP sustains its cohesion by implementing power-sharing accommodation between its factions together with what an executive official described as "family meetings" that involve secret negotiations among important members. The negotiations require mutual promises which involve resource distribution or appointment allocation

between members to establish stability at the cost of ideological consistency. The party shows signs of member loss because its internal mechanisms fail to work properly which led to defections before the 2015 and 2023 elections. The LP creates party unity through ideological approaches that merge various interests under shared principles of good governance and anti-corruption. Since the party expanded its membership base this approach has become harder to maintain so the party now makes practical compromises to keep different factions' content.

The LP experiences unique cohesion issues because its members with traditional labor backgrounds differ from the newer joiners who tend to be more progressive and the younger members who are more radical. The parties maintain contrasting approaches based on their historical backgrounds but focus primarily on sustaining their organizations above adhering to pure democratic standards. Both parties within the Nigerian political system maintain their involvement in ethnic politics together with godfatherism despite their divergent origins and public stances since this indicates deep structural limitations to democratic consolidation. Every political configuration developed in recent times maintains susceptibility to fundamental issues from ethnic mobilization combined with elite capture which works against true Democratic Party politics. These parties are taking different paths to address these challenges by either maintaining established institutions (PDP) or trying to move beyond them (LP) which could set Nigeria on diverging political development paths. The PDP prefers structured stability, yet their procedures minimize the potential for innovative change while the LP runs its organization with fewer guidelines which allows reform possibilities yet triggers uncertain political volatility in this difficult Nigerian political environment.

2. Influence of ideological distinctions, quality of electoral processes and internal democracy within LP and PDP parties on their roles as opposition parties in Nigeria

This section examines how ideological positions within the PDP and LP affect the democratic system of Nigeria. The analysis draws from responses to interview questions related to party ideology, policy implementation and democratic practices in opposition politics.

Table 5: Ideological Distinctions on Internal Democracy and opposition politics.

Aspect	PDP	LP	Impact on opposition politics
Ideological Clarity	In its official stance the party identifies with centre-right values, yet it demonstrates inconsistent behaviours during practical implementation because it focuses on forming coalitions instead of maintaining ideological coherence.	Historically social democratic but increasingly broad-based; emphasis on good governance and anti-corruption over traditional labour ideology.	The unique feature of this system hinders policy-driven voting contests and makes it harder for people to hold parties responsible for their policy delivery and it leads people to base their choices on party leaders.

Policy Implementation	The stated principles receive inconsistent application because political considerations now take precedence over the established ideological framework.	The system faces challenges in executing its policies across the nation while it works to blend economic development with social welfare programs through citizen-led policy development.	The erratic governmental landscape hurts stability and drives separation between political pledges and delivered results along with poor policy stability.
Candidate Selection	The political candidate selection process remains heavily influenced by financial power because the delegate system often comes under party elite manipulation and consensus candidate preferences originate from party elites.	The system works on implementing more inclusive methods while dealing with institutional challenges and faces a conflict between democratic values and competitive requirements.	When political parties choose their representatives, they prioritize party elite control over voter preferences thus it produces officials who lack voter loyalty and damage both leadership quality and democratic representation.
Electoral Processes	Ethnic mobilization and patronage distribution become more important than policy competition because this system advances transactional politics.	The system faces similar problems but makes active attempts at policy discourse while clientelism remains a systemic obstacle.	Elections become empty procedures which have no substantial effect on governance systems while encouraging vote-buying and clientelism as well as decreasing public involvement with democratic practices that cannot challenge the party in power.
Reform Proposals	Financial transparency should be coupled with autonomous internal electoral committees while nomination fees should decrease.	Emphasis on technological innovation, youth engagement, and institutional capacity building.	A comprehensive execution of this proposal holds promise to enhance democratic quality, yet its effectiveness depends on the resolution of structural system incentives.
Obstacles to Reform	The resistance of current stakeholder beneficiaries stands against constitutional changes while unequaled patronage systems continue along with economic constraints preventing people from taking part.	The party's fast expansion exceeds its institutional growth while competition intensifies under limited resource availability.	Effective opposition politics remains difficult to achieve as result of the failure to address underlying political economy of elections.

The above findings revealed several substantial tendencies which affect Nigeria's path toward democratic consolidation. The parties demonstrate weak institutionalization according to political science definitions which means organizations having personal leadership and unstable membership and unclear ideological positions. The weak institutionalization of Nigerian political parties creates democratic instability because it weakens policy coherence together with electoral responsibility and representative democracy. A PDP Senate nominee acknowledged in honest admission that "the PDP has always functioned primarily as a political vehicle rather than an ideological movement because our policies during government time frequently produced contradictory results." The party intentionally implemented this inconsistent approach because it allowed them to hold together their diverse ethno-religious coalition across Nigeria. An LP executive officer explained that their party underwent ideological change after rapid growth during recent years because multiple groups with different priorities joined the party which created a challenge for maintaining ideological consistency.

The party model demonstrates "ideological malleability" based on how academic scholars describe such electoral

systems as "electoral machines" rather than true policy-based organizations. Such policy position intermixing triggers elections to become contests based on candidates' personal characteristics instead of substantive policy proposals. The PDP House of Representatives nominee stated their party's policies emerged from short-term political demands and personal preferences of ministers instead of a strategic direction. Due to this inconsistent governmental policy makers faced unpredictable decision-making environments that weakened democratic policy coordination and schemes leading to poor democratic political development.

The documented ideological ambiguity within both parties stems from strategic decisions instead of being an organizational failure. The PDP built its extended political control through flexible ideological approaches which brought together various ethnic and religious groups across Nigeria. The LP currently seeks to broaden past its core labor base through recent ideological expansion. The democratic system suffers serious effects because party flexibility exists for political benefit even though it disables elections from delivering meaningful policy design and official responsibility. Internal party democracy stands as a fundamental element which connects to democratic

consolidation according to the interview responses of research participants. According to a PDP delegate the process of candidate selection demonstrates minimal genuine democratic choice because delegates function only to validate predetermined choices.

The financial aspect presents major problems because it transforms elections into an economic market instead of democratic selection which produces candidates who serve their funders instead of their constituents and the party platform. According to an LP executive officer the organization faces difficulties because rapid growth exceeded institutional development which leads to a conflict between what should be done and what is practical. The deficiencies in internal democratic processes which affect both political parties show similar structural causes that include expensive participation barriers and powerful financial influence from wealthy donors. The political system operates as a marketplace through these conditions that makes candidate selection rest more on financial strength than on voter backing and policy positions. The commercialization of party selection methods produces negative effects on the quality of representatives and governance that result from electoral processes. The consolidation of democracy depends essentially on internal party democracy according to this academic scholar's profound observation. The democratic system faces direct harm from how parties operate internally because parties serve as the fundamental channels for political engagement.

The research findings demonstrate that party democracy within internal structures directly relates to electoral system's integrity. Elections become compromised even when election administrators improve their procedures since candidates arise from non-democratic internal party selection methods. The PDP presidential nominee described the absence of clear policy separation between political party's leading election contests to descend into either character running against each other or turning into clientelist or vote-buying schemes. An LP Senate nominee explained that candidates who gain their nomination through financial means instead of policy platform continue using patronage distribution instead of policy proposals in general elections. The ongoing electoral pattern fails to impact governance meaningfully which drives citizens to adopt a pessimistic view of voting because they view it as an exchange rather than their civic responsibility or a way to shape policies.

The success of Nigerian democracy depends on improving candidate selection by political parties instead of concentrating on election-day operations alone. The prospects for democratic reforms exist between a positive and negative outlook. The growing public awareness combined with technological developments and new generation participants make democratic progress achievable. A candidate from the LP House of Representatives proposed electronic voting systems for primaries because they would reduce

manipulation and enhance transparency while a presidential nominee from LP believed younger Nigerian voters who want transparency and accountability showed promise. Strong entrenched interests together with system incentives maintain the existing political structure. The PDP executive officer designated the resistance of system beneficiary leaders along with financiers who maintain control through financial gatekeeping as the main barrier to party reform. Nigeria's democratic consolidation process is expected to follow an irregular path instead of steady development because of the opposing forces at play.

The analytical examination shows both parties face comparable problems, but they follow separate developmental paths. The PDP displays institutional deterioration after many years in power because its democratic weaknesses have deepened throughout its rule. The LP faces multiple issues due to its fast growth through multiple constituencies while it attempts to establish democratic practices as an organization. The PDP requires institutional rejuvenation, yet the LP needs to focus on building its institutional structure. The study shows that party activities continuously interact with political cultural patterns. Clientelist political norms that emerge from undemocratic party practices lead to the continued justification of undemocratic practices. The broken cycle demands joint interventions on institutional development and civil education along with legal reforms and changes to political financing systems to build democratic pressures between them.

Conclusion

This research analysis of People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) opposition politics demonstrates that Nigeria's political parties need internal democratic reform to achieve sustainable democratic governance. The study confirmed its primary argument that the numerous weaknesses affecting these major opposition parties including unclear ideological frameworks alongside poor internal democratic systems and ongoing ethnic political and godfatherism patterns create major barriers for enhancing electoral democracy and achieving lasting democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The PDP, which faces opposition challenges following extended rule and the LP which deals with the difficulties of transitioning from a movement to institutional growth share crucial identical structural defects. The shared weaknesses reveal an alarming truth about the nation's political system because these flaws exist deeply within the core structures of politics, economic system and cultural norms of Nigeria. Such systemic behaviour reinforces power hierarchies based on individual influence against established institutional framework which thus prevents Nigeria from developing a democratic system able to represent its people responsibly and adapt to changes.

Lastly, political parties including PDP and LP along with other parties should create strict transparent procedures to

select candidates through primary elections with verifiable credibility. The system should lower internal nomination fees to increase candidate participation from elite financial groups while also implementing secure electronic voting and independent electoral committees that are free from party or godfather interference. Political parties need to develop and maintain their established conflict resolution systems according to constitutional provisions. These governing bodies require sufficient resources for their operations while maintaining impartiality and must have defined powers to enforce party rules and regulations. The practice of informal dispute resolution must end because internal party disputes are prohibited from going to external courts under constitutional law.

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