

Chaotic Party Primaries and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the chaotic conduct of party primaries in Nigeria and their implications for democratic consolidation. Adopting a qualitative approach, it draws on secondary data from published documents, newspapers, magazines, and online sources. It takes institutional and elite theories as theoretical foundation. Findings reveal that primaries are often marred by manipulation, vote-buying, candidate imposition, parallel contests, judicial disputes, and violence. These practices stem from weak party institutions, entrenched godfatherism, personalization of party structures, absence of ideological orientation, corruption, and poor enforcement of electoral regulations. The consequences include erosion of internal party democracy, diminishing public trust, violence, voter apathy, defections, party fragmentation, weakened institutions, and political skepticism. Collectively, these outcomes constrain Nigeria's democratic development and stability. To address

these challenges, the study recommends reforms including adherence to party constitutions, strict enforcement of electoral laws, transparent candidate selection, strict enforcement of digitalized membership registers, stronger oversight by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and sustained civic education.

Keywords: Party primaries, democratic consolidation, internal party democracy, electoral conflicts, Nigeria.

Introduction

Political parties constitute the foundation of representative democracy, functioning as the primary vehicles for political participation, interest aggregation, leadership recruitment, and governance. In democratic systems, party primaries are designed to provide transparent and competitive mechanisms through which political parties select candidates for public office. When conducted effectively, primaries strengthen internal party democracy, enhance political accountability, and contribute to democratic consolidation by ensuring that candidates emerge through lawful and inclusive processes. Conversely, when primaries are marred by manipulation, candidate imposition, vote-buying, factional disputes, and violence, democratic principles are compromised, and citizens' trust in political institutions is eroded (Ogbe, 2019).

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, political parties have remained pivotal to electoral competitiveness and leadership recruitment. Yet, despite more than two decades of uninterrupted civilian rule, the country's democratic trajectory continues to be constrained by persistent

weaknesses in internal party democracy. Party primaries, which are intended to provide a fair and competitive platform for candidate selection, have often been compromised by allegations of delegate bribery, candidate imposition, irregular delegate lists, parallel congresses, judicial interference, and elite domination of party structures (Olaniyan, 2020). These practices have fueled intense intra-party conflicts, widespread defections, protracted litigation, and political instability within major parties (Ezeani, Ikpegbu, and Ezeani, 2024).

The conduct of party primaries has become increasingly contentious within Nigeria's electoral system. Rather than serving as democratic pathways for selecting credible candidates, many primaries have degenerated into arenas of elite contestation, where powerful actors manipulate outcomes through patronage networks, violent conflicts, and financial dominance (Olaniyan, 2011). The growing commercialization of party nomination processes, particularly evident during the 2023 general elections, has raised concerns about the exclusion of competent but less affluent aspirants from meaningful political participation (Ariyo et al., 2026). Excessive nomination fees, coupled with the monetization of delegate voting, have transformed candidate selection into a process driven by economic power rather than democratic competition (Sambo, Sule, Adamu, and Septiadi, 2024).

The consequences of chaotic party primaries extend beyond the internal dynamics of political parties and directly undermine the broader democratic system. Democratic consolidation refers to the process by which democratic institutions, norms, and practices become firmly established

and widely accepted as the legitimate framework for political competition and governance. A consolidated democracy requires robust institutions, political legitimacy, active citizen participation, and consistent adherence to democratic rules. Political parties are indispensable to this process, serving as intermediaries between the state and society. When party primaries are characterized by conflict, exclusion, and manipulation, they erode electoral credibility and weaken the foundations of democratic consolidation (Ndubuisi and Omeire, 2025).

Furthermore, the persistent crisis of internal party democracy has contributed significantly to the growing incidence of pre-election litigation in Nigeria. Aggrieved aspirants frequently challenge the outcomes of party primaries in courts, resulting in prolonged legal disputes that sometimes alter electoral outcomes even after elections have been conducted. Such developments not only expose weaknesses in party institutionalization but also place additional burdens on judicial institutions and create uncertainty within the political system (Chukwudebelu, Arinze-Umobi, and Iguh, 2024).

The 2026 party primaries across Nigeria, which marked one of the initial stages leading to the 2027 general elections, further exposed the persistent challenges surrounding candidate selection. Numerous political parties were engulfed in internal crises stemming from disputed primaries, allegations of manipulation, and widespread dissatisfaction among aspirants. These conflicts triggered defections, factionalism, weakened party cohesion, and declining public confidence in the democratic process (Olaniyan, 2011). Such recurring patterns

underscore the extent to which the quality of Nigeria's democratic consolidation remains contingent upon political parties' willingness to institutionalize democratic norms within their internal operations (Musa and Musa, 2023).

Despite extensive scholarly engagement with elections and democratic governance in Nigeria, there remains a pressing need to critically interrogate how chaotic party primaries affect democratic consolidation (Olaniyan, 2011; Ezeani, Ikpegbu, and Ezeani, 2024). While existing studies have examined inter- and intra-party conflicts, candidate imposition, and deficiencies in internal party democracy, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the broader implications of these practices for democratic stability and institutional development. This study therefore investigates the nature, causes, and consequences of chaotic party primaries in Nigeria and evaluates their impact on democratic consolidation. It argues that persistent irregularities in party primaries undermine internal party democracy, erode electoral legitimacy, foster political instability, and ultimately pose a significant obstacle to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on party primaries in Nigeria demonstrates a strong correlation between flawed candidate selection processes, intra-party conflicts, and obstacles to democratic consolidation. A recurring theme in the literature is the prevalence of candidate imposition and elite domination in party affairs. Ezeani, Ikpegbu and Ezeani (2024) and Oji (2024) contend that political elites frequently manipulate

primaries to secure the emergence of preferred candidates. These studies converge on the view that candidate imposition undermines internal party democracy by denying members meaningful participation in candidate selection. While Ogbe (2019) emphasizes the implications of imposition for democratic governance and political stability, Ezeani et al. (2024) attribute the problem to weak party institutionalization and poor adherence to party constitutions. Oji (2024) further expands the debate by identifying godfatherism, money politics, and weak party ideology as reinforcing factors of elite control.

Of particular relevance is the relationship between party primaries and intra-party conflicts. Studies by Olaniyan (2011), Adekeye and Abdulrauf (2017), and Ndubuisi and Uduma (2025) reveal that disputes over candidate selection often lead to factionalism, defections, fragmentation, and broader societal instability. Olaniyan (2011) identifies ideological differences, struggles for political positions, and competition for party control as major sources of conflict, while Adekeye and Abdulrauf (2017) highlight the failure of party leaders to adhere to democratic procedures. Despite differing emphases, these studies collectively suggest that internal crises are rooted in the absence of transparent and institutionalized mechanisms for managing political competition.

The literature also demonstrates that the consequences of chaotic primaries extend beyond party structures to affect democratic consolidation. Ndubuisi and Omeire (2025), Oyadiran and Toyin (2016), and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) argue that persistent intra-party conflicts weaken democratic

institutions by reducing participation, undermining electoral legitimacy, and eroding public confidence in parties. These studies suggest that democratic consolidation depends not only on credible general elections but also on the extent to which parties institutionalize democratic norms internally. Consequently, flawed primaries often produce leaders whose legitimacy is contested, thereby weakening the broader democratic process.

A notable trend in recent scholarship is the increasing judicialisation of party politics (Olaniyan, 2025). Chukwudebelu, Arinze-Umobi and Iguh (2024) found that disputes from primaries have generated unprecedented levels of pre-election litigation, as party members increasingly resort to courts due to ineffective internal conflict-resolution mechanisms. This development underscores institutional weaknesses and highlights how flawed primaries contribute to electoral uncertainty and governance challenges. Similarly, Osezua and Olumide (2023) establish a link between intra-party conflicts and political defections, arguing that disputes often encourage politicians to switch affiliations, thereby weakening party institutionalization, undermining accountability, and fueling instability.

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals broad consensus that candidate imposition, elite manipulation, money politics, weak party institutions, and poor compliance with party constitutions are the major drivers of internal crises in Nigeria's parties. These crises, in turn, undermine democratic consolidation through increased litigation, defections, electoral conflicts, and declining public trust. However, most existing

studies remain limited to specific parties, states, or election cycles. Insufficient attention has been devoted to examining chaotic primaries as a systemic and recurring feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and assessing their cumulative implications for democratic consolidation. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a broader analysis of how chaotic primaries undermine democratic institutions, electoral legitimacy, political participation, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Institutional Theory and Elite Theory to explain the persistent crises surrounding party primaries in Nigeria and their implications for democratic consolidation. Together, these frameworks illuminate how weak political institutions and elite dominance shape candidate selection processes within political parties. Institutional Theory, associated with Douglass North (1990), defines institutions as the formal and informal rules, norms, and procedures that structure political, economic, and social interactions. Institutions reduce uncertainty by providing stable frameworks that regulate human behavior. In politics, institutions such as parties, electoral bodies, constitutions, and electoral laws are expected to guide competition and safeguard democratic governance.

Strong institutions foster accountability, transparency, and compliance with established rules, while weak institutions encourage arbitrariness, manipulation, and instability (North, 1990). Applied to party politics, effective institutions should

guarantee transparent candidate selection, internal democracy, and adherence to party constitutions. However, weak institutional mechanisms often enable party leaders to manipulate primaries through candidate imposition, delegate control, vote-buying, and procedural violations.

Despite its utility, Institutional Theory has been criticized for overemphasizing formal structures while neglecting individual agency and power relations. As Peters (2019) notes, institutions do not operate independently of the actors who control them; political outcomes are frequently shaped by elite interests rather than institutional rules alone. In Nigeria, weak party structures, poor enforcement of regulations, and limited institutionalization of internal democracy contribute to chaotic primaries and undermine democratic consolidation.

Elite Theory, on the other hand, was developed by classical scholars such as Vilfredo Pareto (1935) and Gaetano Mosca (1939), and later expanded by Robert Michels (1915) through his influential “Iron Law of Oligarchy.” The theory posits that in every society, political power is concentrated in the hands of a small minority - the elite. Michels (1915) argued that even organizations founded on democratic principles inevitably become dominated by a few powerful individuals who control decision-making processes.

Elite theorists maintain that political parties are often controlled by actors who wield economic resources, political influence, and organizational power (Olaniyan, 2008). In Nigeria, political godfathers, party financiers, incumbents, and influential party executives frequently determine the outcomes

of party primaries. As a result, candidate selection tends to reflect elite preferences rather than the collective will of party members. This elite domination fosters candidate imposition, factional conflicts, defections, and electoral disputes.

A major criticism of Elite Theory is its tendency to underestimate the capacity of ordinary citizens and democratic institutions to shape political outcomes. Critics argue that it presents an overly pessimistic view of democracy by portraying political participation as largely ineffective (Bottomore, 1993). Nevertheless, Elite Theory remains highly relevant to this study because it highlights the role of powerful actors in manipulating party primaries and generating internal crises. It helps explain how elite control of party structures contributes to chaotic primaries, weakens internal party democracy, and ultimately obstructs democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

These two theories, taken together, provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing Nigeria's party primaries. Institutional Theory underscores the weakness of party structures and regulatory mechanisms, while Elite Theory emphasizes the dominance of powerful actors who exploit these weaknesses. Their interaction explains how fragile institutions and entrenched elite control jointly produce chaotic primaries, destabilize party systems, and undermine democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Trends and Manifestations of Chaotic Party Primaries in Nigeria

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, party primaries have consistently served as a major source of political instability. Although the Fourth Republic was expected to entrench internal party democracy, candidate selection processes have repeatedly triggered crises across political parties. The internal conflicts within the PDP ahead of the 2007 and 2015 elections, as well as the APC's struggles before the 2019 and 2023 elections, underscore the persistence of this problem. Research shows that party primaries in Nigeria are frequently characterized by elite dominance, weak institutional frameworks, and disregard for party constitutions (Musa and Musa, 2023). These recurring issues reveal the failure of political parties to embed democratic principles in their internal processes. The manifestations of chaotic primaries can be discussed under the following trends:

Delegate Manipulation

One major manifestation of chaotic party primaries in Nigeria is the manipulation of delegates by powerful political actors. Delegates often serve as instruments through which elites influence primary election outcomes. Instead of reflecting the preferences of party members, delegates are frequently subjected to pressure, inducements, and patronage networks (Bassey et al., 2023). During the 2022 APC and PDP presidential primaries, delegates became the principal targets of intense bargaining and financial inducement. Research indicates that the delegate system has become highly commercialized, thereby undermining the credibility of candidate selection processes (Olaniyan, 2011).

In response, the Electoral Act reforms of 2026 introduced direct primaries to reduce delegate influence and broaden participation. Under this arrangement, candidates could emerge either through direct primaries involving registered party members or through consensus agreements among stakeholders. In principle, this reform sought to deepen internal party democracy by expanding participation and limiting elite dominance (Bassey, 2025).

However, evidence from several states reveals that the implementation of direct primaries has faced significant challenges. Reports and media footage documented controversies over voter accreditation, membership verification, and vote counting. In some cases, party officials were accused of inflating turnout figures and manipulating results to favor preferred candidates. Allegations surfaced that the number of accredited voters announced in certain wards far exceeded the visible number of party members present (Vanguard Newspaper, 2026; Awofadeji et al., 2026).

Rather than eliminating manipulation, the shift from delegate-based primaries to direct primaries appears to have relocated the arena of contestation - from delegate control to the management of membership registers, accreditation procedures, and vote tabulation. Consequently, the credibility of direct primaries depends not only on the electoral method adopted but also on transparent procedures, accurate membership records, effective monitoring, and strict compliance with party and electoral regulations. The persistence of manipulation allegations demonstrates that

institutional weaknesses within political parties remain a major obstacle to internal democracy in Nigeria.

Vote-Buying and Monetization

Money politics has become a defining feature of Nigerian party primaries. The 2022 primaries preceding the 2023 general elections witnessed unprecedented levels of commercialization. Delegates were reportedly offered substantial cash inducements in both local and foreign currencies to influence their voting choices. As Sambo et al. (2024) observe, the high cost of nomination forms and widespread vote-buying have transformed party primaries into contests dominated by wealthy aspirants rather than qualified candidates. For instance, the APC presidential nomination form cost ₦100 million in 2026, while delegates allegedly received thousands of naira from rival candidates during the convention.

This monetization entrenches exclusivity in Nigerian politics and undermines democratic competitiveness. Beyond bribing delegates, financial inducements are often extended to security personnel and electoral officials, further compromising the integrity of the electoral process (Babatunde, Shaibu and Ariyo, 2019). Consequently, money politics exacerbates electoral conflict, weakens institutions, and erodes public trust in democratic governance.

Parallel Primaries

Another significant manifestation of chaotic primaries is the emergence of parallel primaries. Factional divisions within parties frequently lead to separate primary elections producing

rival candidates. During the 2022 primaries, the APC experienced parallel primaries in states such as Ogun, Akwa Ibom, and Zamfara, while the PDP faced similar disputes. These parallel exercises reflected deep-seated struggles for control of party structures.

The trend persisted in subsequent years. For example, during the 2026 Nigerian Democratic Congress (NDC) primaries in Lagos, rival executives organized separate elections, sidelining one another, and creating confusion over legitimate candidates (Dennis, 2026). Similar crises have plagued other parties such as the ADC and the Accord Party. In Oyo State, one Accord Party faction selected broadcaster Oriyomi Hamzat as its gubernatorial candidate for 2027, while another faction declared Olakunle Busari the winner of a parallel primary (Eboesomi, 2026).

The prevalence of parallel primaries underscores weak institutional control and the inability of party leadership to manage internal disputes effectively (Ezeani, Ikpegbu and Ezeani, 2024). These conflicts not only fracture party cohesion but also destabilize the broader political system.

Imposition of Candidates

Candidate imposition remains one of the most contentious issues in Nigerian party politics. Party leaders and political godfathers frequently bypass democratic procedures by imposing preferred candidates on party members. This practice has fueled resignations and defections ahead of major elections. A notable example was Peter Obi's exit from the

PDP presidential race in 2022, citing entrenched interests and concerns about the party's nomination process.

Studies consistently identify candidate imposition as a major driver of intra-party conflicts and a key factor undermining internal democracy (Ogbe, 2019). By sidelining the collective will of party members, imposition entrenches elite dominance, weakens party legitimacy, and contributes to instability within Nigeria's democratic system.

Pre-election Litigation

Another manifestation of chaotic party primaries in Nigeria is the proliferation of pre-election litigation and the growing judicialization of party politics. Increasingly, aggrieved aspirants challenge primary outcomes in courts rather than relying on internal dispute-resolution mechanisms. Following the 2022 primaries, numerous lawsuits emerged over candidate nominations, substitutions, and eligibility. This reliance on the judiciary reflects declining confidence in party institutions.

Chukwudebelu, Arinze-Umobi, and Iguh (2024) argue that pre-election litigation arising from flawed primaries has become a major challenge to democratic governance, as it generates uncertainty and weakens party cohesion. The handling of the Ekiti State APC governorship primaries in 2025 illustrates this trend. After Biodun Abayomi Oyebanji was selected as the party's candidate, several dissatisfied aspirants filed lawsuits alleging irregularities and exclusion during the process (Bada, 2026). Their legal action raised questions about fairness, transparency, and inclusiveness in candidate selection.

The increasing use of litigation by defeated aspirants underscores the inadequacy of internal party mechanisms and highlights the judiciary's growing role in resolving intra-party disputes. However, this judicialization often prolongs conflicts, undermines party unity, and creates uncertainty within the electoral process—ultimately posing challenges to democratic consolidation.

Violence and Intimidation during Primaries

Violence and intimidation remain recurrent features of Nigerian party primaries. Political thugs are frequently mobilized to intimidate delegates, disrupt voting, and influence outcomes in favor of preferred aspirants (Oke and Ariyo, 2018). Although the intensity varies across states, reports from several primaries preceding the 2026 general elections documented threats, physical confrontations, and coercion (Dennis, 2026).

Such practices erode the credibility of primaries and contribute to Nigeria's broader culture of electoral violence. The persistence of violence demonstrates how political competition remains highly personalized and driven by high-stakes struggles for access to state resources.

Causes of Chaotic Party Primaries in Nigeria

The persistence of chaotic party primaries in Nigeria is driven by a combination of institutional, political, and socio-economic factors. These dynamics weaken internal party democracy, encourage manipulation of candidate selection, and fuel recurring intra-party conflicts.

Weak Party Institutions

A central cause of chaotic primaries is the weakness of party institutions. Political parties are expected to operate through clear rules, procedures, and organizational structures that regulate candidate selection and conflict resolution. Yet, many Nigerian parties lack strong institutional frameworks capable of ensuring transparency and accountability. Party constitutions and guidelines are often ignored or selectively applied by leaders. As Ezeani, Ikpegbu, and Ezeani (2024) note, weak institutionalization fosters arbitrary decision-making, candidate imposition, and factional disputes, leaving primaries vulnerable to manipulation.

Godfatherism

Godfatherism remains a defining feature of Nigerian politics. Political godfathers wield economic resources, political connections, and social networks to determine candidate emergence (Olaniyan, 2008). Rather than allowing free choice, godfathers impose preferred aspirants and influence delegate voting. Albert (2005) identifies godfatherism as a major obstacle to democratic governance.

Examples abound: in Lagos State, the Governance Advisory Council (GAC) has played decisive roles in candidate emergence. Former Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's failed re-election bid in 2018 and the endorsement of Obafemi Hamzat for the 2027 governorship illustrate elite consensus overriding competitive primaries (Agbo, 2026). Similarly, in Rivers State, former Governor Nyesom Wike's influence over party

structures demonstrates how elite dominance shapes candidate selection. These cases reinforce Elite Theory's argument that power is concentrated in the hands of a few actors who determine party outcomes.

Personalization of Political Parties

Many Nigerian parties are personalized around powerful individuals rather than institutionalized structures. Leaders often treat parties as personal enterprises, exercising excessive control over nominations and party positions. Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011) argue that this personalization centralizes decision-making, reduces member participation, and heightens conflict during primaries.

Lack of Ideological Orientation

Unlike established democracies where parties are anchored in ideology, Nigerian parties are largely ideologically fluid. Politicians frequently switch affiliations without policy considerations. Omotola (2009) observes that this lack of ideological foundation fosters intense competition for offices, as parties are viewed primarily as vehicles for accessing state resources. Consequently, primaries become highly personalized and conflict-ridden, with candidates focused on power rather than policy.

Corruption and Monetization of Politics

The commercialization of politics is another critical factor. Candidate selection has become expensive, dominated by wealthy aspirants who can afford nomination forms and delegate inducements. For example, the APC's presidential

nomination form cost ₦100 million in 2026, excluding the widespread vote-buying reported during primaries (Sambo, Sule, Adamu and Septiadi, 2024). This monetization excludes competent but financially disadvantaged aspirants, fuels factional disputes, and undermines party integrity.

Weak Enforcement of Electoral Laws by INEC

Finally, weak enforcement of electoral laws by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) perpetuates chaotic primaries. Although empowered by the Electoral Act to monitor primaries, INEC's role is largely observational. Parties frequently violate guidelines without sanctions. Jinadu (2011) argues that ineffective oversight encourages impunity and weakens accountability. The absence of strict enforcement enables practices such as candidate imposition, delegate manipulation, and parallel primaries to persist unchecked.

Implications of Chaotic Party Primaries for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The findings reveal that chaotic party primaries have profound implications for Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Democratic consolidation refers to the process through which democratic norms, institutions, and procedures become firmly established and widely accepted as the legitimate means of political competition and governance (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Persistent irregularities in party primaries undermine the development of a stable, institutionalized democratic system in Nigeria.

Erosion of Internal Party Democracy

Chaotic primaries erode internal party democracy by denying members equal opportunities to participate in candidate selection. Practices such as candidate imposition, delegate manipulation, and elite interference weaken democratic culture within parties. Ezeani, Ikpegbu, and Ezeani (2024) note that persistent violations of party constitutions and nomination guidelines reduce members' confidence in internal processes, transforming parties into instruments of elite control rather than democratic institutions.

Declining Public Trust in Political Parties

Manipulated primaries contribute to declining public trust in political parties. Since parties are central to democratic representation, their legitimacy depends on transparent internal processes. When primaries are perceived as corrupt or predetermined, citizens lose confidence in both parties and elections. Omotola (2010) argues that widespread perceptions of corruption and lack of transparency have weakened citizens' attachment to democratic institutions, thereby obstructing consolidation.

Increased Electoral Violence

Flawed primaries often generate electoral violence. Intense competition for nominations leads to intimidation, property destruction, and violent clashes among supporters. Olaniyan (2011) observes that intra-party conflicts frequently escalate into violence due to struggles over political power and access to state resources. These conflicts often spill into general elections, threatening electoral stability and democratic development.

Voter Apathy and Political Disengagement

Chaotic primaries also foster voter apathy. Citizens who perceive political processes as manipulated or predetermined are less likely to participate in elections. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2015) argue that persistent irregularities discourage citizen engagement, weakening democratic participation. The perception that elites, rather than voters, determine outcomes undermines the legitimacy of elections and reduces political involvement.

Defections and Party Fragmentation

Disputed primaries frequently result in defections and fragmentation. Aggrieved aspirants often defect to rival parties or establish alternative platforms. This trend was evident during the 2015, 2019, and 2023 elections. Eme and Anyadike (2014) highlight that intra-party conflicts arising from flawed primaries destabilize Nigeria's party system. Frequent defections weaken institutionalization and hinder the development of stable political organizations necessary for consolidation.

Weakening of Democratic Institutions

Finally, chaotic primaries weaken democratic institutions more broadly. Parties serve as intermediaries between citizens and the state, and their effectiveness is crucial for governance. North (1990) emphasizes that strong institutions are fundamental to stability. Weak party institutions characterized by persistent conflicts and irregularities undermine electoral bodies, legislatures, and governance structures, thereby obstructing democratic consolidation.

Challenges to Political Legitimacy and Governance

Chaotic party primaries pose significant obstacles to political legitimacy and effective governance in Nigeria. Candidates who emerge from contentious or manipulated nomination processes often face questions regarding their legitimacy and representativeness. Such controversies erode public trust in elected authorities and weaken their ability to govern effectively. Diamond (1999) emphasizes that democratic consolidation depends heavily on the legitimacy of political institutions and leaders.

According to Ariyo and Akomolafe (2026), power struggles among political actors are a major driver of political violence in Nigeria. Electoral procedures are frequently designed in ways that restrict genuine opportunities for leadership transition and limit the electorate's ability to exercise their franchise meaningfully. When citizens perceive electoral processes as unfair or manipulated, governance becomes more difficult, and support for democratic institutions declines.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that chaotic primaries constitute a major barrier to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Flawed nomination processes undermine internal party democracy, erode public confidence, incite violence, increase voter apathy, enable defections, weaken institutions, and cast doubt on political legitimacy. These outcomes collectively hinder the growth and durability of Nigeria's democracy.

Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of chaotic party primaries in Nigeria and their implications for democratic consolidation. The findings revealed that primaries are frequently characterized by delegate manipulation, vote-buying, candidate imposition, parallel primaries, judicial disputes, and political violence. These manifestations are largely driven by weak party institutions, entrenched godfatherism, personalization of political parties, lack of ideological orientation, corruption, and inadequate enforcement of electoral regulations.

The study further established that chaotic primaries have far-reaching consequences for democratic consolidation. They erode internal party democracy, diminish public confidence in political parties, encourage electoral violence, foster voter apathy, and contribute to defections and party fragmentation. Moreover, flawed primaries weaken democratic institutions and cast doubt on the legitimacy of elected leaders, thereby undermining governance and political stability. The persistence of these practices demonstrates that Nigeria's democratic development remains constrained by weaknesses in party organization and candidate selection processes.

To address these challenges, the chaotic state of party primaries in Nigeria necessitates comprehensive reforms by the executive and legislative arms to enhance internal party democracy and democratic consolidation. Key reforms include strengthening internal party democracy by adhering to constitutional rules, ensuring electoral and legal reforms to enforce compliance with democratic processes, and increasing transparency in candidate selection with publicly accessible

criteria. Digitalization of membership registers can improve integrity by providing accurate record-keeping and preventing manipulation, as has been recently directed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Additionally, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should enhance its oversight to discourage irregular practices. Civic education is vital for promoting democratic norms and holding political actors accountable, which is the duty of the political parties and the electoral body. A multifaceted approach encompassing institutional, legal, technological, and civic reforms is essential for improving the credibility of party primaries and consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

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