

## Political Party Crises and the Implications for Democratic Governance in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Whereas institutions and structures of governance in Nigeria have the features and capacity to function according to democratic processes and norms, their outputs over the years have been far below expectations, hence the persistent cry by people for tangible dividends of democracy from successive governments. This situation is linked to several factors, including corruption and government waste, which have been widely discussed in prior research. This study examines how internal party crises have contributed to the challenges Nigeria has faced in democratic governance. It adopts a qualitative research design involving secondary data sources, which are content analysed. It argues that persistent internal party crises distract ruling political parties from performing their core functions of governance and fulfilling campaign promises, while weakening opposition parties, rendering them incapable of effectively holding the government accountable. The study contributes to the burgeoning literature on party politics in Nigeria by showing why political parties have yielded few democratic dividends despite decades of the country's uninterrupted democratic experience since 1999.

### Keywords

Party Politics, Intra-Party Democracy, Parties' Internal Crisis, Nigeria, Democratic Governance

### 1. Introduction

Political parties, which Agbaje (1999:195) described as associations of people, "With the goal of aggregating interests, presenting candidates for elections with the purpose of controlling governments, and representing such interests in government", are arguably the engine room of democracy. Without them, there cannot be a credible and acceptable expression of people's will, which is the symbol of true democracy. Whether in a two-party or a multiparty system, the goal is the expression, aggregation, and representation of people's will and interests. Traditionally and generally speaking, this is what political parties are created for and expected to do.

As the voices of the people and the channels for expressing their will, political parties in modern times are the only acceptable and credible instruments for creating legitimate government anywhere in the world. The success or otherwise of democratic governance is measured by the nature and character of party politics in existence and in practise, which, in turn, is a function of the internal dynamics (administration, structure, operations, and workings) of political parties in relation to their core functions. Thus, crisis-ridden parties, or

parties without appropriate functioning mechanisms, such as a defined and coherent leadership structure, make democratic governance difficult. This underscores the importance of well-functioning political parties in democratic governance.

In many democracies, including advanced democracies such as the United States of America and France, political parties experience internal crises. In the United States of America, for example, the Republican Party was embroiled in an internal crisis in the run-up to the 2016 congressional elections over efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA, informally known as Obamacare) (Zeppos & Kamarck, 2017). In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) has been observed to lack internal party democracy, as exemplified by the party leadership's intolerance of debate and dissent (Lotshwao, 2009). As in other contexts, political parties in Nigeria face internal crises, some of which have profound implications for governance (see Ndubusi & Uduma, 2025; Nwauwa & Adekunle, 2015).

Nigeria, though abundantly endowed with human and natural resources, is known to have a governance crisis (see Yacob-Haliso & Agbaje, 2018). This is evidenced by a series of military interruptions to its democratic governance and by democratic governments that have failed abysmally to deliver the dividends of democracy, such as economic prosperity for the people. Moreover, the country has experienced several instances of interparty and intraparty crises. These include the crisis that plagued the conduct of the All Progressive Congress (APC) party primaries in Abia state Central Senatorial district in 2022 (Ndubusi & Uduma, 2025:104), and election litigation between the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) over the outcome of the 2003 presidential election (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020).

This article critically examines the role of parties' internal crises in Nigeria's governance challenges. It focuses primarily on the nature of the internal crises that parties have experienced and on how these crises have contributed to the crisis of governance in the country. The article begins with the theoretical framework, followed by the methodology. Next is a historical analysis of party politics, followed by an examination of the internal crises that political parties in Nigeria have experienced and their implications for democratic governance. The fifth section is for the conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in Sebnem Gumuscu's factional theory of party behaviour, which posits that political parties are constituted by people with different perspectives on political issues (Gumuscu, 2023). This results in the formation of different factional coalitions, constituted by people whose individual preferences have aggregated into group preferences (*ibid.*). This underpins factional politics in political parties, involving struggles by different factional coalitions for access and control of the party's leadership structures, and "the distribution of booty" (Köllner & Basedau, 2005:12).

Factional politics is believed to have its merits and demerits. For the merits, Köllner and Basedau (2005: 12) argue, among other things, that factions can "help advance the intra-party and governmental careers of their members and leaders." The drawbacks of factional politics are, however, grave, including the undermining of party cohesion and effectiveness (Köllner & Basedau, 2005). Given the pros and cons of factional politics, the factional theory of political behaviour is well-suited to analysing party politics in Nigeria, as it helps explain the role of intraparty factionalism in the country's democratic odyssey.

Existing research on party politics in Nigeria has primarily addressed issues such as the evolution and history of political parties, party and democratic elections, party systems, and intra- and inter-party conflicts. Similarly, literature on governance crises focuses on

corruption and government waste. This study thus contributes to the burgeoning literature on party politics in the country by showing why political parties have yielded few democratic dividends despite decades of the country's uninterrupted democratic experience since 1999.

### 3. Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative research method, using secondary data. Data were collected from books, historical and documented materials, relevant periodicals and reliable online sources. The choice of data sources was informed by the extant literature on the growth of political parties, party systems, democracy, and related topics in Nigeria. Efforts were made to ensure that major political parties, ruling and opposition, past and present, across Nigeria were covered by the study. The data sources, including published books and journal articles, and publications of political parties, were carefully read and examined over time to identify the issues/concepts that constitute or reflect political parties' activities, internal party crises and consequences of party crises. The identified issues/concepts were grouped. These became the themes. The recurring but related themes include factional politics, factionalism, defection, and party politics. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis, involving contextual reading, interpretation, and drawing conclusions based on the themes. The findings were presented through a robust description of the social phenomena (events and issues) engendered by the themes as they relate to Nigeria.

### 4. The Historical Antecedents

#### 4.1. *Party Politics in Colonial Nigeria*

The history of political parties and democratic governance in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period (1914–1960), when the country was a British colony. During this period, and in response to subtle agitation for political inclusion and participation by Nigerian nationalists and the general public, the colonial government under Sir Hugh Clifford introduced a constitution (the Clifford Constitution) in 1922 (Akanji, 2018). The constitution engendered the formation of political parties and ushered in party politics and political activism, albeit in a miniature form. This was because the 1922 Constitution, as a legal document/instrument of colonial administration, specified the powers and structure of the colonial government in Nigeria at the time. For example, the constitution established an executive council and a legislative council to administer the country and specified their membership. While the executive council comprised the colonial governor and several nominated European members, and was advisory in character, the legislative council comprised the colonial governor, as President of the council, twenty-six appointed officials, who were Europeans, fifteen nominated unofficial members, and four elected unofficial Nigerians, elected from Lagos and Calabar (Akanji, 2021).

Although fraught with several shortcomings, including that the powers of the two councils were limited to southern Nigeria, the fact that the constitution specified that four Nigerians be elected as unofficial members of the Legislative Council laid the foundation of party politics [better still, political party politicking] and democratic governance in Nigeria (Akanji, 2018). This is because, in response to the constitution, Nigerian nationalists formed political parties to contest the unofficial membership seats. Political party politicking thus began as parties such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the Nigerian Youth Movements (NYM) were formed in 1923 and 1938, respectively (Ngou, 1989; Keay & Thomas, 1986). Democratic elections were also conducted from 1923 for the four unofficial membership seats in the Legislative Council. The NNDP was victorious in the 1923, 1928, and 1933 elections and dominated the country's political party landscape until the 1938 election, which was won by the NYM (Keay & Thomas, 1986). Another notable political association during

the colonial period was the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), formed in 1946 (Akanji, 2018; Ngou, 1989).

Except for the 1946 Richards Constitution, which did little to promote the growth of political parties, the 1951 (Macpherson Constitution), 1954 (Lyttleton Constitution), [both colonial constitutions], and the 1960 (Independence Constitution) increased the representation and participation of Nigerians in the administration and democratic development of the country. For example, by its character, ensconced in its provisions on indirect election and secret ballot, the Macpherson Constitution enfranchised more Nigerians, stimulated the creation of more political parties, and revived party politics in general. The Macpherson Constitution renamed the Central Legislative Council, the House of Representatives and enlarged its membership from forty-four (44) to one hundred and forty-eight (148), comprising 136 unofficial and 12 officials, and specified that the unofficial members be elected members (Akanji, 2021: 42-43). Of the 136 elected unofficial members, 68 were elected from the Northern region, while 34 were elected from each of the Eastern and Western regions (Akanji, 2021: 42). To elect the unofficial members, the constitution introduced the principles of indirect election and secret ballot. The indirect election began with a secret-ballot election at the village level, followed by elections at the district and, thereafter, at the provincial level (Keay & Thomas, 1986). This was to elect members of the regional Houses of Assembly, who, in turn, selected regional representatives from among themselves for the Central Legislative Council, renamed the House of Representatives (Akanji, 2021).

As a result, old parties, such as the NCNC, were reinvigorated, while new political parties emerged as prospects for elective representation in the regional Houses of Assembly and in the enlarged House of Representatives. Thus, the Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), both of which metamorphosed from the socio-cultural movements in the western and northern regions, respectively, were formed in 1951 (Akanji, 2021). Also formed in response to the broadening of the political space by the Macpherson Constitution was the Middle Belt Peoples Party (MBPP), formed in 1953, which later merged with the Middle Zone League (MZL) to form the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in 1954 (Ngou, 1989). With the formation of these and other political parties, political activities, including political mobilisation, campaigns and meetings, nomination of candidates for election, participation at elections, and conduct of elections increased across the country, especially as elections into the regional parliaments and the House of Representatives were conducted in 1951 and 1952, respectively. This set of political parties also participated in the elections held in 1954 (federal elections), 1956 (western regional election), 1957 (eastern regional election), and 1959 (federal elections), though under a system of direct election introduced by the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954.

It is imperative to note that, apart from the dominant parties (i.e., the AG, NCNC, and NPC), twelve other political parties participated in the 1959 federal election; the last election before Nigeria gained political independence from the British in 1960 and the election through which the 1960 independence government was formed. The parties included the UMBC, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the Mabolaje Party, the Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons (DPNC), the United National Independence Party (UNIP), the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), the Ilorin Talakawa Parapo, and Habe-Fulani Peoples Party (Ngou, 1989). Although these parties were minority parties, they nonetheless played key roles in the overall development of party politics in Nigeria, as they served as credible alternatives to the dominant parties, promoted minority interests and broadened the voters' electoral choices.

However, while the federal election of 1959 was won by the coalition of the NPC and NCNC (the NPC-NCNC alliance), thereby producing the first civilian government in post-colonial

Nigeria, with the AG as the main opposition party, each of the major parties dominated politics and won elections in its regional base. While the AG controlled and formed the government in the Western region, where it originated, the NPC and NCNC, respectively, dominated politics, governance and elections in the Northern and Eastern regions after the 1959 elections. This set the tone for the character of Nigeria's party politics in the immediate post-independence era (1960-1966), as the political parties continued to bear and reflect regional/ethnic identities and interests, rather than any concrete national interests.

#### ***4.2. Political Parties in Post-colonial Nigeria***

The history of political parties in post-colonial Nigeria straddles the country's immediate post-colonial years (1960-1963), the First Republic (1963/1964-1966), the Second Republic (1979-1983), the abortive Third Republic (1992-1993), and the Fourth Republic (1999 to date). It is important to note that the political and electoral landscapes of Nigeria in the immediate post-colonial years and the First Republic were not so markedly different from those during the colonial period, especially between 1954 and 1959. This was because the political parties that dominated the country's politics during the twilight of colonialism (1954-1959) also dominated the country's political life from 1960 until the military coup of January 15, 1966, which terminated the First Republic that had started in 1963/1964.

During the period (i.e., 1960-1966), the governments of Nigeria at the federal (national) and regional levels were formed and constituted by officials elected from the political parties in existence at the time. For instance, the outcome of the 1959 federal elections resulted in a power-sharing arrangement between the NPC and the NCNC, leading to an NPC/NCNC-led federal government, with Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of NPC as the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe of NCNC as the Governor-General (later President in 1963, after Nigeria declared itself a republic) (Ngou, 1989; Dare, 1989). The outcome of the same election at the regional level resulted in each of the AG, NCNC, and NPC controlling the governments in the Western, Eastern and Northern regions, respectively. The regional character of the parties was related to the nature of party politics in the colonial period, during which, by the 1940s, "Ethnic identities had begun to solidify and become politically meaningful" (Falola & Heaton, 2008:150). This was facilitated by the regional structure of the country, which coincided with and largely reflected the identities of the dominant ethnic groups, as the Western region was dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group, the Eastern region by the Igbos, and the Northern region by the Hausa-Fulani (Tijani, 2015; Falola & Heaton, 2008). Hence, Tijani's (2015) submission that the political parties formed were ethno-regional in nature.

However, four years into independence, and in preparation for the 1964 general elections, new parties were formed, and new party alliances were created, mainly due to internal and inter-party crises that had plagued some existing parties. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), formed in 1964 by Samuel Ladoke Akintola because of the internal crisis that plagued the AG-controlled Western region, and the Northern Progressive Front (NPF), created from NEPU, were some of the 'new' parties that emerged at the time to contest the 1964 general elections (Dare, 1989; Ngou, 1989). In addition, two new major coalitions of parties were formed to contest the 1964 general elections. These were the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), comprising NPC and NNDP of Akintola, and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), comprising the AG, NCNC, NPF and UMBC (Dare, 1989).

It is, however, important to note that, like in the colonial period, the parties in the years between 1960 and 1966 had regional identities/character. The parties pursued sectional interests, rather than national interests. Moreover, the parties, especially the dominant parties, were associated largely with the personalities that were instrumental to their formation, as

they reflected and were affected by the beliefs (political and otherwise) and aspirations of such personalities. For instance, the AG was primarily associated with Obafemi Awolowo, who literally dominated and controlled it. Also, the NCNC was the party of Nnamdi Azikiwe, whereas the NPC was more the party of the northern oligarchies, especially the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, than of anyone else. The character of the political parties at the time contributed to the problematic nature of the first civilian government/First Republic, which was characterised by ethnic politics, inter- and intra-party crises, and political and electoral violence. It was against this backdrop that the military coup d'état of January 15, 1966, occurred. The coup overthrew the crisis-ridden first civilian (Republican) government and ushered in a period of military dictatorship that lasted until 1979, when the Second Republic (1979-1983) began.

Party politics in the Second Republic was to some extent similar to party politics in the colonial and First Republican periods, as parties, especially the dominant parties, continued to be associated with ethnic/sectional interests, and certain individuals continued to act as the parties' political godfathers. However, the political environment was markedly different from the previous democratic experience, as the 1979 Constitution introduced a presidential system to replace the parliamentary system of government that had operated during the First Republic.

The 1979 Constitution equally broadened the political space by providing for a multiparty system. According to Ollawa (1989), about fifty-three political parties were formed prior to the election. However, of the 53 political parties, only 19 successfully met the deadline for submitting registration forms to the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDEC); only five were deemed registrable and registered. The five parties were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) (Ollawa, 1989). These parties contested the 1979 elections, which the NPN won. The number of parties, however, increased to six, with the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) as the new addition, for the 1983 general elections (Oyediran, 1989).

It is important to note that, apart from the GNPP and NAP, which could be considered new parties, the others were direct offshoots of parties from the colonial and First Republic periods. The UPN, for instance, was an offshoot of the AG, while the NPN, NPP and PRP arose from NPC, NCNC and NEPU, respectively. Also, Obafemi Awolowo (of the defunct AG) was a prominent figure and leader of the UPN, in the same way the northern oligarchs (of defunct NPC), Nnamdi Azikiwe (of defunct NCNC) and Aminu Kano (of defunct NEPU) were instrumental to the formation of NPN, NPP and PRP, respectively. Hence, the parties, i.e., UPN, NPN, NNPP, and PRP, were not markedly different from their forebears in terms of origin or the personalities instrumental to their creation. One significant difference, however, is that the leadership of all the parties reflected the federal character of Nigeria, in that members of their top hierarchies were drawn from at least two-thirds of the federation's states. This was as prescribed and mandated by the 1979 Constitution that was introduced by the military government of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979), which also midwifed the second Republic (Omotola, 2015). This, therefore, made the parties in the Second Republic more national in outlook than their forebears in the First Republic.

Although some political parties maintained some form of tight electoral control in their areas of origin/influence, including the AG dominance of the states (Lagos, Oyo, Ogun and Bendel) in the west, and NPP control of some states (Imo and Anambra) in the east, the results of the general elections (1979 and 1983) in the second Republic partly supported the national outlook of the parties. For instance, the outcome of the 1979 general elections shows that the

NPN, though considered a northern political party, won governorship elections and majority seats in State Houses of Assembly in Cross River and Rivers states, two states in the southern part of the country that were largely considered by the general public to be in the NPP area of influence (Ollawa, 1989).

In the same vein, during the 1979 elections, the NPP won the governorship election and majority legislative seats in Plateau state (Ollawa, 1989), a state in the middle belt part of the country that was not in the NPP's traditional areas of influence. This indicates changes and dynamism in the country's electoral and party politics. However, it was partly due to the geopolitical reconfiguration of the country from four regions to nineteen states, imposed by the military governments (1965-1979), which freed some minority groups from the dominance of certain ethnic majorities and afforded them opportunities to express their electoral preferences. This broke the parties' regional electoral hegemony, as witnessed during the colonial and First Republic periods.

Notwithstanding the shift, party politics in the Second Republic was largely rancorous and fraught with many challenges, including corruption, widespread electoral irregularities and malpractices, intra-party crises, and economic mismanagement. These and other factors led to the military's abrupt termination of the Second Republic in December 1983, shortly after the NPN-led federal government had been inaugurated for a second term. The military rule, which began in December 1983, lasted until 1999. During the period, the process toward a Third Republic was initiated by the military government. The process included, for example, drafting a new constitution (the 1989 Constitution) to implement the Third Republic, which was to begin in 1992, and the formation of political parties and the conduct of elections.

Unlike the First and Second Republics, the military government permitted only a two-party system in the Third Republic. This, the military hierarchy thought, would address the issue of political parties being overly identified with ethnic/sectional interests and unduly dominated by a few individuals, as was the case during the colonial, First, and Second Republic periods. Hence, two political parties were registered, or better put, created by the military government for politicians to join. These were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). The parties were ideologically different, with the SDP being "a little to the right ideologically and the NRC a little to the left" (Oyeni, 2015:345).

Being government-established, the hierarchies, funding, structure and programmes of the parties were more or less determined and dictated by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993). For example, the military government provided the offices of the two registered parties in all the states and local governments in the country, and furnished them. Similarly, Tony Anenih and Tom Ikimi were each appointed as chairmen of the SDP and the NRC, respectively, by the military government. All of these made the parties mere appendages of the military government of Babangida. Little wonder why despite the successful conduct of state governorship and legislative (State and National Assembly) elections in 1992, and what can be described as the first-ever truly free, fair and peaceful presidential election in the country's democratic history on June 12, 1993, the outcome of which aligned with the collective wishes of the people, the military government of Babangida still annulled the results on frivolous and baseless grounds.

The opprobrium generated by the annulment, as Nigerians unanimously rejected the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, forced the military president, Ibrahim Babangida, to abdicate power, to use his words, 'step aside', and to institute an Interim National Government (ING) for the country under a civilian leadership of Ernest Shonekan (Akanji, 2015). This, however, put the country under another military dictatorship within months, as the ING was removed from power by the military cabal led by General Sani Abacha. The Abacha regime

(1993-1998) made some pretensions towards democratisation. First, it introduced the 1995 Constitution, which was to birth another democratic government, of which he made efforts to contest.

Second, it allowed for the process of formation of political parties, a process that he manipulated to the extent that only five parties, described by Bola Ige as the “five fingers of a leprous hand” (Akanji, 2015:359), were registered. The parties were the Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM), Committee for National Consensus (CNC), United Nigeria Centre Party (UNCP), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) (Akanji, 2015). The death of General Abacha in 1998 and his replacement by General Abdulsalami Abubakar’s regime (1998-1999) terminated the proposed democratic experiment of the Abacha regime, ushering in what appeared to be a more inclusive and sincere effort to return the country to civilian rule. This culminated in the drafting of the 1999 Constitution, which birthed the Fourth Republic.

Under the 1999 (amended) Constitution, the Fourth Republic (1999-present) is predicated on a multiparty democratic system. Hence, the Fourth Republic has witnessed a flurry of political activity, including the formation of numerous political parties and the conduct of general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023. It is important to note that although several political associations have emerged during the Fourth Republic, only those registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have participated in general elections. For example, only three parties, namely, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP), which later became the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) in 2002, and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were registered and participated in the 1999 general elections. In the 2023 elections, nineteen political parties were registered by INEC. These include the Action Alliance (AA), Accord (A), All Progressive Congress (APC), African Action Congress (AAC), Action Democratic Party (ADP), Boot Party (BP), Labour Party (LP), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Young Progressive Party (YPP), Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Youth Party (YP), and New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP).

A closer look at the Fourth Republic reveals that parties were formed independently of government by like-minded individuals, irrespective of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, in contrast to the situation in the aborted Third Republic. Also, the composition of the leadership of the parties reflects, as stipulated by the 1999 (amended) Constitution, the federal character of the country. This has made the parties national in their outlook and goals. However, a common feature of party politics in the Fourth Republic, like in the colonial period and the First and Second Republics, is the issue of internal party crises. This is the focus of the next section of this article.

## **5. Intra-Party Crises and crisis of governance in Nigeria**

Many political parties, especially the major parties that have ever formed in Nigeria and contested elections, have experienced one form of party crisis or another. While the causes of intra-party crises are numerous and their nature is diverse and sometimes party-specific, their consequences for [democratic] governance and the country's political stability have been grave and severe.

### ***5.1. Internal Party Crises and Governance Challenges in Colonial Nigeria***

What could be considered the first instance of an internal party crisis in Nigeria occurred in the NYM in 1941, during the colonial period. Although the NYM was a national political organisation that included members from diverse ethnic backgrounds, an internal rift in 1941 led a group of party members, including Nnamdi Azikiwe, Samuel Akinsanya, some Ijebu-Yoruba members,



and some Igbo members to withdraw from the party. The internal rift in the party, according to Ngou (1989) and Dare (1989), arose from the fact that the non-Ijebu Yoruba members had supported the emergence of Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw man, as the party's candidate to the Legislative Council, over that of Samuel Akinsanya, an Ijebu-Yoruba man. This rift ended the seemingly national character of the NYM, and "marked as much ...the tribalisation of the NCNC, which succeeded NYM in nationalist appeal, just as it marked the intra-ethnic disagreements that made the AG that was formed later the weak party it was despite its superior organisation" (Ngou, 1989: 90).

One effect of the NYM crisis was that, from that period onwards, many political parties were formed to reflect ethnic and, in some cases, sub-ethnic identities. The UMBC, for example, was formed in 1954 as a predominantly non-Muslim and non-Hausa party of the middle belt area described in its 'Constitution and Bye-Laws' to include "Kabba, Ilorin, Niger, Plateau, Adamawa, Southern Zaria, and Southern Bauchi Provinces" (Ngou, 1989: 94). It is however more important to note that the UMBC itself was a product of an intra-party crisis in the Middle Zone League (MZL), a predominantly Christian and non-Hausa/Fulani political party in the middle belt area that had replaced the Nigerian non-Muslim League (NML) in 1951 (Ngou, 1989).

The crisis in the MZL, which occurred in 1953, centred on the party leadership's decision to enter into an alliance with the NPC, a predominantly Hausa/Fulani party, for the 1954 election (Ngou, 1989). The decision, however, angered party members from the Tiv Progressive Union, the Ijumu Progressive Union, and the Igbirra Progressive Union, who felt that the MZL had compromised its objective of a Middle Belt State in the country (Ngou, 1989). As a result, the aggrieved members withdrew from the MZL and formed the Middle Belt Peoples Party (MBPP) to continue the struggle for a Middle Belt State (Ngou, 1989). Although both the MBPP and MZL later merged in 1954 to form the UMBC, "with membership that excluded the Hausa/Fulani" (Ngou, 1989:95), the implication was that it amplified ethnic disunity in the northern part of the country, which, incidentally, has continued to date, creating a governance crisis.

Another notable instance of intra-party crisis during the colonial period was the one that occurred in the NCNC between 1952 and 1953, over the failure of Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC in the AG-controlled Western regional House of Assembly to successfully get elected to the central legislature, the House of Representatives. While this was due to AG's preference for Yoruba members of the NCNC in the Western Regional House of Assembly, the result was that Nnamdi Azikiwe, the national leader of the NCNC, was excluded from the central government. To reverse the situation, available records indicate that the NCNC-controlled Eastern regional legislature and government, to no avail, pressured its representatives in the central government and in the Eastern regional government to resign their ministerial portfolios (Akanji, 2021; Keay & Thomas, 1986). This was intended to compel the central government and the eastern regional government to reshuffle their cabinets (ministerial appointments) to pave the way for the inclusion of Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC from the Eastern region.

This precipitated a crisis, as the party expelled the ministers appointed from the Eastern region to the central government and those in the Eastern regional government for failing to respond to party pressure (Keay & Thomas, 1986). The expelled ministers, however, came together to form another party, the National Independence Party (NIP) (Keay & Thomas, 1986). It is important to note that while the crisis lasted, governance in the Eastern region was almost at a standstill. This was because the NCNC controlled and dominated the Eastern regional legislature, and so the legislature refused to pass Bills, thereby forcing the Lieutenant-Governor (the executive head of the region at the time) to use reserve powers to bring the Appropriation Bill into force (Akanji, 2021; Keay & Thomas, 1986). The NCNC was also

plunged into another internal crisis between 1957 and 1958, when some members criticised the party leadership and demanded a change. The fallout of this was the emergence of the Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons (DPNC) in 1958 among those displeased with Nnamdi Azikiwe's leadership style.

## ***5.2. Internal Party Crises in the First Republic***

There were several internal party crises that significantly affected governance, both nationally and regionally, during the First Republic. However, the root of the intra-party crises in the First Republic lies in the political circumstances created by the outcome of the 1959 general elections, which birthed the country's independence in 1960, and the character of politicking by political gladiators after 1960. In the 1959 elections, no single party was capable of forming the government at the centre. Hence, there were moves for political alignments. Although the moves produced the NPC/NCNC government at the central/federal level from 1960 to 1964, each of the AG, NPC, and NCNC controlled the government in its region of origin: the west, north, and east, respectively.

However, the NPC/NCNC alliance and several parties were plunged into an internal crisis. For instance, in the AG-controlled Western region, a crisis ensued between Obafemi Awolowo, the party national leader, and Samuel Akintola, the deputy leader and premier of the region, over the "mode of coexistence of the party with other parties in the federation" (Dare, 1989: 114), and the administration of the region (Tijani, 2015). Available records revealed that while Awolowo wanted the party to extend its activities to other parts of the country, Akintola, on the other hand, wanted the party to limit itself to the western region for a time being in order to build itself (Dare, 1989), and "join the Federal Prime Minister's coalition" (Keay & Thomas, 1986: 207), as a way of strengthening national unity. This, however, was not acceptable to Awolowo.

Moreover, Awolowo, as the party leader, believed he should be involved in the administration of the regional government headed by Akintola (Tijani, 2015). The disagreements between the two AG stalwarts, each with his followers, culminated in a free-for-all fight in the regional parliament in 1962, with the removal of Akintola as the premier by the regional governor following a petition to that effect purportedly signed by the majority of the members of the regional legislature (Tijani, 2015; Keay & Thomas, 1986). Consequently, Akintola and his loyalists pulled out of the AG and formed a new political party, the Unity People's Party (UPP) in 1962 (Tijani, 2015). The UPP and some Yoruba members of the NCNC, such as Chief Fani-Kayode, later merged and formed a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1964 under the leadership of Akintola to "form a united Yoruba front in the federal set up" (Tijani, 2015: 93). Like the AG, the NNDP was also enmeshed in crisis, over the deputy premiership position between Oba C.O. Akran and Chief Fani-Kayode (Tijani, 2015).

The implications of the parties' internal crises, particularly in the AG, for governance in the Western region were grave. The crisis disrupted the smooth operation of government and social and economic activities in the region, especially in its capital, Ibadan. There were also serious threats to lives and properties, as some legislators were injured and legislative activities were completely disrupted (Dare, 1989). More importantly, the crisis led to the federal government imposing a state of public emergency in the western region (Adekunle, 2015; Dare, 1989). By this, the western region was placed under an Administrator appointed by the federal government. Hence, the region lost its autonomy and operational independence within the federation, contrary to the spirit and letter of federalism under which the country operated. The federal government, for instance, instituted a probe into the activities of the six major statutory corporations in the region, just to investigate the AG members who had benefited

from them (Adekunle, 2015; Dare, 1989). Similarly, Awolowo was detained in 1962 and charged with treasonable felony, and later convicted and sentenced in 1963 to ten years imprisonment for treason (Adekunle, 2015). Hence, with federal support, Akintola and his loyalists formed the post-emergency government in the Western region from 1963.

At the federal level, the NPC/NCNC coalition equally experienced an internal crisis in 1962, which led to its breakup in 1964. The crisis concerned the NCNC's perception of an unfair distribution of federally funded projects by the government of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa of the NPC, as well as the 1962/1963 census figures. The NCNC felt that most of the federal projects under the National Development Plan (1962-1968) were unduly allocated to the Northern region, with only a few allocated to the Eastern region (Dare, 1989). Likewise, the NCNC felt betrayed by the federal government's splitting of the iron and steel industry between the Eastern and the Northern regions, although it had originally been planned for the Eastern region (Dare, 1989).

Similarly, the NCNC-controlled Eastern regional government rejected the official figures of the 1962/1963 census, which showed the Northern region had higher figures than other regions, over allegations of irregularities (Dare, 1989). All of these weakened the NPC/NCNC coalition and rendered it unworkable, as each alliance partner formed new alliances with other parties to contest the 1964 federal and 1965 regional elections. While the NPC aligned with NNDP of Akintola to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), the NCNC aligned with the AG and the Northern Progressive Front (NPF), which arose from NEPU and UMBC to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) (Dare, 1989).

The larger implication of this crisis, and that of the AG in the Western region, was that the country's body politic and the entire political terrain became unnecessarily charged and tense. The two crises fostered an environment of extreme political distrust and acrimony, rather than cordiality, fairness, and respect for the rule of law, in a newly independent country such as Nigeria. Additionally, due to the crises, the country's elections became a do-or-die affair for the parties and alliances. This became evident in the 1964 federal elections and the October 1965 Western regional legislative elections, which were marred by widespread vote rigging, intimidation of opponents and other irregularities, leading to large-scale violence in the Western region between supporters of AG and NNDP (Adekunle, 2015; Tijani, 2015; Dare, 1989). The scale of the violence made the western region ungovernable for the unpopular, but yet declared winner, the NNDP, and the failure of the governments (federal and regional) to expeditiously tackle the violence contributed to the military coup of January 15, 1966, that terminated the First Republic.

### ***5.3. Internal party crises in the Second and aborted Third Republics***

Unlike the First Republic, there were no serious instances of internal party crises that had a grave impact on governance, whether at the national/federal or state level (the regions had been restructured into states) during the Second and aborted Third Republics. This was due to a number of factors. First was that the parties in the Second and aborted Third Republics were formed on the backdrop of years of military dictatorship, which had altered many things in Nigeria, including the country's geopolitical structure, which was reorganised from a regional structure into twelve, nineteen and later thirty-six states structure with implications for voter choices and party performance. Second was the nature of the process leading to the formation of the parties, including the requirement in the 1979 Constitution that parties should reflect the country's federal character in their leadership composition. This reduced the possibilities of parties being dominated by ethnic personality figures. The third was that the parties, especially in the aborted Third Republic, were government-created, and also that the aborted Third

Republic never fully took off. Hence, instead of serious internal party crises that could have negatively impacted governance, what was common during the two republics was inter-party crises over election results, such as the 1979 and 1983 elections. Nevertheless, some of the few recorded cases were internal disputes within the NPP, GNPP, and PRP.

The NPP's internal crisis centred on the political ambitions of Waziri Ibrahim and Nnamdi Azikiwe, two key members of the party, regarding the party's leadership and its presidential candidacy for the 1979 elections (Nwauwa, 2015). The result was that Waziri Ibrahim and his loyalists in the NPP left the party after Azikiwe had emerged victorious, forming the GNPP, with some others (Nwauwa, 2015). For the PRP, a major internal crisis occurred between 1981 and 1982, when the two state governors (of Kano and Kaduna states) and some members of parliaments on the platform of the party joined a coalition of progressives against the ruling NPN government, and supported a call for the emergence of a progressive party, a position that the party leadership did not fully support. This led to a rift in the party, as some, including the then party's vice president, Michael Imoudu, supported the progressive governors and MPs, while others, including Aminu Kano, the then party's national president, opposed the idea and suspended the progressive governors and legislators from the party. As a result, the PRP broke into factions: the Aminu Kano faction and the Abubakar Rimi (Kano State Governor)/Balarabe Musa (Kaduna State Governor)/Michael Imoudu faction (Oyediran, 1989).

Similarly, a lack of respect for party structure and principles led to the expulsion of some members of the GNPP in 1981 for their strong opposition and criticism of the then-ruling NPN government, contrary to the unofficial but widely known position of non-antagonism toward the ruling government held by the party leadership. Consequently, the party factionalised, with Governor Abubakar Barde of the then Gongola state leading a faction of the party (Oyediran, 1989). Although the immediately noticeable effect of the internal crises in the NPP, GNPP and PRP appears to be the fractionalisation of the parties, the broad and more serious effect was that their electoral competitiveness and performance were badly affected, as they became more ethnic/sectional in outlook than national, especially in membership and electoral acceptability. This prevented them from mounting any serious opposition to the ruling party, the NPN. This also denied the country and its people alternatives over big parties and the NPN-led government, which grossly mismanaged the nation's economy (Omotola, 2015). This gave the military the opportunity to rationalise the seizure of power again in December 1983, thereby terminating the second Republic.

#### ***5.4. Internal Party crises in the Fourth Republic***

Most, if not all, parties that have graced the political terrain of the Fourth Republic since its inception in 1999 have experienced one form of internal party crisis or another. Without doubt, there has been a litany of internal party crises, too many to mention, and some with serious implications for governance and political stability, nationally and/or at the state level in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In 1999, for example, the All Peoples Party (APP), one of the three parties at the time, the others being the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), had an internal crisis over the selection of its presidential candidate for the 1999 presidential elections.

While the party initially nominated Ogbonnaya Onu, an Igbo man, at its convention in Kaduna, it later adopted Olu Falae, a Yoruba man and the presidential candidate of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), as its presidential candidate (Peoples Democratic Party [PDP], 2024). This was considered a strategic move in the then newly formed APP/AD alliance to counterbalance the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man, as the PDP presidential candidate. This,

however, spelt doom for the party as it whittled down its popularity, and led some party members to join other parties, while others teamed up to form the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) (Akande, 2020). Thus, whereas the APP participated, though lost, in the 1999 presidential election, it had ceased to exist by the 2003 general elections, having been eclipsed and replaced by the ANPP. The ANPP itself experienced an internal crisis over leadership, prompting some members, including its stalwart, Attahiru Bafarawa, to break away to form the Democratic People's Party (DPP) in 2006 (Akande, 2020).

Similarly, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was engulfed in a series of internal leadership crises between 2003 and 2006, including the chairmanship tussle between two of its stalwarts, Adebisi Akande and Mojisola Akinfenwa (Akande, 2020). The party's leadership crisis led to its fractionalisation at different times. In 2006, a faction of the party led by Adebisi Akande and Bola Ahmed Tinubu withdrew to join others to form the Action Congress (AC) (Akande, 2020). The party (AC) was later transformed into the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The internal crises in the AD were a major factor that contributed to its eventual demise as a party of note in the country, as it suffered serious electoral losses at the 2003 general elections, including the loss of five of the six South Western states it had earlier controlled, to the PDP and a sharp reduction in its members elected to the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly. This explains why the party was no longer visible in the country's political and electoral space by the 2007 general elections and subsequent elections.

Also, the Action Congress (AC), which eclipsed and replaced the AD, experienced internal crises, the chief of which was the 2006/2007 crisis in Lagos State between the then-governor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the then-deputy governor, Femi Pedro, over succession issues. While the deputy governor wanted to succeed Bola Tinubu as the party's candidate for the governorship election in 2007, the leadership of the party in the state, including Bola Tinubu, thought otherwise (Awofeso, 2006). The nature of the crisis, characterised by political mudslinging and accusations and counter-accusations of disloyalty to the party leadership, forced Femi Pedro to withdraw from the party while retaining the deputy governorship position, and to join the Labour Party (LP) in the state (Oladesu, 2010). Although it is difficult to show that the succession tussle seriously undermined governance in Lagos state, as governance continued largely unhindered, it can be argued that it created an environment of tension while it lasted, as it polarised party members, and also denied the state the services of some of its best brains, including Femi Pedro and some of his loyalists.

Furthermore, two other parties in the Fourth Republic, whose experiences of internal crises warrant mention given their popularity and the currency of the crises, are the Labour Party (LP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Apart from being parties with rich electoral history, having participated in elections since 1999, for PDP, and 2003, for LP, both contested the 2023 general elections and emerged as the opposition parties, having lost the elections to the All Progressive Congress (APC). However, while the LP, as a minor party until the 2023 general elections, experienced a few internal crises with serious implications for governance, the PDP has had numerous internal crises that have affected the quality of governance in the country. Although the PDP dominated the country's political terrain from 1999 to 2015, its internal party crisis was its main albatross, weakening its popularity and capacity to retain power. For example, "the party was managed by not less than eleven national chairmen between 1999 and 2015, all of whom left office in controversial circumstances" (Katsina, 2016: 4).

There was also a succession crisis in the party between 2002 and 2007, involving Olusegun Obasanjo and Atiku Abubakar, the country's president and vice president (1999-2007), respectively. The crisis resulted in the latter's withdrawal from the party and his joining the AC

as its presidential candidate (Tukur, 2017). In addition, there was the surreptitious move by President Olusegun Obasanjo and his loyalists in government and within the party to amend the 1999 Constitution so that he could contest the 2007 presidential election and extend his tenure beyond the constitutionally approved two terms (Okem, 2013). This dented the party's image and angered some of its members. The series of internal crises in the party led to its fractionalisation and cross-carpeting by members at different times. These included the breakaway of Orji Uzor Kalu and his loyalists from the party to form the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA) in 2006 (Akande, 2020: 417), and the emergence of a faction known as the new PDP in 2013 (Udo, 2013). Although the party (PDP) won the 2007 and 2011 presidential elections, the internal crises it experienced, along with other factors, including widespread corruption in government and spiralling insecurity, dented its image and weakened its ability to provide quality leadership for the country.

Hence, the party lost its 'traditional' dominant electoral position at the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections to the APC, a party formed in 2013 to counter the PDP dominance by a wide array of opposition parties, including the ACN, the ANPP, the new PDP and a breakaway faction of APGA. Even as an opposition party since 2015, the PDP has been unable to provide effective opposition to the ruling party, including by offering credible socio-economic alternatives to the socio-economic programmes of the APC-led government that have adversely affected the populace. This, however, has been due to internal crises. For instance, whereas the general opinion among many Nigerians in the run off to the 2023 general elections was that the APC-led federal government had failed the country, internal crisis in the PDP over the choice of its presidential candidate between Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi undermined its ability to present a formidable force that could have wrenched power from the APC; hence, it lost the elections.

The spate of internal crises in the PDP has led it to be described as the "Most unstable and crises-ridden party with low-internal cohesion in the Fourth Republic" (Katsina, 2016: 4). The import of this is that the absence of credible opposition, due to internal crises in the main opposition parties, has allowed the ruling party to govern as it considered appropriate. It has also somewhat encouraged democratic authoritarianism by the ruling party, given the sheer impossibility of removing it from power through democratic means, such as elections or impeachment, given the weakness of the opposition.

## **6. Implications of Party Internal Crises for Nigeria's Democratic Governance**

The internal party crises in Nigeria have had serious implications for democratic governance. First and foremost, the crises have played a critical role in Nigeria's political instability. For example, the lack of internal party democracy in the AG, as earlier shown, precipitated the violence that ruptured legislative functions in the Western Regional House of Assembly and undermined the region's peace in 1962, or, better put, 1962-1966 (Tijani, 2015).

It is equally irrefutable that the series of military interventions in politics and governance in Nigeria were not unconnected to internal crises in some of the country's dominant parties. The internal crises in the AG in the Western region and in the NCNC in the Eastern region, as discussed earlier, clearly contributed to the military takeover of government in 1966, which truncated the democratic processes of the First Republic (1960-1966). This affected Nigeria's democratic development, as the coup, like those in 1983, 1985, and 1993, denied the Nigerian electorate and the political class the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and practice of democracy.

Furthermore, parties' ability to secure electoral victories has often been weakened by recurring internal squabbles. This accounted for why APGA, against known precedents,

performed poorly in Anambra State during the 2019 general elections (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020), and why APC failed in Abia State during the 2023 general elections (Ndubuisi & Nduma, 2025). Likewise, persistent internal crises undermine meritocracy in party administration, especially in the election of officials and candidates for elective positions, thereby allowing incompetent candidates and those with questionable character to be elected/appointed to party leadership and presented as party candidates for elections. This invariably affects the quality of leadership that ruling parties provide and limits the capacity of the opposition effectively influence government accountability.

Furthermore, internal crises contribute to parties' loss of political relevance and extinction. As earlier discussed, recurring crises in the AD accounted for the loss of five of its stronghold states in the southwest to the PDP in 2003 general elections, and subsequently to both the PDP and the APC. The same also contributed to PDP's losses in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections at the national and subnational levels, thereby confirming fears repeatedly expressed before 2015 by some of its stalwarts, including the party's national publicity secretary, Olisa Metuh (Ojukwu, 2014). This has affected the quality of democratic governance in the country, as there has been no vibrant, strong opposition or credible alternative to the APC-led government since 2015.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that internal party crises are not a new phenomenon in Nigeria and that they have had a grave impact on the country's democratic governance. From the colonial period to the current Fourth Republic, most political parties that have ever been formed have experienced at least one major internal crisis. While internal conflict is a characteristic of all organisations, including political parties, it renders political parties incapable of offering credible alternatives even when they come to power. Where they are in the opposition, they fail to provide effective checks on government power. Consequently, this affects the overall quality of governance and erodes the dividends that democracy is purported to offer to the people.

The foregoing analysis shows that much of intra-party conflicts stems from a lack of internal-party democracy. Based on the analysis, the study offers the following recommendations to address intra-party crises in Nigeria. First, to strengthen internal democracy, political parties must strictly adhere to their own constitutions when electing officials and selecting candidates for public elections, deliberately avoiding the imposition of candidates and other electoral irregularities during primaries. Concurrently, each party should establish a robust internal conflict-resolution mechanism, such as an elders' council or a dedicated committee, to settle disputes before resorting to litigation. At the systemic level, amendments to the 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act are necessary to empower INEC to sanction parties that violate due process in their internal elections. Finally, sustained efforts by both political parties and INEC are required, including periodic capacity building and training for party members, to entrench acceptable democratic norms, values, and practices. The study contributes to the burgeoning literature on party politics in Nigeria by showing why political parties have yielded few democratic dividends despite decades of the country's uninterrupted democratic experience since 1999. Future research may examine the role of factional politics in party cohesion, party performance in national and subnational elections, and the implications of factionalism within parties for national socioeconomic development.

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