

## **Enhancing Internal Democracy in Nigerian Political Parties through Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

By

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### **Abstract**

Nigerian political parties have been plagued by internal rivalries and disputes, particularly over primary elections, resulting in a large number of court proceedings. This scenario not only strains the judiciary, but also weakens the parties' democratic values. The purpose of this paper is to argue that adopting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, instead of frequent recourse to the courts, will enhance internal democracy in Nigerian political parties. While the formal judicial process of litigation has shown some strength in resolving party disputes for internal democracy to reign, there is a growing agreement that this process has generally failed in delivering justice, healing wounds, facilitating voluntariness and reconciliation, and in ensuring direct participation of disputants in resolving their disputes – an option that not only reduces the time and cost of resolving the dispute but also fosters internal democracy. Congresses, party primaries, elections, and appointments constitute the most visible processes that have generated disputes and threatened party cohesion and governance in general. The paper identifies the lack of ideology and the absence of internal democracy as factors that predispose political parties to disputes. It argues that party disputes can be resolved through the deployment of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism which has been acknowledged as an effective means of resolving disputes or conflicts. The paper concludes that political party members, especially leaders of the parties, should focus more on internal party mechanisms to resolve conflicts that may arise from primaries, congress and general elections. It recommends that political parties and institutions should maintain openness, fairness, and inclusion in these processes to reduce intra-party wrangling and foster party cohesion and good governance.

*Keywords:* internal party democracy, intra-party conflicts, alternative dispute resolution, litigation, political party

### **Introduction**

Internal democracy within political parties is crucial for ensuring fairness, transparency, and inclusiveness in the decision-making processes. It allows for the participation of party members in shaping policies, selecting candidates, and overall governance. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR),

as its name implies, denotes other methods and procedures outside of litigation in resolving disputes either as alternatives to the traditional dispute resolution mechanism (the court system) or supplementary to such mechanism. ADR is a way of settling disputes without litigation. Using ADR procedures such as Mediation, which involves a neutral third party assisting disputing parties to reach a mutually acceptable resolution, Arbitration, which involves a neutral arbitrator who listens to both sides and makes a binding decision to resolve the dispute, and Negotiation, involving direct discussions between the conflicting parties, can facilitate out-of-court settlement of disputes. Implementing arbitration mechanisms can provide a structured approach to settling conflicts. These mechanisms have the capacity to help avoid the acrimony that often accompanies extended trials and allows parties to understand each other's position and craft their solutions (Miller, 2016, p.1; Robert, 1998, p.1).

Arbitrations have been part of the traditional dispute resolution (TDR) method in Nigeria; Common Law rules on Arbitration are part of our Law. Arbitration Ordinance 16 of 1914 was an adaptation of the 1889 English Arbitration Act. According to Rhodes-Vivour (1999), the Arbitrations Ordinance was based on the English Arbitration Act of 1889 and applied to the whole country which was then being governed as a unitary state; when Nigeria became regionalized in 1954, and later federal, the ordinance became the respective laws of the regions and later the states.

Internal democracy in political parties, similarly recognized as intra-party democracy, is a democratic cultural practice within and among party members, which is the level and methods of including party members in decision-making and deliberation within the party structure. Intra-party democracy is usually known to cultivate voters' political competencies and produce more capable representatives who ensure that the party produces better policies and political programmes. Okhaide (2012, p. 58) states that "Political parties are indispensable institutions of democracy and democratic societies. It has been argued that sustainable democracy is not achievable without a viable political party system".

Many political parties in Nigeria find it very difficult to adopt an open system that will not only allow members of the party to participate in the decision-making but also give them the unrestricted opportunity to contest in elections under the party's platform. This kind of socio-political restriction and constraint has increasingly resulted in party wrangling, war of attrition, recrimination, acrimony, coordination dilemmas, and cross-carpeting in many Nigerian political parties (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). These challenges thrown up by the lack of proper internal democracy across all political parties in Nigeria, which is a recipe for conflicts, is

what this paper seeks to interrogate. Available data indicate that introducing ADR as a standby mechanism will help in resolving intra-party conflicts in Nigerian political parties. The activities of political parties since 1999 (the advent of the fourth republic) shall be scrutinized, with special focus on political party primaries of 2022.

### **Litigation Challenges**

Party primaries, congresses, elections, and appointments constitute the most visible processes that have generated disputes and threatened party cohesion and general governance. These procedures are crucial in molding the structure of political parties, selecting candidates for elections, electing party members to various organs of the party and filling government positions after every election. However, due to self-interest and godfatherism, differences frequently become problematic and spark conflicts inside political parties and across the political landscape (Uzochukwu & Atracta, 2022; Oseghale, 2020).

The delay and cost implication of the litigation processes that arise from these conflicts is a huge challenge, as they often bring to reality the maxim "justice delayed is justice denied." According to Oddiri (2004, p.1), "overtime, the process of litigation has become more and more time-consuming, expensive and cumbersome, upsurges in the number of cases in courts have led to congestion and delay in their resolution." These genuine concerns over cost and delay in litigation procedures coupled with increasing globalization have led to the emerging global search for a more flexible means of resolving conflict or dispute; hence, the re-emergence of ADR. Ontario Civil Justice Review (2015, p. 1) asserts that "No civilized society can remain stable without a mechanism whereby its members can resolve their disputes peacefully and, where necessary, in a binding fashion."

To ensure requisite high quality of justice and fair and impartial determination of matters coming before the courts, a strong and completely independent judiciary is essential. That would spur the judiciary to develop a streamlined more efficient structure and overall strategy for the civil justice system that would enable it to provide speedier service and maximize the utilization of public resources allocated to it. According to Warren E. Burger, a former chief justice of the United States, "A sense of confidence in the courts is essential to maintain the fabric of ordered liberty for a free people" (1970, p. 936). When justice is delayed, which is generally accepted as denial, solidarity and stability will be impeded and such society will hardly function. As an impetus to this position, Burger listed some harms delayed justice could inflict on society:

inefficiency and delayed justice will drain even a just judgment of its value; people who have long been exploited in the smaller transaction of daily life would conclude that the court cannot vindicate their rights and protect them from fraud and overreaching behaviour; and people would come to believe the law in the larger sense cannot fulfil the primary function of protecting them and families in their homes, at their work and in the public street (Burger, 1970). This is a recipe for conflicts the results of which can hardly be determined.

ADR is a method or mechanism put in place for the resolution of conflict outside of court litigation processes, and this process is always anchored by a neutral third party. Spangler (2003) said the term ADR is commonly used while referring to informal processes or method of dispute resolution where parties to the conflict meet with a professional third party who helps them to navigate out of their dispute in a way that is less formal and often more consensual, unlike what is obtainable in the courts. Lieberman and Henry (1986, p. 424) emphasized that "the ADR roster includes such well-known processes as arbitration, mediation, conciliation, and, perhaps, negotiation. These processes can be used to settle existing disputes or to prevent disputes from developing."

Fundamentally, alternative dispute resolution symbolizes all procedures of resolving conflict other than litigation or adjudication through the court's processes. ADR provides a viable opportunity to resolve disputes and conflicts through the utilization of processes that are best suited for a particular dispute or conflict. The salient beauty of ADR is that it is like a renaissance of Africa's traditional method of conflict resolution. Pre-colonial Africans relied heavily on the nitty-gritty negotiating for peace which was inherited from their forbears. For conflict to be resolved in traditional African society, and for harmonious and peaceful coexistence, the mechanism or processes of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and reconciliation, based on the tripod of impartiality, neutrality and transparency, were strictly followed. Elaborating on this, Olaoba (2010, p. 23) said: "The nature of the principle of conflict resolution in indigenous African societies was anchored on flexibility and elasticity of the rules and guidelines of operation, the divine inspiration and the conceptualization of peace in the society."

ADR is an effort to provide an alternative to the adversarial nature of litigation that fosters a win-lose outcome; it is a system that has a human face and encourages joint problem-solving. Because of its contents, it is often referred to as Amicable Disputes Resolution or Appropriate Disputes Resolution. Olagunju (2014) opined that ADR hypothetically developed in the West, notably the USA. But in reality, any student of Traditional

African Dispute Resolution (TADR) or of various Asian and even Native American dispute resolution mechanisms will realize that ADR appropriates and leans profoundly on those various local practices of conflict resolution (Affrifah, 2015).

### **ADR Awareness in Nigeria**

Nigeria as a member of the global community has keyed into this new phenomenon of embracing ADR as a veritable means of resolving conflicts, as more and more states in Nigeria have started experimenting with the ADR process programme, although some states called theirs "Multi-door Court House". This paper projects ADR as a solution to conflicts in Nigeria, and as a way out of the growing challenges confronting the litigation process of justice delivery, like cost, delay, cumbersomeness and increasing number of court cases. As the awareness of ADR in Nigeria continues to gain momentum, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended has further given legal impetus to its use. Specifically, Section 19(d) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999 provides for the settlement of disputes by Arbitration, Mediation, Conciliation, Negotiation and Adjudication. For the first time in Nigeria, Arbitration and other forms of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are given constitutional backing as a means of settlement of disputes (Oddiri, 2004).

ADR reduces hostility and antagonism; but most importantly, it saves business relationships and encourages continued cordiality between the parties. Apart from the fact that businessmen and women now prefer private resolution of their disputes to exposure to the machinery available in the glare of the regular courts, there is the advantage that settlement through ADR avoids what can be best described as brinkmanship and acrimony, which often arise in litigation. These are made largely possible because the procedure provides greater room for compromise than litigation (Obi, 2018; Oddiri, 2004; Tajti, 2019).

### **Formation of Political Parties**

From 1999 (when the then military Head of State, General Abdulsalm Abubakar, handed back power to civilians) to 2023, numerous political parties have been formed in Nigeria, as every group, social or cultural, wanted to metamorphose into a political party. The political parties became too numerous for citizens to keep count of, and the Nigerian political system, already bad-footed as a result of selfish and regional interests, became crippled and bastardized (Okhaide, 2012). Consequently, three political parties were initially registered. These were the People's

Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP), and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Later, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). There was a significant increase in the number of political parties in Nigeria (about 17 parties) by December 2002. Furthermore, additional three political parties were added by INEC between January and February 2006. Currently, under the present political dispensation, the number of registered political parties in Nigeria that participated in the 2019 general election was about 96. Of these number, two – the PDP and APC – are dominant. PDP was among the ones formed in 1999 and APC, formed in February 2013, was the result of an alliance of Nigeria's three biggest opposition parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) (Ajulo, 2018).

However, in a bid to bring sanity into the electoral process, 74 political parties have had their registrations revoked by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for failing to comply with the Constitution's standards for political parties. Sixteen (16) political parties that met the prerequisites for existence under section 225A of the 1999 Constitution remained registered by the Commission. Among them are the African Action Congress (AAC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Accord Party (AP), Action Alliance (AA), African Democratic Congress (ADC), African Democratic Party (ADP), and Allied Peoples Movement (APM). Others are Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), National Rescue Movement (NRM), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Young Progressives Party, and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). Mahmood Yakubu, the chairman of INEC, announced at a press conference that one of the political parties, the Action Peoples Party (APP), filed a lawsuit and won an order preventing the Commission from deregistering it. The APP would remain registered pending the determination of the matter before the court, he said. A new political party, the Boot Party (BP), created by court order after the 2019 general election would also continue to operate (Kwen, 2020). Hence, as at 2023, there were 18 political parties registered in Nigeria that were qualified to contest the 2023 election.

### **Conflict and Intra-Party Democracy**

At every congress and party primary of these numerous political parties in Nigeria, there is always an intra-party conflict that often lingers on in the courts, even after the main election has been conducted and the winner announced. Such was the case between PDP and Rotimi Amaechi who, at the end of an intraparty dispute, became the Governor-elect for River State

without contesting in the main election. Intraparty conflict is, especially, a common phenomenon among the major political parties, PDP, APC and ACN.

Before a country can be sanitized and developed, there must be several internal sanitation and development in the major political parties, one of which is likely to form the government. They have to perform several 'institutional guarantees' to effectively discharge what is expected of them in any democracy. Intra-party democracy is one of the institutional requirements for conducting election into various offices and political parties are among the institutions that carry out and actualize the democratic principles in any organized democratic society. To make intra-party democracy work, fairness is required. Conflict is likely wherever the performance of a public policy is biased in favour of a certain group (Aleyomi, (2013). Okhaide (2012:1) said "The conduct of a credible election has been hinged on many factors. One of them is a well-developed internal party democracy. This assertion underscores the quest for internal democracy among the various political parties in Nigeria."

The lack of or non-existence of an ideology, absence of internal democracy, incumbency factor, goal mismatch, godfatherism or neopatrimonialism, politics of self-interest and winners takes all mentality in Nigeria politics, are some of the reasons why political parties, especially the biggest two (PDP and APC), experience frequent intra-party conflicts (Aleyomi, 2013; Akindede, 2011; Chukwuma & Ali, 2014; Yahaya & Ibrahim, 2015). As Olaniyan (2009, p. 51) observed, "party politics has adorned the toga of notoriety in Nigeria to the extent that its defining characteristics have been intrigues, bickering, backbiting, schisms and violence". It is in this context that scholars are interested in understanding the dynamics of intra-party conflicts with a view to developing a durable process of nurturing democratic ethics and values. Meanwhile, intra-party differences remain recurrent in different forms and at different stages in the process of democratization in Nigeria, constituting a barrier to the growth of democracy in the country (Ngwu & Ajah, 2022).

All political parties' constitutions include provisions for internal democracy, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution and the electoral act serve as guidelines for the political parties, making their registration such a requirement. Unfortunately, political parties have frequently failed to adhere to the procedure. The internal processes of Nigerian party politics are perforated with group wrangling, personality clashes, disaffection, distrust, decamping and assassination. When these happen, aggrieved party members resort to litigation as a means of addressing perceived irregularities committed by some party officials or

groups. Although each party has a conflict resolution mechanism that provided an alternative to the litigation process, members seldom use it to resolve disputes because they have no confidence in it. The tendency is for disputants to seek redress in court through the process of litigation. This is in spite of the fact that managing party disputes or conflicts through litigation and the instrumentality of election petitions tribunals sometimes drag on for years without any resolution. Sometimes, the seeming resolution of some of the issues gives rise to additional or multiple problems and creates bitterness and further conflicts (Okhaide, 2012; Oseghale, 2020; Oseghale & Adesiyon, 2021; Uzochukwu & Atracta, 2022).

### **Overview of Intra-Party Conflicts in Nigeria**

The history of political party disputes or conflicts in Nigeria is a long one. This is because incidences of party disputes date back to the colonial era. For this discussion, however, our focus is on the intra-party disputes witnessed from 1999 to 2019; this period is significant because it represents the latest era of democratic rule after several years of military dictatorship. Some scholars (Chukwuma & Ali, 2014; Jinadu, 2001; Nwanegbo, Odigbo and Nnorom, 2014; Adenuga, et al., 2021; Yahaya, 2019) include the following among the major cases of internal crisis within Nigeria's political parties during this period: the Chief Sunday Awoniyi-led vs. Chief Edwin Ume-Ezeoke-led intra-party squabble of 2000; the Anambra State internal tussle between then Governor Chris Ngige and his godfather, Chief Chris Uba; the Imo State crisis that led to the defection of Senator Ifeanyi Ararume to Action Group of Nigeria; the Ogun State crisis that led to the defection of Senator Ibikunle Amosun to ANPP and later to ACN; the Ekiti State case that led to the defection of former Governor Segun Oni to ACN and later to PDP; the crisis in Ondo State that led to the defection of Governor Segun Mimiko to Labour Party and later back to PDP; the crisis in Abia State PDP that led to the defection of former Governor Orji Uzor Kalu to the Progressive Peoples Alliance, then back to PDP and now in APC and the Bayelsa State crisis that led to the defection of former Governor Timipre Silva to the All Progressive Congress.

Chukwuma & Ali (2014) note that the persistence of the internal crisis within the PDP and the subsequent defections of the aggrieved members, who call themselves the 'new PDP' and moved to the opposing party APC in 2013, is a culmination of the perennial subterranean wrangling in the party that stemmed from desperate ambitions, lack of ideological attachment to the party system, and crass partisan opportunism. This movement was led by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President;



Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje, former acting national chairman of the party and Chief Olagunsoye Oyinlola, former Governor of Osun State and the then secretary of the party. Other prominent members who left PDP at that time include the Engineer Rabi'u Musa Kwakwanso, Governor of Kano State; Mr Chibuike Rotimi Amechi, Governor of Rivers State, Alhaji Ahmed Abdulfatah, Governor of Kwara State, Alhaji Murtala Nyako, former Governor of Adamawa State; Alhaji Aliyu Magatakarda Wamakko, Governor of Sokoto State; Alhaji Sule Lamido, Governor of Jigawa State and Alhaji Babangida Aliyu, Governor of Niger State. And in 2017 the drama continued with Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President, again moving from APC back to his former party PDP. Later on, APC had its own 'new APC' group that was led by Alhaji Galadima and they all again moved back to PDP. Prominent members of this group were Alhaji Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje, Chief Olagunsoye Oyinlola, Alhaji Ahmed Abdulfatah; they were later joined by the Senate President Bukola Saraki and Speaker of the House of Representative, Hon. Yakubu Dogara. As of 13th December 2018 the ruling APC was still ruffled by the aftermath of its primaries that had generated disputes in some states. Ogun and Imo States governors, for months, remained at loggerheads with the party National Chairman Adams Oshiomhole over the outcome of the party primaries held in those states (Adenuga, et al., 2021; Ngwu, & Ajah, 2022; Yahaya, 2019).

The 2023 general election has its fair share of intra-party conflicts, as APC's crisis was multifaceted, stemming from factors such as post-presidential primary election grievances, a crisis of trust/confidence among various tendencies within the party, and discontent in the Tinubu political camp. While the party's presidential primary was widely regarded as free, fair, and legitimate, post-primary election actions suggested that the outcome of the primary election raised some concerns. The petition brought by former Minister of State for Education, Honourable Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, demanding the disqualification of Senator Bola Tinubu, who won the presidential primary, was a key signal of concern. Nwajiuba ran in the APC presidential primaries. The former Minister was thought to be acting out the script of certain factions inside the party hostile to Tinubu's candidacy. Even after its electoral win in the 2023 elections, nominating persons to fill available positions remained a contentious matter, as manifested in the debate over who would lead the 10th National Assembly (Obaraye, 2023).

The two major opposition parties, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP) were also facing crises characterised by leadership tussles, suspensions, expulsions and court cases. The crisis in the PDP had

its roots in the outcome of the party's presidential primary election, where Rivers State governor, Nyesom Wike, lost to the former vice-president, Atiku Abubakar. After the primary, Atiku picked Delta State governor, Ifeanyi Okowa, as his running mate for the 2023 presidential election, against the recommendation of a committee chaired by Benue State governor, Samuel Ortom, which reportedly recommended Wike as the PDP vice presidential candidate. The Rivers governor would later lead four other PDP governors to demand the resignation of the party's chairman, Iyorchia Ayu, as one of the conditions for backing Atiku's presidential ambition. The G5 governors rejected all measures taken to resolve the problem, including the resignation of the party's Board of Trustees (BoT) chairman, Walid Jibrin (Ufuoma, 2023; Obaraye, 2023).

Following the outcome of the general elections, Fayose was suspended by the PDP leadership. The PDP leadership, led by Ayu, also ordered Ortom to appear before a disciplinary committee. Ayu was suspended by his ward for anti-party activity. Justice W. I. Kpochi of the Benue State High Court ordered Ayu to stop posing as the party's chairman. The Labour Party (LP) was likewise in a similar situation after the general election. The crisis between Julius Abure and Lamidi Bashir Apapa over the party's national chairmanship position continued to shake the foundation of the party (Ufuoma, 2023; Obaraye, 2023).

### **The Role of ADR in Resolving Intra-Party Conflicts**

It is duly recognized that justice can be found outside courts and that it can be reinforced by a variety of methods, structures, procedures, and by people that may have little, if anything, to do with courts or the court system (Sourdin, 2015). Law reform commission (2007, p. 9) states that "Access to justice should not only guarantee access to the court's system but also to adequate dispute resolution processes and forums to resolve disputes in a manner which best meets the goals of the parties involved in securing access to individualized justice."

There is evidence, from the literature reviewed, that the litigation process as an approach used in the management of political party disputes, has not been very effective. Distrust, bickering, decamping and unwarranted treatment of party members have continued to be a reoccurring decimal in party politics in Nigeria. This failure of the litigation process has created additional reasons for defection and in a few cases resulted in the creation or formation of a "political party within a political party", loss of lives, hates speeches, governance disruption, uncertainty, displacements and destruction of property. These are some of the aftermaths of many court judgments pertaining to intra-party disagreements. Hence the need for an

alternative approach and appropriate dispute resolution system that can at both intra and inter-party levels resolve conflicts so that its outcome ends in a flexible, friendly, timely and cost-effective manner where parties to the conflicts will have a win/win situation. This new strategy (ADR) is not only germane but very apt once litigation failures are juxtaposed with ADR outcomes (Obi, 2018; Tajti, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Dispute and conflict are used interchangeably, in this study, to connote a situation of disagreement as a result of incompatibility within a party or between parties. Realistic conflict theory and social conflict theory (SCT) were adopted as theoretical framework for this study. Realistic conflict theory was first developed by Muzafer Sherif (1954), an American psychologist who carried out the famous “Robbers Cave” study into group conflict. The theory is termed “Realist” because it proposes that conflict between groups isn't based on something irrational but on an actual need for resources. This theory provides a framework for proper understanding of the need to use Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and the norms of internal party democracy as effective mechanisms of resolving intra and inter-party disputes as these disagreements constitute what Donald Campbell called a social psychological model of intergroup conflict (Campbell, 1965, cited in Mutezo, 2015).

The skill with which Nigerian politicians struggle to power, typically for their self-interest, is the root cause of the apparent friction within and between all the political parties. The theory explains the feelings of bias and discrimination that accompany intergroup hostility and suggests that intergroup animosity might develop from competing aims and rivalry over scarce resources. Groups may compete over scarce resources like money, political influence, military protection, or social status that are either genuine or perceived to be scarce. The value of this idea, which undercuts the entirety of the realistic conflict theory, is questionable, specifically in terms of relations between groups in a broad societal framework. As is the case with many theories, this theory has also been questioned. The realistic conflict theory of intergroup behaviour has several flaws that should be recognized (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994), chief among them is the propensity to presume that conflict is always detrimental. Valentim (2010) asserts that it is apparent that groups with conflicts and significant ideological differences rarely make for harmonious relationships.

Social conflict theory (SCT) was also adopted for this study to complement Realist conflict theory. SCT has the potential to significantly improve internal democracy in Nigerian political parties through

alternative dispute resolution processes. It was therefore employed to investigate the article. Karl Marx and Max Weber developed this theory to better comprehend social conflict. Marx concentrated on class conflict in capitalist countries. Weber broadened conflict theory to encompass power struggles beyond economic class. According to SCT, society is characterized by numerous types of conflict that stem from social inequality and the battle for resources, power, and influence.

In the context of Nigerian political parties, where internal disputes are frequently caused by power struggles, a lack of openness, and unethical behaviour, social conflict theory might give insights into overcoming these difficulties. SCT offers a critical view of societal arrangements, emphasising the importance of competition, power dynamics, and class conflict in forming social structures. Understanding the root causes of internal conflicts within political parties via the lens of SCT allows stakeholders to build more effective alternative dispute resolution processes customised to the unique dynamics of any given system. Recognising that disputes may emerge as a result of unequal power distribution within party structures might, for example, lead to the establishment of mediation methods aimed at balancing power dynamics and promoting inclusion.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used for this study was primarily qualitative, with data collected from secondary sources such as books, news publications, library articles, and online sources to aid in the explanation of concepts such as improving internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties through alternative dispute resolution processes. These publications were examined to generate information about specific cases of intra- and inter-party conflicts in Nigeria since 1999, and to extract points made by various authors who have written on the subject of internal democracy in Nigerian political parties and the use of ADR as a conflict-resolution mechanism.

### **Discussion**

Resolving disputes is a crucial component of democracy. Democracy is a form of government that places a strong emphasis on the involvement and representation of the populace in decision-making. Conflicts are unavoidable in a diverse society with divergent interests and viewpoints. A democratic system's strength resides in its capacity to control and settle these disputes in amicable and appropriate ways. Party primaries, congresses, elections, and appointments are the most visible procedures that have caused disagreements and jeopardized party cohesiveness and

general governance processes in Nigeria.

During party primaries, members of a party vote in internal elections to select their candidates for general elections. Conflicts frequently emerge during primaries because of issues like allegations of unfairness, imposition of candidates, control of the party structure, and absence of transparency. These conflicts can weaken the unity of the party and divert attention from important governance issues by causing defections, party factions, and even legal battles. During party congresses, where party members gather to elect party officials, discuss party policies, and make decisions, disagreements over party leadership, allegations of manipulation, and the conduct of the congress may arise. Conflicts like these can divide parties and make it hard to make good decisions.

After an electoral victory, the appointment of individuals to various positions, including ministerial positions, board memberships, and other important roles, can also generate disputes. These disputes may arise due to issues such as favouritism, tribal or religious bias, lack of merit-based appointments, and allegations of corruption can strain party unity and erode public trust in the governance system. While disputes are unavoidable in any community, democracy provides a framework for handling and resolving them peacefully and productively. It develops the structures, procedures, and principles required to guarantee that conflicts are resolved democratically, promoting stability, inclusion, and development.

### **Conclusion**

The challenges militating against internal party democracy in Nigeria, as we have indicated, arise mainly from conflicting interests among party members and lack of clear-cut ideology that is capable of binding party members together. This narrative that breeds conflicts and court cases has to change if Nigeria's democracy must thrive and further develop. While reinforcing the ideological foundation of the country's political parties is a long-term process, we can start changing the current spate of conflicts and litigations by adopting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as a more favoured and more frequent way of resolving party conflicts. Conflict management is a fundamental aspect of democracy, which is a system of governance that emphasizes the participation and representation of the people in the decision-making process. It recognizes that in a diverse society with varying interests and perspectives, conflicts are inevitable, which makes adopting a mode of resolving them without acrimony very vital.

Therefore, political party members, especially leaders of the parties, should focus more on internal party mechanisms, especially ADR, in resolving all conflicts that may arise from primaries, congresses and general elections. The formal judicial process of litigation has not been able to pre-empt, mitigate or amicably resolve party disputes; rather, additional or multiple problems are further created, due to bitterness and renewed cyclical conflicts. Party formation, membership and operation involve human relationships and interactions that give rise to incompatibilities that make conflicts inevitable. Issues arising from incompatible relationships and perceived neglect or marginalization are usually complex issues that cannot be resolved by the win-or-lose nature of litigation. A more mutually fruitful way of resolving party disputes arising from such issues, and many others, is the deployment of Alternative Dispute Resolution options. ADR mechanism usually ends in win/win outcome for parties to conflicts because it is anchored on flexibility and elasticity of the rules and guidelines of operation and is always approved by the disputants themselves.

### **Recommendation**

Political parties and institutions should maintain openness, fairness, and inclusion in their procedures to reduce conflict and foster party cohesiveness and good governance. Strengthening internal party democracy, fostering a fair playing field, and building effective dispute resolution systems will minimize disputes and improve Nigeria's overall governance processes.

Political parties in Nigeria should uphold the tenets of democracy and practise internal democracy to enable their leadership to emerge democratically, and to prevent the rising culture of political violence and assassination associated with political party activities.

Legal reforms can significantly reduce the pressure on the courts by making provisions which would facilitate adoption and use of ADR processes, such as arbitration within political parties, by the political parties.

Also, by offering training sessions and workshops to party members on dispute resolution procedures and the benefits of ADR, political parties can foster a culture of open conversation, compromise, and consensus-building. Embracing these guidelines and actively using ADR methods can help political parties to promote a more inclusive and transparent decision-making process, which would ultimately give rise to a more virile and stable democracy in Nigeria.

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