AN ASSESSMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: AN EXAMINATION OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

AJAYI, OLUWASEUN CLEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, KOGI STATE UNIVERSITY, KABBA, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA,
ocajayi@ksukabba.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT
Political parties have been the central thrust of democratic practice, and assessing the performance of political parties and credibility of elections in Nigeria has become a complex task. The 2023 general elections marked a significant shift in the country's political landscape. The study examines the performance of political parties in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, highlighting the challenges faced during the elections, identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in party operations and as well the areas for improvement. Despite efforts to strength democratic institutions, the elections were marred by weak electoral governance, ethnic and regional dynamics, electoral law violations, godfatherism, money politics and vote buying which has undermined our democratic and electoral institution. This paper relied on secondary source of data collection such as party documents, electoral commission reports, journal articles, textbooks, newspaper, online publications and other relevant existing literatures, the theoretical framework adopt in this paper is the Institutional theory because it explains the linkage between Nigeria's electoral process and political parties' performance in Nigeria. Findings reveal that political parties are faced with numerous challenges such as lack of internal democracy, issue of party financing, lack of ideologies coherence, influence of ethnicity and religion, internal conflicts and factionalism. The paper emphasizes the need for strict compliance with electoral processes and transparency and accountability in the operations of political activities. Finally, the paper suggests a comprehensive electoral reform to address structural issues, increased accountability and transparency in the operations and financial activities of the parties.

Introduction

Election in Nigeria cannot be effective without the activities of political parties. In Nigeria, political parties continue to be the sole avenue for democratically elected leaders to take office (Sadeeque & Dele, 2017). Elections are institutional mechanisms stand as a legitimate means of choosing acceptable leaders who will represent the interest of the public at different stand of governance be it in aristocratic class or oligarchic (Seriki, Jimoh & Daniel, 2023). Elections have provided a means for the people to freely choose their representatives. Elections are thought to take place in every democracy, but not all of them are democratic. Elections that may feature a single candidate or a list of candidates with no other options are considered undemocratic. Even though there may be multiple candidates for each office, these elections are rigged or intimidated to guarantee that only the candidate approved by the government is selected. There might be real options in other elections, but only within the ruling party. According to Kirkpatrick (1984), these elections are not democratic. Elections guarantee democratic governance that lasts (Bamigbose, 2023).

Political parties are essential to democratic governance, because they serve as a conduit between the people and the government and a forum for citizen influence and participation in governance. Promoting the interests of their members, acquiring and retaining power within the government, and putting forward policy options are all crucial roles played by political parties in democracies. Political parties are most successful when they serve as significant avenues for selecting new leaders for the nation's evolving political landscape and for giving the public a say in the process. Political parties can also encourage public accountability, group efforts, public involvement, inclusivity, and legitimacy by making sure that the values and objectives of Nigerian citizens are taken into account during the governance processes. However, political Parties have been constrained to performance their primary responsibilities by internal flaws and obstacles in the political system.

Assessing the performance of political parties in Nigeria's 2023 general elections is crucial for understanding the country's democratic landscape. The 2023 elections marked 24 years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria, with significant implications for the country's political stability and regional influence. Political parties played a major role in ensuring that democratic is sustained and consolidated. Even though Nigeria's democracy is improving, there are still issues with political parties, such as godfatherism, poor party structures, a lack of internal democracy, Internal conflict and crises, inadequate compliance with existing laws, and poor public outreach. These problems undermine democratic processes by impeding political parties' capacity to operate inclusively and successfully. Significant differences in political participation were brought to light by Nigeria's general elections in 2023, especially for women, youth, and people with disabilities. These groups encountered significant obstacles to representation and entry, underscoring the necessity of a thorough evaluation of political parties' contributions to inclusivity.

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria marked a significant period for evaluating the performance of political parties in the country. These elections included the presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative elections, with the participation of major parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP), as well as other smaller parties. Historically, Nigeria's political scene has been dominated by two major parties: The All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). However, the 2023 elections witnessed the emergence of the Labour Party (LP) as a disruptive "third force," signaling growing voter dissatisfaction with the traditional parties. Additionally, smaller regional parties like the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) also gained attention in specific areas, reflecting Nigeria's diverse and fragmented political landscape.

However, several empirical studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by political parties in Nigeria, electoral malpractices, misconduct in the activity's political parties as well as ineffectiveness of INEC to monitor the activities and campaign finance of political parties. There is dearth of empirical studies that assess the performance of political parties' activities in the 2023 general elections, hence the study.

Methodology

The study adopts secondary source of data collection. A wide range of literatures on political party and 2023 general elections were reviewed in order to get well-informed information's and findings to assess the performance of political parties during the 2023 general elections. Data were gotten from the official reports by the Independent National electoral Commission (INEC) on the outcomes and performance of political parties across the states, Political parties documents, Electoral Acts 2022, INEC handbooks on political party, journal articles, textbooks, online publications were consulted on the study.

Literature Review

Given Nigeria's crucial role in the democratic development of Africa, academics have been interested in the performance of political parties in the country's elections. A new perspective on party dynamics, voter behavior, and the larger difficulties of electoral governance is offered by the general elections in 2023. In order to place the 2023 elections within these frameworks, this review summarizes the body of research on Nigeria's political parties, electoral procedures, and democratic development.

Conceptual Clarification

Political party has been given a wide range of definitions by scholars in field of political science. A political party is a group of people who have banded together with the ultimate objective of running for office through elections. However, competitive and regular elections have come to at least define the character of liberal democracy. Momoh (2013) famously defines a political party as a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed. This is not to say that the mere existence of political parties implies that a society is democratic or not. The foundational organizations of democracy, government, and the electoral process are political parties. In actuality, political parties have been romanticized to the point where academics argue that neither democracy nor democratic societies can be imagined. Stated differently, the presence of active political parties is essential to the survival of democracy in any given polity (Simebine, 2013:2).

In the same spirit, political parties are no longer relevant in guaranteeing legitimate elections and democracy, according to Diamond and Guntner (2011), Valelly (2000), and other scholars who have researched western democracies. The establishment and growth of an efficient multi-party system is a difficult task in Eastern Europe, which is just transitioning from a socialist one-party dictatorship to democracy.

Empirical Review

Political Party Dynamics in Nigeria

The political party system in Nigeria is frequently characterized by factionalism, a lack of ideological commitment, and weak institutional structures. According to scholars, the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) reflects a political environment in which political parties serve more as platforms for ideological governance than as means of acquiring power (Omotola, 2019).

According to Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013), political parties since independence are constructed along ethnic politics The National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), which began as a national party but later reduced its social base to a cultural association, the Igbo State Union of the southeast; the Action Group in the West, which developed from the Yoruba cultural association Egbe Omo Oduduwa; and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), which developed from the northern cultural association, Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa. The First Republic's politics were framed as a struggle for hegemony by the elites of the main ethnic formations, with these ethno-regional elite blocs fighting against one another. Therefore, the First Republic was marked by widespread electoral fraud in the 1964 and 1965 elections, which led to a political crisis, the First Republic's eventual fall, and the military's intervention in Nigerian politics. They assert that, the second republic was largely a rebirth of first republic arrangement of political parties. The general elections of 1979 and 1983 were heavily influenced by regional and ethnic politics. Up to the Second Republic's fall on December 31, 1983, there was political, ethnic, and religious violence, vandalism, political unpredictability, and rivalry between and within parties. The Second Republic's political parties were

distinguished by their use of money, thugs, and the police during electioneering campaigns, their lack of internal party democracy, factions, and electoral fraud. General Babangida's military government later outlawed all of the political parties that had formed in the Third Republic to run for office. The government subsequently created two political parties: The Social Democratic Party (SDP), which is "slightly to the left," and the National Republican Convention (NRC), which is "slightly to the right." The 1999 Constitution established the Fourth Republic. By April 2011, there were 63 registered political parties in Nigeria, marking an unprecedented opening in the country's political landscape. Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013) noted that numerous small parties exploited the opening of the political arena to register parties that turned out to be unprofitable but were intended to serve as conduits for the Independent National Electoral Commission's financial assistance to parties. However, Jinadu (2014) has maintained that Nigerian political parties have failed to meet the standards of electoral politics, competitive parties, and constructive diversity management.

In the 2023 elections, the Labour Party (LP) and other third forces emerged, challenging this dichotomy and casting doubt on smaller parties' ability to remain relevant in a fiercely competitive landscape (Okonkwo, 2023).

Studies revealed the role of third forces in the 2023 general elections, the emergence of LP signify a major dimension turn around in our political system. The APC and PDP duopoly are under threat from the Labour Party (LP) and other smaller parties that emerged in the 2023 elections. These third forces refer to political parties and candidates outside the regular dominant traditional parties in place during previous elections (APC- All Progressives Congress and PDP-People's Democratic party). the Labour party made significant changes across the country winning several seats at the National Assembly, States Assembly and governorship positions in some states. This giant stride marked a paradigm shift in Nigeria's political dynamics, labour party and other third forces were able to depend on the dissatisfaction of some electorates with the dominant parties. The potential of third forces to upend established political systems has been studied by academics, especially in urban and youth-dominated electorates (Onyejekwe, 2023). However, the ability of these movements to establish strong organizational frameworks and reach outside of cities is essential to their long-term viability. In his analysis of the Labour Party's performance, Obiora (2023) argues that the party's success in urban areas reflects a demand for change but highlights its limited reach in rural regions where traditional parties remain dominant. According to Aina, (2023), for the first time in the history of our political system, a third force candidate changed the narratives, because the strong performance of opposition parties stopped a winning candidate from getting the plurality and dominance of votes for the first time in our political dispensation (Fourth Republic, 1999 to date). To him, 37 percent of sub-national units were won by the third forces candidates which include the largest and viable states, Lagos and Kano. Scholars concluded that, the emergence of third forces in the 2023 elections has created inclusive democratic practice, competition and promote diversity in our political circle. Studies conducted on the 2023 general elections revealed that internal conflicts and crises undermines the performance of political parties during the election. Obi & Hassan, (2022), stated that, Internal conflicts and crises have been one the major issues affecting political parties, most political parties lack internal democracy and the legal and moral mechanism to resolve crises which has affect the performance and activities of political parties in carry out the required responsibilities.

Empirical studies also revealed that ethnic coloration characterized the dynamism of Nigeria's political system. Bande (2013), argues that, there are many factors that affect the dynamics and performance of political parties since inception, to him, colonial antecedents, regional, ethnic and religious cleavages; party splits, alliances and mergers; political and socio-cultural forces; constitutions and electoral laws; funding; ideological institutionalization; internal party democracy; and, the media are factors and challenges that undermines the performance of political parties in Nigeria. Nigerian political parties frequently use ethnic and regional divides to rally support, which serves to further polarize the country rather than promote unity (Adeyemi, 2021).

Studies conducted on the Electoral integrity and governance in Nigeria by Yakubu, (2023), stated the persistent challenges faced during elections activities which including vote-buying, voter intimidation, and manipulation of results. Innovations like the **Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)** introduced in

the 2023 elections aimed to enhance transparency, yet their effectiveness has been mixed. For example, Yakubu (2023) argues that while BVAS improved voter accreditation, logistical issues and delayed result transmission undermined trust in the process. Nwankwo and Chijioke (2023), point out that while technological reforms like BVAS and electronic results transmission have the potential to lessen electoral fraud, they also need strong implementation frameworks. However, ineffective technology deployment during the 2023 elections suggests that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is inherently inefficient (Ajayi, 2023).

Voter Behavior and Electoral Participation in Nigeria

voter participation rates are a direct indicator of the public's involvement in the democratic process, they have a significant impact on election results. Voter apathy and electoral violence have historically compromised Nigeria's electoral integrity, resulting in low turnout rates that distort outcomes and call into question the legitimacy of elected officials. This fact was highlighted by the general elections of 2023, which showed that even with notable advancements in online services and mobile connectivity, methods to increase voter turnout are still insufficient. Nigeria, for instance, has made significant strides in digital engagement, but the failure to convert these developments into higher voter turnout points to a gap between public resources and election participation (Igwe, 2021).

Dll (2023), stated that there are various factors that influenced voter's behavior and participation in the 2023 general elections. He argued that, media operation played a major role by sensitizing and educating the general public on the use of technology. He noted that, The INEC voter enrolment device (IVED), the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) for voter accreditation and e-transmission of results for collation, and the INEC results viewing (IReV) portal, which allows the public to view polling station results in real time.

According to Amao & Alliu, (2024), voters' behavior and participation in electioneering processes are as a result of certain factors. He identified ethno-religious, regional affiliations, party affiliations or identification as a determinant factor that influences voter behavior and participation in the 2023 general elections. He added that, voter behavior and choice are driven by primordial sentiments, religion bias and party identification and this attest to the social divisions that have enveloped politics in the country since independence.

Prysby and Scavo, (1993), identified a number of social and attitudinal factors that could influence or determine voters' behavior in an election. On the one hand, they proposed that the main attitudinal factors that may influence a voter's behavior during elections are party affiliation, personal characteristics, political party affiliation, and evaluations of government performance. The social factors that impact voting decisions, however, were found to be gender, constituency, ethnicity, and religion.

In another study conducted by Agomor & Adams, (2014), aimed to clarify how voters choose between evaluative factors like a candidate's qualities and achievements, the effectiveness of the government, and party policy platforms, and non-evaluative factors like political affiliation, ethnicity, or familial ties all of which are primarily psychological in nature. The study's conclusions demonstrated that factors influencing voters' decisions in elections include evaluative justifications like issue-based campaigns, candidate charisma, and the degree to which the ruling party keeps its campaign pledges. They contended that this data bolsters Nordin's (2014) assertion that issue-based political campaigns give voters the chance to identify the best candidate among a number of contenders because they aid in defining economic issues facing a state and inform voters of the candidate best suited to provide workable solutions to address economic problems in general and citizens' welfare in particular.

In Nigeria, socioeconomic circumstances, political consciousness, and faith in the electoral process have all had an impact on voter turnout. Youth and urban voters' interest in the 2023 elections increased, primarily due to the "Obidient Movement" that backed Labour Party candidate Peter Obi. A growing disenchantment with traditional parties and a desire for accountability are reflected in this (Okafor, 2023). According to scholars, there are two determinants factors that influences voter behavior and participation in the 2023 general elections. They are:

Empirical studies conducted by Adebayo, (2023), he emphasized the role of youth mobilization in enhancing participation, the 2023 elections' involvement of young people highlights the value of grassroots initiatives and social media in energizing voters. Low voter turnout (roughly 27%), however, suggests persistent indifference and structural obstacles to voting (Adebayo, 2023). According to Eze and Adekunle (2022), ethnic and regional influences voter behavior during electioneering activities, Nigerian voting habits frequently reflect regional and ethnic allegiances, indicating a political culture in which identity politics predominate over campaigns driven by policy. In 2023 general elections, voters voted along ethnic and regional line, it was evident that Peter Obi of Labour Party had majority of his vote from his region, South-East region and also the APC also enjoyed ethnic and regional support as a result ethnic background of President Ahmed Tinubu.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory is a fundamental framework in political science and organizational sociology that helps explain how formal and informal structures, norms, and regulations influence how people behave in particular settings. It is framework that assesses the performance of political parties in Nigeria's general elections in 2023. In Nigeria's democratic setting, the theory shed light on the dynamics of political parties, institutional theory is a fundamental procedure, voter behavior and political competition. It first appeared in the second half of the 20th century as researchers tried to understand how institutions affected different social phenomena. According to institutional theory, actors' choices and actions within a system are greatly influenced by institutions, which include formal laws, rules, and unwritten conventions.

Early researchers who examined how societal structures influenced individual behavior and participation in the society, like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, are credited with laying the foundation for institutional theory. However, thanks to important contributions from academics like Meyer & Rowan (1977), DiMaggio & Powell (1983), and Scott (1987), the modern development of Institutional Theory accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. These academics concentrated on the ways that institutions give social systems consistency, legitimacy, and a feeling of order.

Institutional theory provides a useful lens through which to examine the complex dynamics of political and organizational structures in order to evaluate the performance of political parties in Nigeria's general elections of 2023. This theoretical framework clarifies how the electoral system's formal and informal norms, regulations, and practices influence the conduct of important participants.

The importance of actors in Institutional Theory is emphasized by Patriotta (2020). This viewpoint highlights the agency of people and organizations participating in the electoral process in relation to the performance of political parties. Voters, political parties, and election officials are viewed as active participants in the institutional environment, both influencing and being influenced by it. A thorough examination of how these actors maneuver through and impact electoral systems is made possible by this lens. According to Emordi, Ekaka, Chinemerem & Ayinor (2024), The theory also emphasizes the importance of the institutional environment, which includes the interaction between formal and informal institutions, in shaping political processes.

The Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The study adopts the institutional theory which play a significant role in assessing the performance of political parties in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. This theory helps us understand how institutions such as political parties, shape the behavior and actions of individuals and groups within them. In the context of Nigerian politics, institutional theory can be used to analyze the internal dynamics of political parties such as the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). For instance, a study on the impacts of internal party democracy on the performance of the party's inability to conduct free and fair primary elections led to internal party crisis and threatened the party's survival.

Institutional theory examines the role of external institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in shaping the behavior, activities and actions of political parties. For example, INEC's capacity to conduct credible elections can impact the performance of

political parties. Institutional theory is highly relevant to assessing political parties' performance in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It highlights how the interplay of formal structures (e.g., INEC, electoral laws) and informal norms (e.g., party culture, voter behavior) shaped electoral outcomes. Strengthening institutional capacity, addressing systemic inefficiencies, and enhancing internal party democracy are essential for improving the performance of political parties in future elections.

Assessment of the Political Parties Performance in the 2023 General Elections

The performance of political parties in Nigeria's 2023 general elections highlights significant trends, challenges, and shifts within the country's political landscape. Established parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) continued to dominate in terms of nationwide networks, resource mobilization, and electoral results. However, the elections also revealed the growing influence of smaller, third-force parties such as the Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), signaling a potential transformation in the dynamics of Nigerian politics. To Yargwa & Abada, (2024), political parties in Nigeria, particularly the dominant parties transgressed democratic principles and internal democracy driven by anti-party activities, defection and undemocratic practices.

The APC retained its status as the ruling party by winning the presidency with Bola Ahmed Tinubu emerging victorious. The party benefited from its extensive political machinery, strategic alliances, and ability to mobilize resources across key regions. However, the APC's performance was not without challenges. Internal party divisions, as well as controversies over governance under the outgoing administration, affected its popularity in some regions (Ajayi, 2023). According to Anene & Ndubuisi (2024), the APC performance can be linked to lack of internal democracy experienced during primary elections conducted within the party and during the electioneering period. Furthermore, it is evident that the APC performance in the subsequent elections were far better. Oyeleke, (2022), believed that political party's performance in general elections can be severely affected by an internal crisis and a lack of internal party democracy. Momodu and Matudi (2013), also subscribed that most political parties experienced crisis, defection and fractionalization as a result of lack of internal democracy.

Eze & Adekunle, (2022) stated that the PDP, historically one of Nigeria's most dominant parties since 1999, faced significant setbacks during the elections. Although its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, secured a substantial number of votes, internal crises, including the rebellion of the G5 governors and leadership disputes, weakened the party's cohesion. This contributed to its inability to reclaim the presidency, highlighting the impact of internal party dynamics on electoral outcomes. However, Gabriel & Anietie, (2024), stated that, the PDP was a credible opposition in the 2019 general elections with Atiku Abubakar as the candidate and Peter Obi as the running mate. The party approached the 20023 election with weak structure and leadership tussle. The power tussle between Governor Wike of Rivers state and the Presidential Candidate, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku was one of the major contending issues that led to the failure of PDP during the 2023 general elections.

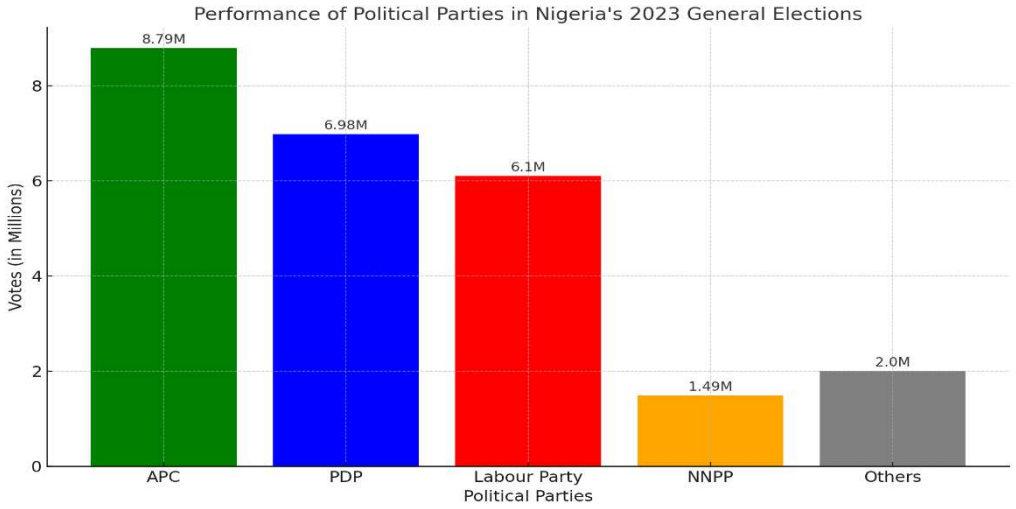
The Labour Party, led by Peter Obi, made remarkable strides, particularly among urban and youth voters. The party leveraged social media, grassroots mobilization, and public disillusionment with the APC and PDP to gain significant traction. While the Labour Party's stronghold was primarily in urban centers and the South-East region, it struggled to establish a robust presence in rural areas, limiting its overall impact. Nonetheless, its performance represented a shift towards a more pluralistic political landscape (Onyejekwe, 2023).

Okonkwo, (2023), noted that, the NNPP also emerged as a notable force, particularly in Kano State, where its candidate, Rabiu Kwankwaso, garnered widespread support. The NNPP's regional focus demonstrated the potential for smaller parties to challenge established players in localized contexts. However, like the Labour Party, the NNPP faced challenges in transitioning from regional influence to national relevance.

The 2023 general elections also underscored systemic issues affecting political party performance, such as the role of money politics, vote-buying, and allegations of electoral malpractice. While technological innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System

(BVAS) were introduced to enhance transparency, inconsistencies in their implementation undermined trust in the process. These challenges disproportionately affected smaller parties, which lacked the resources to counter institutional weaknesses (Yakubu, 2023).

Overall, the performance of political parties in the 2023 elections reflected both continuity and change in Nigeria's political system. While established parties maintained their dominance, the rise of third-force parties highlighted the growing demand for alternative political platforms. This development underscores the need for reforms to enhance electoral integrity, strengthen internal democracy within parties, and address systemic inequalities in Nigeria's political landscape.



Source: INEC and various election reports (2023)

Factors that Influences Political Parties Performance in the 2023 General Elections

The performance of political parties in Nigeria's 2023 general elections was shaped by several interrelated factors, reflecting the complexities of the country's political landscape. Among these factors, the role of electoral reforms stood out prominently. The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the electronic transmission of results aimed to enhance transparency and reduce malpractices. While these reforms were lauded for their potential, their uneven implementation affected party performance. Parties with robust technological adaptability, like the Labour Party, leveraged these innovations to engage urban voters effectively, while others struggled in regions where technical challenges arose (Yakubu, 2023).

Another critical factor was internal party dynamics. Weak internal democracy and factionalism plagued major parties like the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The PDP faced significant setbacks due to the defection of key figures and the rebellion of the G5 governors, which undermined its cohesion and electoral strategy. Conversely, the Labour Party, with a grassroots-driven campaign led by Peter Obi, benefited from relatively stronger internal unity, capturing the support of disillusioned voters, particularly the youth (Ajayi, 2023).

The influence of regional and ethnic politics also played a significant role. Established parties like the APC and PDP capitalized on their extensive networks and ethno-regional affiliations to secure votes in specific strongholds. The New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) gained dominance in Kano State due to the popularity of its leader, Rabiu Kwankwaso, demonstrating the impact of regional loyalties. However, the Labour Party struggled to expand beyond urban centers and the South-East, reflecting the challenges of breaking entrenched regional voting patterns (Eze & Adekunle, 2022).

Voter turnout and electoral participation significantly influenced outcomes. The 2023 elections recorded a turnout of approximately 27%, one of the lowest in Nigeria's history. This low turnout reflected voter apathy and a lack of trust in the electoral process. Established parties with deeper grassroots structures, like the APC, managed to mobilize their base effectively despite the widespread disillusionment, while smaller parties faced challenges in reaching rural voters (Okonkwo, 2023).

Campaign financing and resource distribution were also decisive. The APC and PDP, as dominant parties, benefited from extensive financial resources, allowing them to fund large-scale campaigns and deploy agents nationwide. In contrast, the Labour Party and NNPP operated on relatively limited budgets, which constrained their ability to compete in rural areas and regions with high logistical demands (Onyejekwe, 2023).

Lastly, social media and informal institutions emerged as pivotal tools, particularly for the Labour Party. Social media platforms enabled smaller parties to bypass traditional media barriers and reach a younger, tech-savvy electorate. This dynamic was a game-changer, allowing third-force parties to build momentum despite institutional disadvantages (Yakubu, 2023). These factors collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of political party performance in the 2023 general elections, highlighting the need for systemic reforms to address structural inequalities and enhance democratic participation.

Challenges of Political Parties in Nigeria

Political parties in Nigeria are face with multitude of challenges that hinder their ability to effectively function and contribute to the democratic process. These challenges are deeply rooted in the country's historical, social, and political contexts, and they continue to impact the functioning and development of political parties.

One of the most significant challenges is the issue of party financing. Political parties in Nigeria are heavily reliant on financial contributions from a few wealthy individuals or interest groups, which can lead to the entrenchment of patronage systems and corruption. According to Galadima & Umar, (2017), managing a national and durable political party with a strong political base require huge financial backing and resources. Elections since 1999 has shown huge influence of money bag. This financial dependence often distorts the party's ideological and policy orientations, making it more prone to serving the interests of a small elite rather than the general population. According to a study by Iyoha (2014), the absence of robust mechanisms for political financing, coupled with the dominance of a few financial backers, undermines party democracy and weakens the political system.

Another key challenge is the lack of ideological coherence among political parties. Many Nigerian political parties are often criticized for their lack of clear ideological stances or policy platforms, which leads to a lack of direction in governance. Instead of being based on ideologies, Nigerian parties tend to be more focused on power struggles and personal ambitions. According to Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013), the focus of party politics has shifted from ideology to personalities, ethnic groups, geopolitical zones, and power control. A national party's ideology plays a crucial role in communicating to the public its values and positions on social, political, and economic issues. Ideology is what gives a party its unique character and draws in voters. This lack of ideological clarity makes it difficult for voters to make informed choices, and it fosters a situation where political parties are more about competing for power rather than promoting coherent policies. As noted by Omotola (2012), the absence of ideological differences makes it easy for politicians to switch parties, further undermining party cohesion and stability.

In addition to ideological ambiguity, political parties in Nigeria face severe internal conflicts

and factionalism. These internal divisions often arise due to power struggles, disagreements over leadership, and competition for resources. As a result, parties frequently experience fragmentation, leading to splinter groups or the formation of new parties. These divisions weaken the party system, limit political stability, and create confusion among the electorate. For instance, the recent history of political parties like the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) shows how factionalism and infighting can cripple party operations and affect electoral outcomes.

Another challenge is the influence of ethnicity and religion on party politics. Nigeria is a highly diverse country, with deep ethnic and religious divides that often play a significant role in the formation and operation of political parties. Many political parties tend to reflect these divisions, leading to a politicization of ethnicity and religion that can hinder national unity and social cohesion. As highlighted by Akinwumi (2017), ethnic and religious considerations often override policy concerns, resulting in the marginalization of certain groups and creating a highly polarized political landscape.

Moreover, the electoral process itself poses a challenge to political parties in Nigeria. Electoral malpractices, including vote-buying, electoral fraud, and violence, have plagued Nigerian elections for decades. These issues distort the legitimacy of political parties and undermine the trust of the electorate. The role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has also been questioned at times, with criticisms that it is unable to ensure free and fair elections. The prevalence of electoral malpractice further compounds the difficulties that political parties face in their pursuit of power.

However, political parties in Nigeria face a range of challenges that hinder their ability to foster democratic development. These challenges, which include financial dependence, ideological incoherence, internal divisions, ethnic and religious divisions, and electoral malpractices, have resulted in a weak party system that struggles to provide effective governance and meet the needs of the population. Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening political institutions, ensuring better party financing mechanisms, promoting ideological clarity, and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria's general elections in 2023 represented a turning point in the nation's political history, demonstrating both the continued dominance of long-standing political parties and the rise of fresh forces looking to alter the political landscape. The Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) illustrated the expanding potential of alternative platforms, while the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) preserved their prominence through vast networks and resource mobilization. The elections revealed systemic issues, including low voter turnout, persistent challenges with internal party democracy, and inconsistencies in the implementation of electoral reforms such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). Despite these challenges, the performance of political parties underscored the evolving dynamics of voter behavior, regional politics, and the influence of technology in electoral processes.

The findings highlight the necessity of addressing critical structural and institutional weaknesses to foster a more inclusive and competitive political environment. This requires sustained efforts to improve electoral governance, promote internal democracy within parties, and enhance the trust of the electorate in the political process.

However, the study provides the following recommendations to enhance the performance of political parties and electioneering process in Nigeria. They are:

1. **Strengthening Electoral Reforms**: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should address the difficulties encountered during the implementation of BVAS and electronic result transmission in order to increase transparency and credibility. Investing in strong infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and providing thorough training for electoral staff can reduce technical issues and guarantee consistent implementation of reforms.

2. **Encouraging Internal Party Democracy**: To combat factionalism and anti-democratic candidate selection procedures, political parties should give internal reforms top priority. Parties will become more cohesive and credible as a result of transparent and inclusive procedures, which will also make them more receptive to the demands of the electorate and members.

3. **Using Technology to Engage Voters**: Political Parties should keep using digital platforms and social media to reach out to voters, especially young people and those living in cities. Party members can improve their interaction with tech-savvy voters by receiving training on successful digital campaign tactics.

4. **Fostering Emerging Political Forces**: Smaller parties should receive institutional support, such as funding, media outlets, and voter education materials, in order to promote pluralism. Emerging parties can increase their influence outside of their local strongholds and create enduring networks with the aid of these policies.

5. **Strengthening Campaign Financing Regulations**: Strict enforcement of campaign finance laws is necessary to level the playing field. This entails keeping an eye on party spending and reducing the impact of money politics, which erodes electoral equity and gives established parties an unfair advantage.

By following these suggestions, Nigeria can create a more robust democratic system that promotes fair competition, motivates citizens to get involved, and represents the preferences of its diverse populace.

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