

**INTRA-PARTY CONFLICT AND INTERNAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: A
STUDY OF THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 2015 – 2023**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined intra-party conflicts and their impact on the internal democracy and political performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. The study was motivated by the persistent leadership crises, factional struggles, defections, and disputes over candidate selection that affected the stability and effectiveness of the PDP following its loss of federal power in 2015. The objectives of the study were to examine the major causes of intra-party conflicts within the PDP and analyze how these conflicts affected the party's internal democracy and political performance. The study adopted Elite Theory as its theoretical framework to explain how competition among influential political actors shaped party structures, leadership processes, and organizational stability. A qualitative research design was employed, while data were obtained through documentary sources including party records, electoral reports, newspaper publications, academic literature, and political commentaries. Qualitative content analysis was used for data interpretation. The findings revealed that intra-party conflicts within the PDP were primarily driven by elite rivalry, zoning controversies, leadership disputes, and candidate imposition. The study further found that these conflicts weakened internal democracy, reduced member participation, encouraged defections, and negatively affected the party's electoral competitiveness and public image. The study concluded that strengthening internal democratic mechanisms and effective conflict resolution processes are essential for improving party cohesion, stability, and democratic governance in Nigeria.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Democracy is universally recognized as a system of government that thrives on the principles of participation, representation, accountability, and inclusiveness. At the center of democratic governance are political parties, which serve as vehicles for leadership recruitment, political mobilization, policy articulation, and governance. For democracy to function effectively, political parties must themselves operate democratically by allowing broad participation, transparency, fairness, and accountability in their internal affairs. This makes the issue of internal democracy within political parties highly significant in democratic systems. In Nigeria, however, political parties have continued to experience persistent internal crises, factional struggles, elite domination, and leadership disputes, all of which weaken party stability and democratic development. The period between 2015 and 2023 provides an important context for examining these challenges within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), one of Nigeria's major political parties.

Internal democracy refers to the extent to which political parties adhere to democratic principles in the management of their internal affairs, including candidate selection, leadership elections, policy formulation, conflict resolution, and decision-making processes. It ensures that party members actively participate in party governance rather than remaining subordinate to dominant political elites. Where internal democratic principles are weak, intra-party conflicts often emerge, leading to factionalism, defections, mistrust, and organizational instability. In Nigeria, the absence of strong internal democratic structures has consistently contributed to political instability within parties, thereby affecting the broader democratic process. The study of intra-party conflict and internal democracy is therefore critical to understanding the challenges facing democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), established in 1998, played a dominant role in Nigeria's political landscape from 1999 until its loss of presidential power in 2015. Despite its influence, the party has repeatedly experienced serious internal crises arising from leadership struggles, zoning controversies, candidate imposition, and disagreements over party administration. Following its defeat in the 2015 general elections, the PDP entered a period characterized by intense factional disputes and power struggles among competing political interests. These conflicts exposed deep weaknesses in the party's internal democratic processes and threatened its organizational cohesion. Internal divisions within the PDP became more pronounced during preparations for subsequent elections, particularly the 2019 and 2023 electoral cycles.

The issue of zoning and power-sharing became one of the major sources of conflict within the PDP between 2015 and 2023. Zoning refers to the informal arrangement through which political offices are rotated among different regions in order to promote inclusiveness and national balance. Although the PDP adopted zoning as a mechanism for managing political competition and maintaining unity, disagreements over its implementation generated significant tension within the party. The controversy surrounding the 2023 presidential ticket, which many party members expected to be zoned to the South after President Muhammadu Buhari's northern presidency, created deep divisions when Atiku Abubakar from the North emerged as the party's presidential candidate. This development triggered dissatisfaction among several influential party stakeholders and contributed to factional opposition within the party.

Leadership disputes also constituted a major aspect of intra-party conflict within the PDP during the study period. The 2016 leadership crisis involving Ali Modu Sheriff and Ahmed Makarfi resulted in prolonged legal and political battles that severely weakened the party's unity and organizational effectiveness. The conflict created parallel leadership structures and

generated uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of party leadership until the Supreme Court judgment of 2017 recognized Ahmed Makarfi as the authentic leader of the party. Similarly, the emergence of the G5 Governors in 2022 under the leadership of Nyesom Wike reflected internal resistance against the party's leadership and dissatisfaction with the handling of zoning arrangements and power distribution within the party structure.

Intra-party conflicts within the PDP also reflected broader issues relating to elite domination and weak institutionalization of party structures in Nigeria. Political godfathers, financiers, and influential elites often exercised excessive control over party decisions, particularly in candidate selection and leadership appointments. Such practices undermined merit, transparency, and participation within the party, thereby weakening internal democracy. Where party members perceive internal processes as unfair or manipulated, confidence in party leadership declines, often resulting in defections, litigations, and parallel political alignments. This condition weakens party cohesion and reduces the ability of political parties to effectively perform their democratic functions.

The relationship between intra-party conflict and internal democracy is closely linked to democratic development and political stability. Political parties that lack transparent and inclusive internal mechanisms often experience recurring crises that affect governance and electoral credibility. Weak internal democracy undermines accountability because leaders who emerge through manipulated processes are more likely to prioritize personal or factional interests over collective party goals. Conversely, parties that uphold democratic principles internally are more likely to promote political stability, member participation, and institutional legitimacy. Therefore, the quality of internal democracy within political parties significantly influences the broader democratic environment in Nigeria.

Between 2015 and 2023, the PDP struggled to maintain unity amidst competing regional interests, leadership rivalries, and ideological inconsistencies. Persistent factional disputes

weakened the party's electoral performance and reduced public confidence in its organizational stability. In many instances, internal conflicts led to mass defections, parallel party structures, and litigations that distracted the party from effective opposition politics and policy development. These challenges demonstrated the extent to which weak internal democratic practices can undermine party effectiveness and democratic consolidation.

The issue of candidate imposition further intensified intra-party conflicts within the PDP during the study period. In several states, party primaries were criticized for lacking transparency and fairness, with allegations that influential party leaders imposed preferred candidates against the wishes of ordinary members. Such practices generated dissatisfaction among party members and contributed to factional divisions within state and national party structures. The inability of party institutions to effectively manage disputes and ensure credible internal elections exposed weaknesses in conflict resolution mechanisms and democratic accountability within the party.

Furthermore, intra-party conflicts within the PDP affected not only the party itself but also Nigeria's broader democratic process. Political instability within major parties often contributes to electoral uncertainty, governance challenges, and declining public trust in democratic institutions. When political parties fail to manage internal disputes democratically, citizens become disillusioned with the political system, leading to voter apathy and declining political participation. Thus, the quality of internal democracy within political parties remains essential for sustaining democratic governance and institutional stability in Nigeria.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of intra-party conflict and internal democracy highlights the importance of institutional development, participation, and accountability in democratic systems. Political parties that encourage inclusiveness, transparency, and effective conflict management contribute positively to democratic consolidation. Conversely, parties

characterized by authoritarian leadership, elite domination, and weak institutional structures often reproduce instability within the wider political system. The PDP's experiences between 2015 and 2023 therefore provide an important case for understanding how internal party dynamics shape democratic development in Nigeria.

In summary, intra-party conflict and internal democracy remain central issues in Nigeria's political development. The experiences of the Peoples Democratic Party between 2015 and 2023 demonstrate how leadership struggles, zoning controversies, elite interference, and weak institutional mechanisms undermine party cohesion and democratic practice. Although the PDP remains one of Nigeria's most influential political parties, its recurring internal crises reveal the dangers of weak internal democracy and excessive elite control. Strengthening internal democratic structures within political parties is therefore essential for promoting political stability, accountability, and sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria. This study seeks to examine the nature, causes, and implications of intra-party conflict within the PDP and assess how these conflicts affected internal democracy and political performance in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 has been characterized by the dominance of political parties that often struggle with internal cohesion and democratic discipline. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), despite being the longest serving ruling party in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, has continued to suffer from recurring internal conflicts that weaken its political stability and performance. Provisions within the party's constitution, particularly those relating to internal democracy, candidate selection, and the zoning principle, are frequently contested or inconsistently implemented. The zoning arrangement, designed to balance power between the North and South, has been a major source of tension, especially during the lead up to the 2023 general elections when the party's presidential ticket

was widely expected to shift to the South but was eventually secured by Atiku Abubakar from the North. This development intensified divisions within the party and exposed deep fractures in its internal structure.

In addition, leadership tussles and elite rivalries have played a significant role in destabilizing the party. The 2016 leadership crisis involving Ali Modu Sheriff and Ahmed Makarfi led to a prolonged legal battle that culminated in the Supreme Court judgment of 2017 which recognized Makarfi as the legitimate leader. Similarly, the emergence of the G5 Governors in 2022 led by Nyesom Wike highlighted internal resistance against the party's leadership under Iyorchia Ayu particularly over the failure to uphold zoning principles by retaining both the national chairmanship and presidential candidacy in the North. These conflicts alongside earlier disputes during the 2018 primaries and post 2015 electoral loss demonstrate a pattern of elite driven struggles that undermine party unity.

Issues such as imposition of candidates, lack of transparency in primaries, disregard for zoning arrangements, and leadership crises have consistently disrupted the party's internal harmony. These problems not only breed factionalism but also lead to mass defections as seen after the 2015 Nigerian General Elections, poor electoral outcomes, and a gradual erosion of public trust in the PDP's commitment to democratic principles. Consequently, rather than functioning as a unifying political institution capable of deepening democratic practice, the party has often become a battleground for competing elite interests and power struggles that threaten its internal cohesion and long term viability.

Despite the growing attention on political reforms in Nigeria, there is still limited empirical understanding of how internal party crises within the PDP, particularly those linked to constitutional provisions, zoning controversies, and elite conflicts, affect its ideological coherence, organizational stability, and capacity to contribute to democratic consolidation. Most existing studies have focused on electoral performance or isolated leadership disputes

without adequately situating them within the broader institutional framework of the party or examining specific conflict episodes and actors over time. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining the nature, causes, and effects of intra party conflicts in the PDP from 2015 to 2024 with particular attention to constitutional provisions, zoning arrangements, and key political actors involved in order to highlight their impact on democratic growth and suggest pathways for strengthening internal democracy in Nigerian political parties.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the major causes of intra-party conflicts within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from 2015 to 2023?
2. How have these conflicts affected the PDP's internal democracy and overall political performance in Nigeria?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine Intra-Party Conflict and Internal Democracy in Nigeria: a study of the People's democratic Party, 2015-2023. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the major causes of intra-party conflicts within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023.
2. Analyze the impact of these internal conflicts on the party's democratic practices and political performance.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes both theoretically and practically to the understanding of intra-party conflict and internal democracy in Nigeria's political system.

Theoretically, the study adds to existing literature on political parties, internal democracy, and democratic governance by providing a contextual analysis of how zoning arrangements, leadership struggles, and elite rivalry influence party cohesion and democratic practices within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). By focusing specifically on the PDP between 2015 and 2023, the study enriches academic discourse on party politics, political stability, and democratic development in emerging democracies such as Nigeria.

Practically, the study provides useful insights for political parties, policymakers, electoral management bodies, and democratic reform advocates on the importance of transparency, fairness, inclusiveness, and effective conflict management within party structures. The findings of the study will help political leaders and party stakeholders understand the implications of zoning controversies and intra-party conflicts on internal democracy and political performance. The study will also serve as a guide for strengthening internal democratic mechanisms, promoting party unity, and improving political accountability within Nigerian political parties. Furthermore, the study will benefit researchers, students, civil society organizations, and scholars interested in party politics, democratic governance, conflict management, and political development in Nigeria.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on intra-party conflict and internal democracy within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. The temporal scope covers a significant period in the history of the party beginning from its loss of presidential power in 2015 to the period following the 2023 general elections, which witnessed major internal disputes, zoning controversies, leadership crises, and factional divisions within the party.

Geographically, the study is situated within Nigeria and examines intra-party conflicts at the national, zonal, and state levels within the PDP. At the national level, the study focuses on conflicts involving the party leadership, presidential primaries, zoning arrangements, and

policy direction. At the zonal level, attention is given to power-sharing arrangements and regional political alignments across the six geopolitical zones. At the state level, the study examines factional disputes, governorship primaries, leadership struggles, and grassroots disagreements within selected PDP state structures.

Conceptually, the study is limited to examining how the zoning formula contributed to intra-party conflict within the PDP and how these conflicts affected the party's internal democracy and political performance between 2015 and 2023. The study specifically focuses on issues such as zoning controversies, leadership disputes, elite rivalry, candidate selection, and constitutional provisions guiding party administration. The study does not extend to inter-party conflicts or broader electoral malpractice except where such issues relate directly to internal party dynamics within the PDP. The scope is therefore confined to understanding how internal conflicts within the PDP influenced party cohesion, democratic practices, and political effectiveness in Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews relevant literature on intra-party conflicts, internal democracy, and political performance within political parties, with specific reference to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria. The review is organized into five sections. The first section presents the conceptual review, which clarifies key concepts central to the study. The second section focuses on the thematic review of literature, organized around themes derived from the objectives of the study. The third section discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the research. The fourth section reviews relevant empirical studies, while the final section summarizes the reviewed literature and identifies gaps the present study seeks to address.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Intra-Party Conflict

Intra-party conflict is a prolonged disagreement, rivalry, and struggle that happens within a political party between members of the party, factions, or leadership organs. These can be over issues of control of the leadership, selection of candidates, allocation of party resources, direction of ideology, and/or political positioning. Intraparty conflict is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather it is indicative of structural and organizational issues within parties. In a democratic system, political parties are expected to conduct internal competition in a constructive manner, and where internal competition takes a negative form, it creates instability. Intra-party conflict is thus a conflict of cooperation/competition within the same

political party. Although it is an element of party politics, its strength and impact depend on the nature of party politics. These are more likely to be expressed in the emerging democracy because of weak regulations within the institutions and fragile institutions.

Political scientists have theorized that intra-party conflict is normal and pathological to the organization of a party. According to Klingelhöfer and Müller (2024), intra-party conflict is a result of the interplay between party actors with conflicting preferences and ambitions in the same institutional context. They believe that conflict is more noticeable in situations where there are no effective means of democratically expressing dissent. The visibility is amplified in times of critical political events like primaries, leadership elections, or a change in leadership. In this sense, intra-party conflict is not just a disagreement but a conflict that persists and compromises party unity. Academics also report that such fights can happen throughout a party's democratic trajectory, growing in strength as more and more of the party loses relevance and as it faces a growing threat to survival. So, there is intra-party conflict both from the inside and outside.

There is also a tight connection between intra-party conflict and hierarchy and authority in political parties. Parties that have weak internal structures or have poorly enforced rules are more likely to suffer severe internal conflicts, as noted by Bolleyer (2022). In ambiguous situations, there is a competition for supremacy between players, and it can be done with confrontation. They contend that the internal control functions of parties are critical to managing conflict and preventing conflict from fracturing. Regulatory functions within the party are important ways to manage conflict and to prevent conflict from fracturing, Bolleyer et al. argue. Without a good conflict regulation system, conflicts degenerate into factional warfare that endangers the unity of the party. This is especially likely to occur in situations

where the informal power networks are more powerful than formal institutional structures. Thus, within the party there is a breakdown in discipline and leadership.

Intra-party conflict has implications for internal party democracy from a democratic point of view. According to Ufuoma and Princewill (2024), it is an accepted fact that disagreement within parties is inevitable, but the level of conflict reduces and compromises democratic values like participation, transparency, and fairness. They assess that Nigeria's party politics has so far been characterized by unresolved conflict within parties, which leads to the exclusion of party members' voices through candidates' appointments. The conflict within the party weakens its capacity to foster democracy, the values expected to be promoted by parties. Parties are no longer means to make collective decisions, but fields of elite competition. The effect of this dynamic is that it skews grassroots members' internal democratic processes and their representation of them.

Intra-party conflict has been seen in the Nigerian context as a common occurrence in party politics. According to Gambo (2022), party conflict in Nigeria is frequently ideological and/or materialistic since it is about contestation over state power and material resources. Such clashes are likely to escalate in times of elections, especially primary elections and party congresses. Gambo et al. also maintain that the winner-takes-all political system in Nigeria worsens the divisions within the nation. This makes the members of the party sense that there is competition within the party and compromises are rare. Intraparty conflict, therefore, is a reflection of the overall political culture of high competition and low institutional constraint.

Comparative studies also reveal that there is no particular association between intra-party conflict and developing democracies. In their analysis of radical right parties in Europe, Pytlas and Biehler (2024) show that ideological struggles within the party can be a key driver

in how a party defines itself and acts. They find that intra-party conflict is even possible in very institutionalized party systems. But the results vary from party to party in the way that they deal with dissent. When internal processes of negotiations are available, conflict can result in adaptation and renewal. Without such mechanisms, there is fragmentation and decline in conflict. The comparison is useful to emphasize the role of institutional capacities in managing internal conflicts.

Intraparty conflict also has an impact on the behaviour of legislators and policy coherence. Harbridge-Yong and Snead (2025) suggest that intraparty dissent can manifest in disunity in party voting and differences in policy stance. Their analysis indicates that the lack of party leaders' reconciliation of internal interests results in members functioning on their own, which leads to a reduction in party discipline. Such a fight damages party reputation and effectiveness, particularly in parliament. It also makes it more difficult to communicate with the public as it begins to reveal the differences among the parties. As a consequence, intra-party conflict is not confined to internal party dynamics, but has consequences for party outcomes in terms of political governance.

The impact of intra-party conflict on elections has grown more and more an increasing object of study. Internal conflicts within the PDP had a negative impact on its performance in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, Adamu and Yusufu (2025) note. Their research found that there was poor campaign coordination due to factionalism, parallel party structures, and leadership disputes. These conflicts lowered the voters' trust and led to defections by party members. The internal clash of interests as a factor in electoral defeats is thus an important variable to consider. It reminds us that the unity within is linked to the unity of the outside in politics.

Moreover, there has been a correlation between intra-party conflict and political defections and party instability. In the study, Ambali et al. (2024) show that in the event of an internal dispute for a prolonged period, members who feel aggrieved tend to defect towards other parties. This helps to diminish party organization and continuity. The scholars say that if grievances are not resolved democratically, exit is a “rational” alternative to those who are displeased. This is especially true in Nigeria where party allegiance is more of political goodwill than allegiance. Intra-party conflict, then, is a factor that helps the fluidity and instability of the party system.

To conclude, intra-party conflict is a multi-layered phenomenon which has multiple roots in political party organization, ideology and party power. Intra-party conflict can be ideological or hierarchical in nature, as it is a reflection of the conflicting visions of party identity and control (Kölln & Polk 2024). Conflict in a party is a necessary issue, but the severity and impact of the conflict are related to the strength of democratic processes within the party. When poorly managed, intra-party conflict undermines unity, internal democracy, and political performance. Understanding this concept is therefore essential for analyzing the challenges faced by the Peoples Democratic Party in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.

2.1.2 Internal Democracy

Internal democracy refers to the extent to which political parties adhere to democratic principles in the management of their internal affairs. It encompasses the participation of party members in decision-making, transparency in leadership selection, accountability of party officials, fairness in candidate nomination, inclusiveness, adherence to party constitutions, and respect for established rules and procedures. In a democratic political system, political parties are expected to serve as democratic institutions where members have equal opportunities to influence policies, elect leaders, and contest for elective offices without

undue interference from powerful individuals or groups. Internal democracy therefore strengthens party cohesion, enhances legitimacy, and contributes to democratic consolidation (Scarrow, 2005).

According to Scarrow (2005), internal democracy is a broad concept that describes the procedures through which party members participate in deliberations and decision-making within political parties. It emphasizes inclusiveness, transparency, representation, accountability, and competition in party affairs. Similarly, Salih (2003) argues that internal democracy requires political parties to promote equal participation, collective decision-making, and respect for the rights of members. These principles distinguish democratic parties from organizations dominated by authoritarian leadership or elite control.

In Nigeria, internal democracy is constitutionally and legally recognized as a fundamental requirement for political parties. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) and the Electoral Act, 2022 require political parties to conduct transparent congresses and primary elections for the selection of candidates seeking elective offices. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is also empowered to monitor party primaries to ensure compliance with statutory provisions. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these legal requirements has remained problematic because many political parties frequently disregard their constitutions and established procedures during leadership elections and candidate selection (Omotola, 2010; Ojukwu, 2011).

The practice of internal democracy in Nigeria has been undermined by several structural and institutional challenges. One of the most prominent is the excessive influence of political godfathers and party elites, who frequently determine party candidates through imposition rather than competitive primaries. Candidate imposition deprives ordinary members of meaningful participation and weakens confidence in party institutions. In many instances,

party primaries are manipulated through delegate selection, vote buying, intimidation, or outright substitution of candidates after the conclusion of primaries. Such practices violate democratic principles and frequently generate post-primary disputes that escalate into prolonged intra-party conflicts (Ojukwu, 2011; Magolowondo, 2006).

Another challenge is the concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of party executives and influential stakeholders. Rather than allowing broad consultation among members, critical decisions concerning leadership positions, zoning arrangements, coalition building, and candidate nominations are often taken by a small circle of party elites. This centralization of authority discourages grassroots participation and creates dissatisfaction among members who feel marginalized. As a result, internal democracy becomes procedural rather than substantive, existing only in formal party constitutions but not in actual practice (Salih, 2006; Scarrow, 2005).

Poor internal democracy has become one of the major causes of intra-party conflicts in Nigeria. Disputes arising from manipulated primaries, unequal distribution of party offices, lack of transparency, and non-compliance with party constitutions often lead to factionalization, litigations, defections, and leadership crises. These conflicts weaken political parties, reduce electoral competitiveness, and undermine public confidence in democratic institutions. Several Nigerian political parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Progressives Congress (APC), and other parties, have experienced recurrent internal crises largely attributable to failures in internal democratic processes (Ojukwu, 2011; Innocent et al., 2020).

Within the context of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) between 2015 and 2023, internal democracy became a central issue following the party's defeat in the 2015 general election. The struggle for party leadership, disagreements over zoning arrangements, disputes

concerning presidential primaries, and controversies surrounding the selection of candidates contributed significantly to persistent intra-party conflicts. The emergence of factions, numerous court cases, and the defection of prominent party members reflected the inability of the party to consistently institutionalize democratic procedures in managing its internal affairs. These developments demonstrate that weak internal democracy remained a critical factor explaining the recurrent crises within the PDP during the study period (Yusuf, 2015; Ojukwu, 2011).

From a broader perspective, internal democracy is indispensable for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Political parties serve as the gateway through which leaders emerge and public offices are contested. When parties operate democratically, they promote merit-based leadership, accountability, political stability, and citizen confidence in the democratic process. Conversely, when internal democracy is weak, political parties become susceptible to elite domination, factionalism, electoral disputes, and governance challenges. Strengthening internal democracy through transparent primaries, adherence to party constitutions, effective dispute resolution mechanisms, and greater participation of party members is therefore essential for improving the quality of Nigeria's democratic system (Scarrow, 2005; Randall & Svåsand, 2002).

2.1.3 Political Performance of Political Parties

Political performance of Political Parties refers to the capacity of political parties to perform the following: win elections, remain cohesive, influence public policy, and gain the confidence of the public in a political system. Winners are not only those who win elections, but those who do so by raising support, standing up for their interests, and meeting the needs of society in a good manner. Usually, the measure of political performance is in terms of the results of the election, the survival of the party, the public acceptance of the performance, and

the acceptability of the policies. Political Parties are the major interface between the citizens and government in democratic systems and thus play a key role in democratic governance. The lack of accountability resulting from poor performance of parties compromises the accountability of democracy and reduces citizens' engagement. Alternatively, good politics plays a role in the strengthening of democracy and in the consolidation of institutions. Political performance is thus a reflection of the power of the party and political situations.

The significance of electoral success as one of the areas of political performance has been emphasised. The party's organizations and social base are very strong, which is helping them to do well in elections. In this sense, for instance, religious political parties are able to provide social services to the voters and/or to develop networks of civil society, which leads to electoral support for these parties (Rebelo, 2022). This type of embeddedness helps to maintain voters' allegiance in times other than elections. Hence, electoral victory is more about participation over the years, rather than just campaigning. In the absence of enduring social relations between the actors, their political fate will probably be unstable. Political performance deals with the relationship of the parties with society; hence, there is a close relationship between political performance and this.

The institutional and organisational capacity also has a strong influence on the conduct of politics. Effective parties are organised within themselves, have effective leadership with a good sense of responsibility, and are admin-very efficient. Lacking organizational capacity often results in a lack of coordination and a lack of consistency of policies. In nascent democratic environments, a lack of institutions challenges the credibility of the political parties and people's faith in them (Abdulkarim, 2023). This renders the capacity of parties to keep their commitments and to undertake governance roles weak. By this method, the

political performance can be considered as a proxy for the overall/institutional quality. The performance of the party is bolstered by strong institutions, and is limited by weak ones.

Also, the political and economic climate has an impact on political performance. The public perceptions of the performance of political parties have usually been measurable influences on economic indicators that, in turn, influence government changes, elections, and political transition. Some empirical evidence exists that political uncertainty in the election period could affect confidence in the market and economic stability (Yiadom et al., 2024). A good transition is considered to be competent and reliable when the parties are considered competent and reliable. On the other hand, chaotic transitions have a negative impact on parties' reputation and legitimacy. But the working of politics has political consequences – economic governance. The interdependency only accentuates the multi-faceted nature of party performance.

When it comes to political performance, there is a large-scale concept of accountability. Parties should express clear plans and take responsibility for their implementation in the exercise of power. The more policy-focused than patronage-oriented the political groups are, the better they are able to keep the legitimacy of their political position. In resource economies in Africa, there is a strong correlation between the performance of the political actors and accountability mechanisms such as programmatic orientation and electoral competitiveness (Alence and Ndlovu, 2025). If clientelism plays a key role in society, performance diminishes quickly and is tenuous. When someone is held accountable, they can be more confident in the electoral process, and they feel that the party is strong. As such, the linkage between political performance and governance and accountability of political parties is strong.

Party messaging also matters for political results, and is clear and consistent. Those parties that can tell a story and policy position are more likely to be supported by the public. Analyses of European parties reveal that both old and new parties compete on shaping rhetorical consensus, via manifestos and public communication (Mitru and Tap, 2026). If there is confusion over the message or if the message changes, party identification is reduced, and voters are confused. Ideological unity and communication are then essential for good political performance. If the parties do not come up with clear positions, they are not distinguishable. The effectiveness of communicating, in turn, is a part of political performance.

The impact on the citizens' assessment of the performance of political actors can be accomplished after the fact. People are evaluating parties and their performance according to whether parties' promises and policy pledges are respected when they are in power. Research on retrospective pledge voting suggests that voters take revenge on the party-in-power in case of poor performance (Matthieß, 2022). This instills accountability and encourages them to operate well. When parties fail to perform, the retribution of elections is near. Hence, there is continuous surveillance of the voters' performance. This should help to confirm that performance isn't an absolute value, but one that is judged over time.

Political engagement and party branding also play an important role in the performance of parties. Generally, more loyal members are found among the politically active parties and the parties with good political pictures. Engagement may increase the emotional connection between voters and their parties as well as increase party brand recognition (Fahad and Rashid, 2024). Any brand with a strong presence is more likely to be able to cope with times of downturn and to retain key backing. However, if there is not much engagement, the relevance of the vote is low, and people aren't that interested. It is here that the way parties

deal with their public image will have an impact on political performance. Engagement helps to change the nature of parties from electoral machines to political brands. Engagement is key to changing parties from electoral machines to political brands.

The performance is the dominant one of the new politics, media, and digital communication. In today's day and age, memes and online communication are tools for communicating identity and rallying partisanship for a political party. The study of political memes reveals the influence of political parties and politicians on the public's opinion in the digital culture (Kumar et al., 2024). Digital media can be a form of being seen that can be very helpful, but can result in a loss of credibility when used inappropriately. When making a digital impact, a political player's success therefore depends on the decisions made regarding the communication strategy. However, a keyword in the context of innovation and responsibility on the shoulders of the parties is balance. Assessment in the digital domain has become a part of the assessment terrain of performance assessment.

Parties' strategies and political marketing greatly influence the performance of the parties. It appears that the kind of voters who see a link between the message and voters' expectations and context will vote better. Party campaign studies in the area show that it is very important to win elections through the factors of credibility, consistency of message, and the branding of candidates. Lack of coordination in campaigns can lead to voter distrust and lack of party popularity. The lack of coordination in campaigns can lead to loss of confidence and appeal of the party. Hence, this strategic planning/performance of political parties is a component of political performance. Advertising can make a difference in making the message heard and in its impact on the voters.

To conclude, political party performance of political parties is a multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses electoral performance, accountability, party strength, party communication,

and public legitimacy. The performance is also dependent on the internal party capacity, which is also affected by external political/economic factors. Parties that hold themselves to account, are consistent with their messaging, and are consistent in being engaging tend to do well over time. But the existence of weak institutions and poor leaders can cause negative results and loss of democratic credibility. Understanding political performance is an important element of determining how effective parties are in a democratic system. This notion is a necessary mechanism to understand the impact of the inner workings of the parties on the parties' political function at the national level.

2.2 Thematic Review of Literature

2.2.1 Intra-Party Conflicts within the PDP

Intra-party conflicts within the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have been a constant annoyance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, it shows how deeper and structural the party's weaknesses are both in the structure and in the organization. Since gaining prominence as a political power in 1999, the PDP has won over a variety of political players who have different interests, aspirations and ideologies. While these differences were handled around the edges by elite consensus, they eventually became matters of conflict as there was a growing struggle for power and resources. Party control, selection of candidates, and distribution of patronage began to create fault lines due to struggle. Struggle for party control, party candidate selection, and party patronage distribution weakened party internal cohesion. With time, these conflicts grew more prominent at the time of an election, particularly a primary election. This has led to the internal conflicts faced by the PDP sometimes finding their way into the public sphere, compromising party unity and credibility.

A big factor in the PDP's intra-party tensions is the ongoing issue of party democracy in the party. Party leaders and vested elites are sometimes able to influence party processes, such as candidate selection, to favor their preferred candidates and demean the alternatives. Such exclusion results in animosity within the party over what's perceived as an unfair and undemocratic system. These ideas contribute to the development of sections opposing the party from within, to protest and even sometimes to parallel party organizations. But transparent decision-making is missing, exacerbating mistrust between leaders and members of the party. The dynamics have been found to be key to the recurrence of conflict within PDP (Mohammed et al., 2024). This, therefore, constitutes another key cause of “faction” in the party: the internal democracy problem.

The other important factor is the commercialisation of party politics, which has further exacerbated competition and rivalry in the PDP. The high ticket price to secure party tickets makes it less convenient to participate in the party, so that the aspirant must put capital, not just rely on his popularity or ideology. It excludes those who are credible but less affluent, and thus leads to tensions and accusations of corruption within the practice. Money also has a power to influence, which allows godfathers to put candidates forward on the party list, some of whom many in the party won't agree to. Such impositions typically lead to conflicts and litigation by the disappointed applicants. Research has revealed that money politics within the PDP leads to increased intra-party tension and infuses low cohesion in the party (Moliki et al., 2025). This makes internal competitions an “every man for himself” game as opposed to a democratic contest.

The other main source of conflict in the PDP is elite domination and godfatherism. There can be an imbalance of power between powerful men and women and the party structures at the national, state, and local level. They restrict the participation and consultation within the

group to a few leaders, who represent the elites. Whereas their choices are questioned, there are conflicts in the name of godfathers and new political players. In an effort to be relevant and in control, this often results in intra-party divisions. A rise in a culture of domination by elites has been blamed as a cause of the numerous crises in the PDP's internal affairs (Ezeani et al., 2024). These conflicts erode party unity and drive councillors to defy their party.

Party primaries have also become institutionalised, to a certain extent causing conflict within the PDP. The intention of the primaries is to increase participation and legitimacy, but they sometimes result in conflicts because they are poorly run. Problems with the lists of delegates and reports of vote buying and procedural irregularities are common at the PDP primaries. These irregularities result in loss of confidence in the process and instigate the aggrieved aspirants to challenge the results. In a few instances, parallel primaries are held, resulting in multiple candidates being legitimate. A study revealed that primaries have been a source of conflict in the PDP over the years if it is not managed properly (Ezeani et al., 2024). In this way, weak institutional structures are counterproductive to the conflict-mitigating function of primaries.

Intra-party conflicts are also fuelled by personality clashes among aspirants and leaders of the political parties. The PDP unites aspiring politicians with huge personal bases, who have contrasting leadership methods. These personalities colliding with each other usually create a tendency to factionalism as well. These conflicts tend to be exacerbated by those who "stand up for" their faction, who see conflicts as "tribulations for the people. These personal rivalries gradually turn to party-wide factions. From a field-level analysis, one of the major factors that influenced the electoral crises experienced by the PDP in recent elections was personality clash (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025). The conflicts distract attention from policy and reduce the ability to focus on policy.

There are other intra-party conflicts due to incumbency advantage. The incumbent politicians typically rely on the use of state resources and party influence, to obtain re-election or impose a successor. This practice creates enmity among the other aspirants who consider themselves as being deprived of the opportunity. The conflict often erupts into demonstrations, lawsuits, or defections. However, there are some more intense conflicts at the state level, as governors are given a lot of power. The fact that the incumbency factor is one of the key causes of internal conflicts in the PDP has been observed by scholars (Ambali et al., 2024). This is not fair and it will hurt the unity of the whole.

The PDP is also beset with internal conflicts due to weak ideology and lack of policy direction. The party is more of a coalition of interests than a party based on common ideology. The lack of any sort of ideological uniformity makes it hard to deal with disagreements in a constructive manner. Members' interests may be more self-serving than group-based, which will lead to potential conflicts. If you don't have any principles or convictions to back you up, then you start to have personal battles about strategy and leadership. This structural weakness has been identified as a factor that abides in the inner crisis of the PDP (Onyekwere & Ololo, 2025). As a result, there is no principled discussion; instead, conflicts are settled in a manner of a power struggle.

The lack of effective mechanisms for conflict resolution within the PDP contributes to further intensification of intra-party conflicts. Party discipline is seen as being selective and biased. Disciplining takes place inconsistently, according to the ranking of the individual's importance in the party. It fosters impunity and exacerbates members' grievances by selectively enforcing the regulations. Rather than settling conflicts, party interventions can aggravate conflict. Research has shown that poor internal conflict management practices have

made conflict arduous to bring to the end in the PDP (Gambo, 2022). This means that conflicts tend to recur, not solve, and become unsustainable.

All of this has helped to create a culture of conflict within the PDP. The party members are more inclined to see internal crises as unavoidable parts of party politics, rather than an anomaly to be dealt with. This attitude reduces loyalty, fosters defection, and affects the sense of community. As a result of the conflicts, the public's trust in the party's ability to govern is eroded over time. These causes are still present after the elections and account for the intra-party conflicts that have been plaguing the PDP over the electoral cycles. So it is vital to solve these issues in order to rebuild the internal unity and democratic processes in the party.

2.2.2 Intra-Party Conflict, Internal Democracy and Political Performance

The issue of intra-party conflict has been identified as an important variable that plays a vital role in determining intra-party democracy and parties' performance in the political system. Political parties are effective when they adhere to their own rules; electoral accountability in selecting leaders and party members are felt, especially in decision making. In the event of disagreement within parties, these democratic processes can be undermined, resulting in a lack of trust, factionalisation and disorganisation. This volatility jeopardizes the ability of parties to rally supporters, develop a coherent policy and project a cohesive image to the voters. Intra-party conflict is a serious problem to democratic practice in Nigeria's multiparty system where parties are important vehicles of democratic representation to the people. One of the dominant parties since 1999 in Nigeria, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), is a useful case study to look at the interplay between internal conflict and internal democracy and political performance.

The lack of, or erosion of, intra-party democratic norms, especially in the selection of candidates, is the root of intra-party conflict in the studies conducted on the PDP. Party primaries, candidate selection, and party lists are often a source of conflict and complaints within the party. When not resolved, these grievances develop into open conflicts which paralyze party structures and decision-making organs. Studies have indicated that such conflicts make the party less cohesive, the members less confident in the democratic process within the party, and discourage members from participating and being loyal (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025). This was also observed, indicating that the symbolization of internal democracy is more likely when party elites dominate the decision-making process, which will make the internal process more prone to continue (Moliki et al., 2025).

The literature also shows that intra-party conflict has a direct impact on undermining internal democracy by marginalizing dissenting voices in the parties. If those who do not feel included in meaningful party action resort to protest, litigation, or withdrawal from party action, they risk losing their perspective and voice. If these members feel they have no voice or perspective because they do not feel included in meaningful party action, they risk losing their voice or perspective. It undermines the deliberative nature of political parties and weakens their institutional bases. In times of great tension within the party, internal organs like disciplinary committees and reconciliation panels may not work well. This means that party rules are interpreted selectively, which leads to a notion of injustice and a sense of favouritism among party members (Gambo, 2022). This creates an atmosphere of lawlessness and undermines the authority of the party's leadership.

Intra-party conflicts impact political performance, especially in electoral contests as well. When two or more parties are involved in conflict, it is difficult for them to develop an effective campaign because they lack coordination, aren't on the same page, and may have

opposing loyalties. Researchers have observed that the PDP's electoral failures in the last elections have been attributed to its intra-party divisions and issues (Ufuoma & Princewill, 2024). These splits have a negative impact on the party's messages and its capacity to offer an alternative that voters can believe in. This therefore hurts electoral outcomes, even if the party's support was relatively strong in the past.

The second important consequence of intra-party conflict, which has been emphasized in the literature is defections. When an internal democratic process is seen as having been compromised, then unhappy party members often leave the party for another. The defection takes away a party's manpower as well as hurts the party's profile and reputation. Studies have shown that defections from the PDP are common after primaries, when the party is in dispute, and when there is a contest for the leadership, and have been observed to impact election results at the state and national levels (Ambali et al., 2024). Such exodus exacerbates internal crises even more and fuels the impression of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Furthermore, intra-party conflict has the effect of compromising political performance as well as public confidence in political parties as a democratic institution. People often associate perpetual conflict with the absence of good governance capacity and discipline. Research indicates that voters are less inclined to vote for a party that they believe is internally polarized, irrespective of their political ideology or party promises (Ndubuisi & Omeire, 2025). Intra-party conflict in the Nigerian context, which already has a low level of trust in political institutions, contributes to voter apathy and cynicism. This diminishes the role of democracy in participation and overall effectiveness of party competition.

It is also found in the literature that intra-party conflict is connected to democracy consolidation issues. Parties that are not engaged in democratic intraparty conflict management do their part to politically destabilize and erode democratic norms. A condition

for democratic consolidation is the existence of internal party democracy, which is just training grounds for democratic behaviour by scholars (Joe-Akunne et al., 2022). If parties resolve a conflict in an undemocratic way (by force or by manipulation of elites), they pass on anti-democratic behaviour to the broader political system. This also strengthens the dictatorial elements in democracy.

The argument is further supported by comparative perspectives, which show that internal democracy improves political performance, whereas conflict has an opposing effect. International research has shown that parties with stronger democratic elements within the party structure are able to deal with differences in a manner that does not divide the party (Kausar et al., 2023). In comparison, parties with clientelist tendencies and weak internal rules have more internal conflict and have weaker electoral results (Chiru, 2025). The results confirm the importance of the concept of internal party democracy as a conflict-dampening and performance-improving stabilising force.

For the PDP, the enfeeblement of intra-party democracy and performance has been more cumulative due to intra-party conflicts. There have been repeated conflicts, causing loss of institutional memory, continuity of leadership, and less strategic coherence within the party. The literature indicates that the PDP has not been able to effectively counter the other parties and maintain its dominance in Nigeria's political landscape due to these challenges (Mohammed et al., 2024). The chain effect of conflict, low-level internal democracy, and poor performance is thus vicious and will be hard to avoid without intentional institutional restructuring.

All the studies reviewed seem to be in agreement that there is a close relationship between intra-party conflict and internal democracy and political performance. Where internal democratic norms are not strong, intra-party conflict flourishes, and its long-term existence

has a negative impact on the electoral process, party unity, and citizens' confidence. Being able to manage internal conflicts in a manner that is transparent and inclusive in democratic ways is critical to political performance for the PDP. This thematic linkage highlights the need to take intra-party conflict not just as a stand-alone phenomenon but as a central phenomenon in Nigeria, which affects the outcome of party democracy and the overall democratic outcomes in Nigeria.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Elite Theory

The concept of elite theory is useful for the understanding of power, decision-making, and conflict dynamics of political organisation. The theory relies on the concept that in all societies there is a small minority that controls the power of politics, the economy, and society, which is called the elite. They decide the fate of the collective outcome, and they do it in key institutions that they control, and that do not always reflect the preferences of the majority. Elite dominance is seen in the political party, as they dominate the party structure, party selection, and distribution of resources within the party. Consequently, internal party processes can be more oriented towards elite than democratic interests. The theory of the 'Elite' thus explains the development of intra-party conflicts as a result of the competition for power. The constant occurrence of intra-party conflicts in Nigeria's political party arena can be seen as a product of elite competition. Elite competition is a core concept to grasp when dealing with the issue of intra-party conflicts in Nigeria.

In ideal classical theoretical terms, the possibility of full democracy is problematic because the practicalities of organization will tend to limit political participation. Despite their democratic façade, political parties generally focus power on an elite group of individuals

who determine how things work within the party. This centralised arrangement has a pyramid structure, where the decisions made are not significantly influenced by the ordinary members. Damele and Campos (2022) stress how elite theory breaks with the normative notion of mass participation and points to the structural inequalities rooted in political systems. These inequities can create resentment and resistance from the marginalized group members. Such tensions are manifested in various critical situations, such as during primary elections, Congresses, and leadership changes. In this context, intra-party conflict can be seen as a conflict between dominant elites and excluded faction groups which are excluded.

Sociological ideas, and especially the sociological theories of Max Weber on authority and bureaucracy, are also extensively used in elite theory. Weber's contribution is that he is an interpreter of the role that rational-legal authority plays in the control of the elites by formal rules and organizational structures. Today, political institutions are based on bureaucratic structures which, inadvertently, give power to elites based on expertise, experience, and access to information (Damele, 2022). These procedures can be used by party leaders within parties to get around the procedures and still appear to be legal. This process undermines internal democracy and leads to stronger elite control. The elites of the party clamp down on dissent or turn a blind eye to it. These circumstances intensify tensions within and add to factionalism.

Yet another assumption of elite theory is that elite circulation/replacement does not necessarily change power relations. Changes of leadership take place, but new groups of elites tend to perpetuate the same forms of domination as previous groups. According to Frič (2024), elite replacement is an ongoing process, and although it can introduce some degree of democratization, it is usually not substantial, since the new elites use similar methods of control. This would be the case with the political parties: if there is an internal conflict, then it

is not solved by the change of leadership. On the contrary, conflicts could continue to exist because of the competition of rival elites for supremacy. This is especially true in the case of the PDP, which has faced a series of crises in the past. The battle is therefore not about ideology but about gaining the privileges and access to the elite.

Another crucial aspect of the theory is elite conflict, which takes into account that elites are not necessarily agreed. Rival high-profile political parties can develop within the same party, each vying for party control and political office. Yue and Wen (2024) suggest that as an elite fragments, so may the conflict become more intense, particularly in a very competitive political context. In short, intra-party conflicts do not represent an intra-elite conflict but rather the clashes between the elites. These conflicts could be about personal career aspirations, local interest, or access to state resources. As the level of conflict between elites increases, so does the likelihood that party cohesion will weaken and institutional norms will become weaker. This approach offers some insight into the reasons for the length and difficulty of intra-party problems.

Power elite theory is a development of classical elite theory, taking it beyond the narrow meaning of elite to the interlocking of political, economic, and bureaucratic elites. Bonga and Mahuni (2025) argue that power elites are found in institutions, and they consolidate their power through networks and patronage. In political parties, such a network affects the choice of candidates, financial support, and strategic decisions. This clumping of influence ignores the contributions of the general membership and makes it harder to hold the organization accountable. If the party elites put their own or factional interests ahead of the party, their way of functioning is not democratic. This discontent of those who have been excluded may lead to defection and internal crises. This is how elite theory connects elites and intra-elite conflict with general elite domination.

The theory of the elite has also not been without criticism, with some people describing democracy as a pessimistic theory. Critics say it fails to recognise the ability of the people and institutions to change. It is sometimes suggested that elite theorists depict the elites as autonomous and unaccountable to society and that they fail to consider the societal pressures influencing the actions of elites (Parry, 2024). But, despite such criticisms, elite theory is still useful for the study of power imbalance in political parties. It offers a realistic way to appreciate the obstacles that stand in the way of the translation of formal democratic rules into democratic results. Elite dominance is stronger in contexts with weak institutions. This is especially pertinent to countries such as Nigeria, which are still in the process of becoming democratic.

Elite theory is used to examine the PDP, highlighting that the decision-making process is in the hands of party elites. The struggle for power, appointment of candidates, and manipulation of party rules may be seen as elite methods to keep power. Damele & Campos (2022) state that elite theory is particularly relevant when it comes to the study of political organisations with the presence of informal power networks. These networks tend to work around official procedures in the PDP. Lack of alignment between rules and practice provides an opportunity for conflict to flourish. When members feel left out of the party, they will be more inclined to oppose leadership decisions. Elite theory is thus the explanation of the structural causes of intra-party conflict.

Intra-party conflict and political performance are another aspect of this relationship that can be explained by elite theory. One and the other, when party activities are dominated by the competition of fraternities of elites, is undermined by strategic coherence and electoral focus. According to Bonga and Mahuni (2025), elite-driven conflicts take a toll on the focus of policymaking and on voter engagement. Instead, then, it is the parties that are consumed by

their own conflicts. This undermines the legitimacy of elections and erodes electoral competitiveness. For the PDP, successive wars of the elite have tended to be accompanied by losses at the polls. From this, the theory offers a robust explanation of how internal power struggles relate to poor political performance.

Although there is a wealth of literature on elite theory, the bulk of research has been conducted in a general manner on the nature of power concentration, elite circulation, and the nature of conflict, while only a few studies have specifically investigated the nature of the interaction between these three aspects to see how they affect intraparty conflict and political performance over time within a single party. Particularly, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria has not received any significant empirical attention, particularly about the time period from 2015 to 2024, which has been beset with leadership crises, defections, and electoral issues. Moreover, previous literature largely ignores party stability and electoral outcomes in the analysis of elite dominance and intra-party conflict. In addition, previous studies tend to examine elite dominance and intra-party conflict as separate phenomena rather than assessing the impact of the two phenomena on party stability and electoral outcomes. This study therefore seeks to rectify this shortfall by systematically analysing the nature of intra-party conflicts within the PDP, the nature of the elite rivalry, and the nature of power concentration in this party using the elite theory to understand how these developments have impacted on the party's performance during the period under study.

2.3.2 Systems Theory

The systems theory provides a thorough understanding of political processes by considering society and its institutions as interdependent and interrelated parts of a whole. The theory views politics as a system composed of different subsystems (electoral agencies, government institutions, political parties, electorate) which interact with each other in an ongoing manner.

Demands, pressures, and supports are input into the political system, and decisions, policies, and actions are output from the political system. The system then works to modify, re-organize or re-stabilize itself over time through the process of feedback mechanisms. In this context, political parties serve as vital links between society and the State. This can lead to a decline in the political system's stability and effectiveness in case of malfunction in any party. But systems theory can be helpful in the understanding of the dynamics of internal party crises and how they may have broader democratic implications.

Political science is often said to be the field that evolved from a systems perspective, and the intellectual heritage of such a perspective in political science is seen in those who have modeled politics as an “authoritative allocation of values” in a system, such as David Easton. Easton said that "political systems exist by regulating inputs and outputs to keep them in balance. Later political science literature, and even more so after the war, has incorporated his ideas in the field of parties, elections, and democratic governance; though not explicitly mentioned here, Easton's ideas have been adapted to the study of these topics. Namayengo (2023) illustrates how general systems theory can be used to explain political participation in terms of the relationship between citizens and the responsiveness of institutions. Political parties that are unable to control their own demands experience pressure build-up, and this comes out in conflicts. The polarisation of the political system is then affected by these conflicts. The systemic effect of intraparty conflict is thus brought to the fore, as is done in a systems theory approach.

One of the key principles of systems theory is interdependence - no political institution is an island. Political parties are linked to voters, civil society, media, and state institutions, and activities in one sphere will have an impact on others. According to Odera (2023), the institutionalization of the parties and party systems relies on the stability and adaptability of

the parties in the overall political landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa. If there are internal divisions in the parties, then the entire party system is unstable. In this way, intra-party conflict detracts from the strength of individual parties and democratic competition overall. This allows for looking at analysis beyond events to systemic patterns. It is more relevant in plural societies that have low levels of institutional strength.

Another key tenet of systems theory is that of 'adaptation' and 'equilibrium'. Political systems are supposed to react to stress by making adjustments, negotiation, or reforms to rebalance the system. With low or no feedback mechanisms, however, stress builds up and results in breakdown at the system level. The theory of political systems has been used to interpret the process of policy cycles and institutional responses as a result of interaction between political actors (Adeniran et al., 2023). Without addressing grievances within the party through democratic means, it is impossible to have feedback from the party in an effective manner. This means that conflicts don't get solved; instead, they continue and escalate. This explains why unresolved intra-party disputes often recur across electoral cycles.

Feedback relates to the societal responses to political products and is also a crucial component of systems theory. The results of the elections, the citizens' trust in politicians, and party support provide feedback signals for the political parties. According to Pearce Laanela (2024), the level of trust in electoral and political institutions relies on the degree to which these institutions meet citizens' expectations. Ideally, when there is a conflict within a party that reduces its electoral success, it should move towards the reform of the party. If there is conflict within parties that leads to poor electoral performance, this should ideally lead to reforms within the party. But when party elites fail to take heed of feedback, it further reduces the level of legitimacy. It is therefore to be expected that systems theory can link

party behaviour in the system with confidence and consolidation of democracy in the public sphere. It brings to a stark realization what the price of ignoring the signals systemically is.

Systems theory can also be used to explain the beliefs and attitudes of individuals in a party. Bertero (2025) proposes that political belief systems are networks of attitudes, which influence political actions. Common values within parties regarding fairness, inclusion, and legitimacy of leadership have a positive effect on cohesion within parties. Internal conflict is more likely where these belief systems are split or restricted by the elites and their activities. Fragmentation diminishes the ability of the party to function as a unified sub-system in the political system. This dysfunction is then carried over into electoral competition and governance over time. This results in a connection of ideology, organisation and performance in a system.

When moving beyond applying systems theory in the context of political parties in developing democracies, several more insights are discovered. Few of the party systems in Africa are well institutionalized, have a personalized power structure, and do not have a strong ideological polarization. Under this kind of situation, it becomes difficult for the parties to do their stabilising role in the political system, says Odera (2023). They struggle to aggregate interests and to articulate policy options as well because of intra-party conflicts. In place of the venues of democratic participation, parties become venues of elite contestation. This lessens the relationship between citizens and the State. It is in this way that systems theory helps to understand the reasons for severe democratic deficits.

For the purpose of the PDP, systems theory offers a way of thinking about the ways that intra-systemic conflicts impact the wider democratic results. Intraparty conflicts in the PDP are a product of the stress in the system caused by unfulfilled demands, leadership challenges, or weaknesses within the party. In the absence of good management of the party's inputs, it

generates dysfunctional outputs like defections, parallel congresses, and electoral losses. Namayengo (2023) shows that political participation and the democratic nature of the political system are undermined when the political systems are unable to accommodate internal and external pressures. This experience is not unique to the PDP, but is reflected in the many times in the past that the party has experienced impasses over issues that have been detrimental to their political performance. A chain of causation is well captured by systems theory.

The cumulative nature of political crises is also due to systems theory. Internal conflicts among the parties do not happen in isolation, but compete with electoral rules, popular expectations, and other party competition. Political systems are dynamic and cumulative; a failure over time decreases the capacity of the institution, Adeniran et al. (2023) say. The PDP has lost both its own democratic processes and people's confidence due to its successive conflicts. The erosion does not only impact the party, but also the opposition's part in the democratic consolidation process. Systems theory therefore extends the study of events to the future consequences of systems.

To conclude, systems theory provides a comprehensive perspective for analysing intra-party conflict, intra-party democracy, and political performance. It highlights the interdependence, feedback, adaptation, and equilibrium in the political system. The theory puts political parties at the center as important subsystems, helping to understand the destabilisation of democratic processes in the case of internal dysfunctions. Pearce Laanela (2024) reiterates the point that the key to institutional trust and democratic stability is responsive and adaptive systems. Applying the concept of systems theory to this study, it would help explain the influence of the conflicts in the PDP on Nigeria's democracy from 2015 to 2024. It thus also complements

the concept of elite theory, which is directed not only towards the elite context, but also towards the interaction of structures.

2.4 Review of Empirical Studies

There have been a few empirical studies that have focused on intra-party conflicts and their implications for internal democracy, democratic consolidation, and the performance of the parties in Nigeria. The emphasis of these studies is primarily on the difficulties of party leadership, poor party primary contests, the dominance of the political elites, elites' defections from parties, and the weakness of institutional mechanisms in political parties, which threaten democratic principles. Particularly, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has been a major concern given its long tenure in government, and the unabated internal crises since taking government off its hands in 2015. The methodological approaches used in the studies are qualitative case studies, research through surveys, research on documents, and comparison of parties and election cycles. Together, they illustrate that an intra-party conflict diminishes party unity, electoral competitiveness, and has adverse consequences for democratic consolidation. But very few studies capture the longitudinal assessment of election cycles; only a few look at specific states, or only compare party analysis. The current study aims to help fill this void by studying the nature and effects of intra-party conflicts in the PDP during a long period of time - from 2015 up to 2024.

Ndubuisi and Omeire (2025) conducted a study to look at intra-party crisis and the process of democratic consolidation in the 2022 PDP primaries in Abia State. The authors analysed the phenomenon of credible primary elections using the qualitative case study method in the light of the problems of factionalism, imposition of candidates, and elite interference. The results showed that internal conflicts reduced the cohesion of the political party and members' trust in democratic processes. The study also confirmed that unaddressed conflicts led to low voter

participation and to electoral results which were detrimental to the electoral process in the following elections. It said that intraparty crises can have an immediate impact on the consolidation of democracy at the state and national level. This research, like the present study, is focused on intra-party conflict in the PDP, but unlike the present study, Ndubuisi and Omeire (2025) placed emphasis on one state in one election period, while the current study is national and longitudinal, focusing on the period of 2015-2024.

Moliki et al. (2025) took Nigeria's 2023 general elections as the case to look into the effect of intra-party conflict on internal democracy, particularly the PDP. The study uses Survey and documentary methods to examine the impact of leadership conflicts and parallel party structures on democracy. Many of the findings showed that the internal conflicts that plagued the PDP had a negative impact on the internal democracy of the party and had also played a significant role in the party's electoral failures. The authors correlated the intra-party instability with the decreasing political performance and public trust. The overall finding of the study was that securing internal party cohesion is a crucial factor for the consolidation of democracy. The present study utilizes both studies, but adds a layer of analysis to deepen the understanding of conflict beyond the 2023 elections to the periodicity of elections more broadly.

Since Nigeria is a country with democratic consolidation, Erubami (2024) studied internal party democracy and its implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study was conducted using a comparative method between political parties, including the extent to which they adhere to democratic principles and norms, including inclusiveness, transparency, and competitive primaries. Results indicated that poor internal democracy leads to conflicts which hinder the effectiveness of the party and party governance. The study highlighted the fact that internal democracy is an essential condition of sustainable democratic government.

The present study affords a general overview of the concept that can be applied to the PDP, but does not specifically address intra-party conflict over time. The current study expands on this by focusing on the PDP and systematically analyzing the nature of the conflicts between 2015 and 2024.

Barigbon and Rumuolumeni (2023) examined the nature of intra-party conflict and democracy in Nigeria from 2012 to 2023. The study identified, through qualitative analysis, the inter-party conflicts major issues are leadership rivalry, zoning issues, and the absence of institutionalised conflict resolution mechanisms. The findings showed that it creates conflicts which have a negative impact on democratic governance and policy coherence. Unresolved intra-party conflicts are detrimental to opposition parties and democratic accountability, the authors found. This work, although having some commonalities with the present study in terms of the causes of intra-party conflict, does not look into the party system as does the present study but rather focuses on the internal democracy and performance of the PDP.

Oji (2024) looked at the problems of internal party democracy in the democratic process in Nigeria in the period 1999 to 2023 in a comparative study of PDP and APC. The study, through a documentary analysis, has concluded that godfatherism, monetization of politics, and the lack of party institutional strength are factors that affect internal democracy in the party. The findings indicated that intra-party conflicts were found, both for the government and opposition, which made the elections not credible at all. In this study, however, the PDP and APC were compared rather than the study being in-depth, with a longitudinal focus on one party. The present study, however, focuses only on the PDP and offers an in-depth study on the conflict pattern and outcomes between 2015 and 2024.

Ufuoma and Princewill (2024) examined the issues of intraparty conflict and democracy in the context of the presidential election in Nigeria in 2023. To explore the impact of intra-

party divisions on electoral credibility and democratic participation, the study used a qualitative approach. Results showed that conflictual dynamics within the PDP hindered coordination of campaigns and confidence in the party. The research found that intra-party conflicts are a major threat to democratic stability. The present study builds on the idea of conflict influencing the election results, but also looks at the impacts on internal democracy and party performance over a more extended period, in light of the presidential election of 2023.

The study by Akinwunmi (2025) focused on the political parties in democratic consolidation in Nigeria from 2019 to 2023, paying attention to intra-party conflict. The study revealed that, with the help of survey data, internal party differences are weakening the public's trust in democratic institutions. Elite domination of party structures and its negative impact on accountability and participation was pointed out. While the study recognises the internal problems of the PDP, it has a broad focus on party systems as opposed to internal mechanisms. However, the present study contrasts with the other in that it is an empirical study of intra-party conflict within the PDP over a longer period of time.

Usuanlele and Ajisebiyawo (2024), in their comparative study on internal democracy in the APC and PDP in Nigeria, noted that the two parties experienced the same situation of internal democracy. The study revealed that the two are plagued by candidates' election by the elite and low quality of democratic processes. These weaknesses were demonstrated to be a cause of election defeats and in-faction splits. This comparative approach is helpful, but can only focus on the internal development of one party without detailed analysis. The present study takes up the challenge of this focus by focusing just on the PDP and following the impact of intra-party conflicts over time.

Onyekwere and Ololo (2025) provided a Critical Review of intra-party crises and the weakening of opposition parties in Nigeria from 2015-2025 with reference to the PDP. The study was qualitative and revealed that the conflicts had a negative effect on the ability of the PDP to act as a credible opposition. The results correlated with poor electoral results and lack of leadership performance and fractious politics. The scope and focus of this study are very similar to the present study. The present study emphasizes, however, a mediator between conflict and political performance, that is, internal democracy.

The institutionalization of party primaries and intra-party conflicts in the PDP was studied by Ezeani et al (2024). The study revealed that poor primary management had two adverse effects: it made internal disputes and defections worse. It found that poor institutional arrangements play a big role in the internal crises. The present research, however, takes a wider perspective on the party primary as it looks at various aspects of intra-party conflict and how they combine to affect intra-party democracy and performance.

The study of intra-party competition and electoral performance of the Presidential Election conducted by Adamu and Yusufu (2025) was analyzed. The study relied on survey information to draw the conclusion that there is a correlation between electoral failures of the PDP and internal divisions in the party. It showed that there was a lack of cohesion and factionalism, affecting campaign effectiveness. The study has some useful insights, but they are limited to one election. This research is an extension of this analysis over several electoral cycles between 2015 and 2024.

In all, the empirical studies reviewed have shown that intra-party conflicts have a very negative impact on internal democracy, democratic consolidation, and political performance in Nigeria. The majority of the studies suggest that leadership problems, supremacy of the elite, and poor institutionalization play key roles in conflict. Many, however, have a very

limited focus either in time or place or in comparative design that affects the in-depth analysis of a single party. The present study is unique for its longitudinal design and its narrow focus on the PDP as a political party, as it carefully accounts for intra-party conflicts from 2015 to 2023 and their influence on the political performance of the PDP in Nigeria.

2.5 Summary of Review of Related Literature

Reviewed literature has focused on intra-party conflicts, internal party democracy, and political performance in total and also in the special context of the PDP in Nigeria. The authors of the reviewed articles, among others, define intra-party conflicts as struggles for leadership, factionalism, candidate imposition, and competition for party resources. They view internal party democracy as the degree to which political parties implement transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability, as well as hold credible primaries. Political performance, based on the authors, is a function of electoral success, party cohesion, public trust, and effectiveness in governance or opposition. Research shows that since the PDP lost power in 2015, a struggle for control of party structures has led to the party being plunged into crises a number of times, both at the national and state levels. Besides internal grappling for power, weak institutional systems and lack of an effective conflict-resolution mechanism have been cited as major villains that cause instability within the party.

The researchers rely on Elite Theory and Systems Theory to discuss and analyze the intra-party conflict dynamics and their consequences. Elite Theory sees party crises due to the competition between the dominant political players who want to have their way and end up limiting the scope of democratic participation of the party members. Systems Theory argues that political parties have been designed as smaller systems within the larger political system. That means, if party conflicts are not resolved, it often means party dysfunction, and the level of democratization may be negatively affected. Most of the empirical investigations agree

that intra-party conflicts lead to a decrease in the pull of political parties at elections, defections, and loss of public confidence in political parties. Still, there is a great limitation in the available empirical evidence; most studies are confined to specific elections or relatively short time frames, and they do not comprehensively address the direct relationship between intra-party conflicts, internal party democracy and political performance. This situation of research vacuum highlights the significance of a sectoral, time-series study of the internal conflicts of the PDP and their consequences.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework: a theoretical lens for analyzing and interpreting a study. The Elite Theory will be used for this study, a research that will explore intra-party conflicts and their influence on the internal democracy and political performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria from 2015 – 2023. The theory will provide a valuable analytical framework for comprehending the dynamics of internal party stability, decision-making, and party structure in the context of the power struggles among dominant political actors. Since the question of control of party leaders, candidates, and resources is a central theme in intra-party competition, Elite Theory is the right theory to be used. The theory will provide a deeper understanding of why there is a lack of consensus on how to solve issues within a party under formal democratic rules in party constitutions. It will also allow the study to understand conflicts not just in terms of administrative shortcomings, but rather as a fight for supremacy between the competing elites. The study will place intra-party crises in an Elite Theory perspective to relate them to the overall pattern of concentration of power in party politics in Nigeria.

Elite Theory will be useful especially because in Nigeria, political parties have been subjected to the influence of powerful individuals in the party machinery and strategic decisions in the past, and the PDP is not an exception. The theory is expected to provide an explanation of how the level of elite competition increased following the PDP's disembarkment from federal power in 2015, resulting in factionalization amongst them, and prolonged leadership crises. The theory will not treat conflicts as "accidents," but rather as deliberate attempts to influence and exercise control. This will be achieved through this

framework as a study of the impact of elite dominance on transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in the party. The theory will also help explain the relationship between internal power struggles and electoral results and party unity. It is for this reason that Elite Theory will be the main analytical underpinning for the understanding of the nature and implications of intra-party conflicts in the PDP.

3.1.1 Elite Theory

The name Elite Theory originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among classical sociologists and political thinkers like Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels. The idea is that in any society and organization, there is a small elite group that wields most of the political power and decision-making processes. Pareto claimed that there was a circulation of elites in societies, and Mosca stressed the necessity of a ruling minority. Michels came up with the “Iron Law of Oligarchy”, meaning that in all organisations, even those that may seem democratic, a small group of leaders will come to dominate the show. More recent researchers have elaborated the theory to account for the focus of power in political parties and institutions.

Elite Theory says that there's a balance of power, and that organizations are biased toward people who own resources, information and networks of influence. Elites are frequently instrumental in the selection of candidates, leadership, and the direction of policy in political parties. The theory goes: in any party that purports to be democratic, ordinary party members hold little sway over important decisions. Elite Theory will use intra-party conflict as an indicator of the political conflicts among dominant actors for control over party machinery and strategic roles as it pertains to the PDP. These will be seen as both sides fighting for supremacy and not just as a difference in procedures.

3.1.2 Assumptions of Elite Theory

The Elite Theory offers several assumptions which aided this study:

The tendency for power to be held by a small number of people. Clustering of power into the hands of a few people.

The theory is based on the premise that political power is held by a select few influential persons. In this study, intra-party conflicts in the PDP will be seen as a struggle between the powerful elites to control party structures and resources.

3. The initial impact of an ethical violation.4. The severity of the infraction.

Elite Theory suggests that there is always going to be some competition between elites, particularly when power and resources are scarce. The study will explore how this competition will be reflected in the leadership contest and intra-party dynamics of the PDP.

3. Ordinary Members' Limited Participation

The principle of the theory is that ordinary party members will be of little influence in the big decisions. This is because, with this assumption, it would be easy to understand how the imposition of candidates and imbalances in leadership affect internal party democracy.

The tendency of the organization to drift towards oligarchy (centralization of power).

Elite Theory argues that even in a democratic organisation, the process of 'oligarchisation' will lead to the domination of the group by a small elite. The study will evaluate the potential for elite domination in the PDP's internal party mechanisms, and will look into how they can negate the drive for broad-based participation.

All these assumptions will give a framework to examine the causes and effects of intra-party conflicts of the PDP.

3.1.3 Application of Elite Theory to the Study

In the application of Elite Theory, this study will be able to assess intra-party conflicts in the PDP as a struggle for control at the hands of the elites instead of a simple administrative conflict. In this theoretical framework, the study will investigate:

The rivalry and factionalism among leaders. The discord between leaders and factions.

Elite Theory will provide an understanding of how the competition between more important political actors will create factional alignments and intra-elite divisions.

A lack of internal democracy and candidate imposition.

The theory will be used to understand the impact of elite dominance on candidate selection on the party's transparency and inclusiveness.

This will have a major impact on people's political performance.

Elite rivalry and its impact on party cohesion, electoral competitiveness, and public trust will be explored as a factor that weakens party cohesion, lowers electoral competitiveness, and erodes public trust.

The study will make use of Elite Theory to make a direct linkage between the relationship between elite competition, internal party instability, and the impact on democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

3.2 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study will be derived directly from the specific objectives of the research:

- **H1:** Intra-party conflicts within the PDP from 2015 to 2023 will be primarily driven by elite competition for power and control of party structures.
- **H2:** Intra-party conflicts within the PDP will significantly undermine internal democracy and negatively affect the party's political performance in Nigeria.

3.3 Research Design

This study will adopt a qualitative research design. The design will be appropriate because the study will seek to explore and interpret the nature, causes, and consequences of intra-party conflicts within the PDP. A qualitative approach will allow for in-depth examination of party documents, leadership disputes, and political developments between 2015 and 2023. The study will employ a case study strategy focusing specifically on the PDP as a single political entity. This approach will enable detailed analysis of internal dynamics within their real-life political context. The design will also allow for flexibility in interpreting complex political behaviors and elite interactions. By focusing on a single party over an extended period, the study will generate comprehensive and contextual insights.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The study will rely exclusively on secondary sources of data. The documentary method will be adopted as the primary means of data collection. Data will be sourced from:

- Academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles on Nigerian party politics
- Newspaper reports and media publications on PDP leadership crises
- Official party documents, constitutions, and communiqués

- Reports from electoral bodies and civil society organizations
- Policy documents and political commentaries relevant to the PDP

These sources will provide comprehensive information on leadership struggles, factional disputes, party congresses, court cases, defections, and electoral outcomes between 2015 and 2023. The documentary approach will ensure systematic and reliable data gathering relevant to the research objectives.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The study will employ qualitative content analysis. This method will involve systematically examining documents and textual materials to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships relevant to the research questions. The analysis will focus on:

1. Major causes of intra-party conflicts within the PDP
2. Nature and manifestations of elite rivalry
3. Effects of conflicts on internal democratic practices
4. Impact on electoral performance and party cohesion

Through this approach, the study will establish connections between the assumptions of Elite Theory and the empirical realities of intra-party conflicts within the PDP from 2015 to 2023. The method will enable the study to interpret how elite competition shapes party stability and political outcomes in Nigeria.

Logical Data Framework

Research Questions	Hypotheses	Major Variables	Empirical Indicator	Method of Data Collection	Source of Data	Method of Data Analysis
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What are the major causes of intra-party conflicts within the PDP from 2015 to 2023?	H1: Intra-party conflicts will be primarily driven by elite competition .	Independent (X): Elite Competition Dependent (Y): Intra-Party Conflict	Leadership disputes, factional alignment, candidate imposition	Documentary method	Academic literature, party documents, media reports	Qualitative Content Analysis
How have these conflicts affected the PDP's internal democracy and political performance?	H2: Intra-party conflicts will significantly undermine internal democracy and political performance.	Independent (X): Intra-Party Conflict Dependent (Y): Internal Democracy and Political Performance	Electoral outcomes, defections, party cohesion, primary election processes	Documentary method	Electoral reports, party records, scholarly works	Qualitative Content Analysis

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents and analyzes the findings of the study on intra-party conflicts and their impact on the internal democracy and political performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. It is structured around the major themes derived from the study's objectives, hypotheses, and Elite Theory theoretical framework. Using qualitative content analysis, the chapter examines how elite competition, factional struggles, and leadership disputes affected internal democracy and the political performance of the PDP during the study period. The data analyzed were drawn from secondary sources, including party documents, electoral reports, newspaper publications, academic literature, and political commentaries relating to party politics and democratic governance in Nigeria.

4.1 Overview of Intra-Party Conflicts within the PDP (2015–2024)

From 2015 to 2023, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was continually plagued by conflicts within the party faction that severely disrupted the party's internal stability and electoral performance in Nigeria. More so, these conflicts escalated after the party lost the presidency in 2015, giving rise to leadership tussles, formation of factions, defections, and disagreements over candidate selections. The party's failure to keep its members united internally led to long-lasting crises at both the national and local levels.

Post-2015, the PDP found itself with weakened internal structures as well as a deepening divide among powerful party leaders. Besides the paper politicians, several major party leaders were vying to have control over the party machinery, get top party leadership roles,

and even be presidential candidates. The resultant factionalization not only caused excessive division within the party but also practically paralysed collective decision-making.

A notable concern during the research period was the dispute over party leadership and the zoning strategy. Debate over the rotation of political offices, the party chairman's post, and the presidential candidate created a rift among the party players that at times grew so intense that the leaders were ready to take the matter to court. Apart from parallel meetings, suspensions were also meted out to party leaders.

Also, the issue of candidate imposition and dissatisfaction with party primaries cannot be sidelined. In particular, those with the most influential positions were accused by many party members of rigging the internal elections for their own and factional benefit. These charges weakened the faith of members in the party's democratic procedures and made them even more dissatisfied.

Analyse these in reverse order. The PDP was still a major opposition party in Nigeria throughout the study period. Besides participating actively in national elections, the party continued to have a political presence in several states and made efforts to rebuild internal unity as well as be competitive in future elections.

So, the intra-party conflicts in the PDP between 2015 and 2023 mirrored the challenges faced by Nigerian political parties in general, such as competition among elites, absence of strong internal democracy, and struggle for power.

Table 4.1: Key Dimensions of Intra-Party Conflicts within the PDP (2015–2023)

Dimension	Key Activities /	Challenges /	Outcomes / Impacts
	Developments	Constraints	

Leadership Struggles	Competition for party leadership positions	Factional disputes	Weak party cohesion
Candidate Selection	Disputed party primaries	Candidate imposition allegations	Internal dissatisfaction
Party Unity	Reconciliation meetings	Persistent elite rivalry	Continued factionalism
Electoral Performance	Participation in elections	Internal instability	Reduced competitiveness
Party Discipline	Suspensions and sanctions	Weak enforcement mechanisms	Defections and divisions
Judicial Intervention	Court cases over leadership disputes	Legal uncertainty	Leadership instability
Internal Democracy	Party congresses and conventions	Elite dominance	Weak member participation

The results suggest that disagreements amongst the party members of the PDP were mostly caused by the struggle of the elites for power and control of party structures. This is in line with the predictions of Elite Theory, which points out that political organizations are typically controlled by a small group of influential actors who are interested in maintaining their strategic advantage and control.

4.2 Elite Competition and the Causes of Intra-Party Conflicts within the PDP

Findings

The most significant feature of the intra-party conflict within PDP between 2015 and 2023, was elite competition and struggle for political control. Findings revealed:

Contest for leadership positions among the leading figures of the party escalated factionalism within the party.

Disputes over zoning formula and presidential candidate triggered internal instability of the party.

Candidate imposition and rigging of party primaries greatly eroded the mutual confidence of the party members.

The conflict among governors, former office holders, and party leaders was a big part in the party crises.

Political analysts' reports, newspaper publications, party communiques gave us insight into the PDP experiencing repeated internal disputes arising from competition for the leadership positions and strategic control of party structures.

“The PDP’s internal crisis remains fundamentally a struggle among powerful elites competing for control of the party structure.” — *The Punch Newspaper*, September 2022

Table 4.2: Indicators of Elite Competition and Intra-Party Conflict within the PDP (2015–2023)

Year	Major Leadership Disputes	Factional Activities	Defections Recorded
2015	Moderate	Moderate	High
2017	High	High	Moderate
2019	High	Moderate	Moderate
2022	Very High	Very High	High
2023	High	High	Moderate

Source: Newspaper archives, party reports, political analyses

Analysis

These outcomes align with the first Hypothesis of the research, which argued that PCC forum conflicts within the PDP between 2015 and 2023 mainly resulted from elites competing for power and control of party structures.

According to Elite Theory, political parties revolve around key players who clash over leadership, resources, and influencing strategies. That's why the PDP's internal turbulence was a clear demonstration of struggle among party elites for control over organizational structures and political opportunities.

Besides, the disputations on the zoning formula and candidate selection further deepened factionalism in the party, as revealed by the data. Through rivalry among elites, the sense of unity was lost, and ordinary party members came to distrust the party because they saw powerful actors as mainly manipulating party decisions.

Besides, concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a few powerful elites negatively affected inclusiveness in the party. Candidates being imposed and leaders meddling with decisions led to erosion of trust in internal democratic processes and resulted in heightened dissatisfaction internally in the various party structures.

Possible outcomes for the political party's stability

Factional divisions becoming more severe within the party.

Trust in internal democratic processes declining.

Defections and instability increasing.

The gap between party stakeholders widening.

To wrap up, competition among elites was a main source of intra-party conflicts within the PDP that led to the organization's prolonged instability by the end of the study period.

4.3 Intra-Party Conflicts and Internal Democracy within the PDP

Findings

The study found that intra-party conflicts significantly undermined internal democracy within the PDP between 2015 and 2023. Major findings include:

- Candidate imposition weakened transparency and fairness during party primaries.
- Internal disputes reduced the participation of ordinary party members in decision-making processes.
- Factional leadership structures created confusion regarding party administration and legitimacy.
- Court interventions and leadership crises disrupted democratic procedures within the party.

According to media reports and political commentaries, many party stakeholders criticized the dominance of influential elites in major party decisions and electoral processes.

“Persistent leadership crises within the PDP continue to weaken internal democracy and party discipline.” — *Daily Trust Newspaper*, May 2023

Table 4.3: Indicators of Internal Democracy Challenges within the PDP (2015–2023)

Year	Reported Primary Election Disputes	Court Cases on Party Leadership	Member Complaints on Candidate Imposition
2015	High	Moderate	High
2018	Very High	High	Very High
2019	High	Moderate	High
2022	Very High	Very High	Very High
2023	High	High	High

Source: Electoral reports, newspaper publications, party records

Analysis

These results are consistent with Hypothesis 2 that intra-party conflicts within the PDP severely crippled internal democracy and also brought about a downturn in the party's political performance in Nigeria.

According to the Elite Theory, political parties and organizations, in general, tend to fall under the control of a few elites where these top personalities dominate all the important decision-making processes. For the PDP, the influence of elites in the selection of candidates and leaders made the processes less transparent, less accountable, and less open to the involvement of the members.

Also, the data recognize factional clashes and the emergence of alternative leaderships as two main reasons that caused a breakdown in the party's management and a weakening of its democratic procedures. Since the internal mechanisms of the party did not work properly to resolve the disputes, court actions became a common event.

On top of that, the control of a few powerful elites over the party processes eroded the trust of the regular members in the integrity of the party activities. As a result, there was a rise in political discontent and internal opposition, leading to weakening of loyalty among the party's backers.

Implications for Internal Democracy

Party primaries and leadership selection lacked transparency, resulting in mistrust.

Regular members of the party were less involved and contributed less to the decision-making processes.

Courts started to intervene more frequently in party matters, leading to a loss of party autonomy.

People's faith in the democratic processes of the party was gradually diminishing.

In sum, conflicts within the party not only damaged the condition of internal democracy in the PDP but also revealed the shortcomings of the party's organizational setup.

4.4 Intra-Party Conflicts and the Political Performance of the PDP

Findings

According to the research, the internal disagreements within the party hindered the political performance of the PDP from 2015 up to 2023. Major findings are:

Continuous factional problems made the party less competitive in elections.

Different sides within the party led to members and political leaders leaving.

Changing leaders often was a factor that made the public lose faith in the party's capability to organize.

In several elections, performance was impacted by deep, undisclosed party conflicts.

Political experts and election publications revealed that the strife in the PDP disrupted the coordination of campaigns and weakened the party's effectiveness at the time of the main elections.

“Internal divisions within the PDP continue to affect its ability to function as a strong opposition party.” — *Vanguard Newspaper*, February 2023

Table 4.4: Effects of Intra-Party Conflicts on PDP Political Performance (2015–2023)

Political Issue	Effect on PDP Performance
Leadership disputes	Weak campaign coordination
Defections	Loss of political influence
Candidate imposition	Reduced member loyalty
Court cases	Electoral uncertainty
Factionalism	Weak party cohesion
Internal instability	Declining public confidence

Analysis

These results confirm what Elite Theory has been saying all along: that elite competition can not only destabilize the organizational structures of political parties but also hinder their institutional effectiveness.

Continuous quarrels within the PDP deteriorated party solidarity and hampered election readiness. Disagreements over leadership took the focus of the party away from formulating long-term political strategies and led to a drop in collective mobilization for elections.

Besides that, the findings show how defections and factionalism diminished the PDP's political standing in several states. Disaffection within the ranks of party members led to poor campaign coordination and a decline in organizational efficiency.

Also, unsettled leadership situations caused a negative view of the party in the public and decreased voter confidence. The failure to control internal conflicts adequately led to the PDP's reputation as a stable political choice being undermined.

Some of the very important effects of this situation on democratic politics are:

Weakening of the effectiveness of opposition parties in Nigeria.

Escalation of political instability in party structures.

Deterioration of public trust in party institutions.

Lower competitiveness in elections and less party cohesion.

To sum up, the conflicts within the PDP's ranks seriously affected its political performance and led to a fall in its organizational effectiveness during 2015-2023.

4.5 Intra-Party Conflicts, Elite Dominance, and the Future of the PDP

Findings

The research revealed that the viability and political success of the PDP for the next decade, between 2015 and 2024, is hugely reliant on the party's capacity to handle elite competition and enhance internal democracy. The efforts towards internal reconciliation and reforms of the institutions gained importance as the study progressed.

Main points:

Heightened demands for open party elections and internal amendments.

Greater stress on the reconciliation of party leaders.

Awareness of the necessity to empower members' involvement and responsibility.

Fresh. conversations about party discipline and conflict resolution methods. “The survival of the PDP depends largely on its ability to resolve elite conflicts and rebuild internal unity.” —

Leadership Newspaper, August 2023

Table 4.5: Reform Efforts and Future Prospects within the PDP (2015–2024)

Area of Reform	Expected Outcome
Transparent party primaries	Improved internal democracy
Conflict resolution mechanisms	Reduced factional disputes
Stronger party discipline	Improved organizational stability
Inclusive decision-making	Greater member participation
Reconciliation efforts	Enhanced party cohesion

Analysis

Results lend support to the notion of Elite Theory that mostly how elite competition is managed within political institutions determines the stability of the organization.

The political relevance of PDP in the future will be conditioned by their level of internal democratic strengthening and reduction of excessive elite domination. Open candidate selection processes and capable conflict management mechanisms are the main elements necessary to enhance the stability of the party.

Also, the study suggests that, "the ability of a party to make peace with its different factions can bring an increase in organizational harmony and trust among party members." In the absence of significant reforms, internal conflicts may continue to damage the party's ability to compete electorally and its reputation as an institution.

Elite Competition and Party Stability within the PDP (2015–2023)

Indicator	Trend
Leadership Rivalry	Increased steadily
Factional Disputes	Remained high
Internal Reform Discussions	Improved gradually
Member Participation	Moderate growth
Party Cohesion	Fluctuated

Overall, intra-party conflicts within the PDP between 2015 and 2023 reflected the broader realities of elite dominance and organizational instability within Nigerian party politics, while also highlighting the importance of internal democratic reforms for future political stability.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study focuses on intra-party conflicts and their consequences on the internal democracy and political performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023, particularly their effects on party cohesion, democratic practices, and party electoral performance. The Elite Theory's theoretical approach was used to examine the nature of elite dominance, power concentration, and organizational rivalry within the internal dynamics of the PDP during the study. The study was qualitative, and secondary data were used from party documents, electoral reports, newspaper publications, academic literature, political commentaries, and institutional reports on party politics and democratic governance in Nigeria, drawn from content analysis.

The study revealed that, according to the first research question, the occurrences of intra-party conflicts in the PDP from 2015–2023 were mostly about elite contestations for control and power within party structures. The factionalization of the party and its lack of organisational strength were aggravated by leadership rivalries among the party's key members. Party administration was beset by multiple party crises at various levels due to disagreements about zoning arrangements, presidential nominations, party leadership, and candidate selection. There was an increasing number of newspaper articles, party communiqués, and political analysis reports showing that powerful elites often vied with each other for strategic control of party devices and decision-making. This confirmed Hypothesis 1, which holds that intra-party conflict within the PDP was mainly rooted in cliques within the party for power and control of party structures. The results also contribute to the tenets of

Elite Theory, which posits that political organizations tend to be dominated by a small number of influential actors who vie for power, influence, and organizational control.

The study revealed that intra-party conflicts had a significant negative impact on the internal democracy and the political performance of the PDP between 2015 and 2023 in the second research question. Vulnerabilities in transparency and fairness in party primaries and party decision-making processes diminished due to candidate imposition, factional leadership arrangements, and leadership interference. Party administration was undermined by court decisions and a lack of party organization due to leadership conflicts. Electoral reports and political analysis also exposed that internal divisions had an impact on the coordination of campaigns, led to party disintegration, and incited defection of party actors. The results supported Hypothesis 2, which posited that intra-party conflicts had a significant impact on reducing internal democracy and negatively influencing the political performance of the PDP in Nigeria. The results support the assumptions of Elite Theory, which sees organizational structures within political parties moving towards becoming more oligarchic, or dominated by influential elites, and less inclusive of participation.

The study also identified that the long-lasting factionalism and leadership crises undermined the PDP's reputation as a stable opposition party during the study period. Public disputes between party leaders, conflicts over the legitimacy of leadership, and frequent defections eroded public trust in the party's organization and democratic legitimacy. The PDP was still politically active in several states and still played an active part in the national elections, but it was seriously hampered from being effective as a political unit by internal instability.

Additionally, the study found that reconciliation, party reforms and effective internal democratic processes became more significant in the PDP from the year 2015 to 2023. There was a wider awareness that the party needed to become more stable and less elite in its

decision-making processes, with comments on transparent party primaries, inclusive decision-making, better party discipline and conflict resolution processes. But the study concluded that there were still significant obstacles to meaningful reform, related to the existence of elite competition and rivalry and factional rivalry.

In general, the results confirmed that the internal conflicts in the PDP were largely driven by the rivalries between PDP elites, their leadership positions and organisational power, and that the conflicts hurt intra-party democracy, party unity and overall political performance in the study period.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that intra-party conflicts that characterized the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) between 2015 and 2023 were motivated by the search for strategic control of party structures, leadership conflicts and elite rivalries. The PDP continued to be one of Nigeria's leading opposition political parties throughout the study period, but its organization was undermined and democratic practices violated by ongoing factionalism and internal difficulties, which resulted in a lack of organizational stability and overall political efficacy. With the decline of the President's position in 2015, the party's internal dynamics started to become a regular contest with leadership squabbles, candidate impositions, zoning issues, and factional splits.

The results corroborate the hypotheses of Elite Theory, which focus on the presence of influential elites in political institutions and on their struggle for power, influence, and organisational control. In the PDP, elite dominance in the selection of leadership and the nomination of candidates and party administration reduced transparency, accountability, and widespread party membership involvement of ordinary party members. It also showed that

the competition among party members often involved more than a commitment to democratic ideals and institutional stability, and was usually more about securing strategic gain than about advancing democracy.

The study also found that the PDP suffered a lot of intra-party conflicts, which had a negative impact on the internal democracy of the party. The influence of strong political figures in party business caused unfairness in party campaigns, lowered the membership's role in party decision-making, and led to frequent court intervention in party conflicts. In-house conflict resolution structures were largely dysfunctional, and the crises had gone on for a long time, with parallel leadership structures and frequent organizational instability. These developments hurt the credibility of the party and undermined trust within the party.

Further, it is concluded from the study that the intra-party conflicts were detrimental to the political performance of PDP between 2015 and 2023. Leadership changes, defections, disagreements, and unresolved crises seriously hampered campaign coordination and diminished the party's electoral competitiveness in various elections. The image of the PDP as a fractured party also had an impact on voters' confidence and reduced its effectiveness as a cohesive opposition party in the Nigerian democratic process.

However, the study does acknowledge that there are opportunities that can strengthen the party's stability and effectiveness through actions that promote a greater measure of reconciliation, internal reform, and better democratic processes within the PDP. Transparent party primaries, participative party decision-making, increased party unity, and party management mechanisms can help to enhance party democracy and mitigate elite control of the party system.

To sum up, intra-party competition within the PDP was emblematic of deeper party politics issues of elite dominance and organizational instability in Nigeria. The study demonstrates that without strong internal democratic institutions and effective mechanisms for managing

elite competition, political parties may continue to experience instability that undermines democratic consolidation and effective political representation in Nigeria.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen Internal Democratic Processes and Reduce Elite Domination

The leadership of PDP needs to make internal democratic mechanisms stronger so that party primaries are carried out in a transparent manner, decision-making processes are inclusive, and leadership selection procedures are fair. They should also put in place stronger institutional safeguards to prevent excessive elite interference in the selection of party candidates and party administration. Also, to promote accountability, transparency, and equal participation among party members, party constitutions and internal regulations should be strictly adhered to. These measures will not only lessen factional disputes but will also increase members' trust and enhance the party's organizational stability.

- 3. Enhance Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Organizational Cohesion:** PDP must create more robust internal conflict resolution mechanisms that can resolve differences before they develop into long-term factional conflicts and court battles. Strengthening of reconciliation committees, mediation channels, and disciplinary agencies in the party is essential to encourage discussion, unity, and amicable handling of disagreements among party members. Also, there is a need to focus more on party discipline, organizational cohesion, and shared political interests rather than on individual elites' selfish pursuits. This will lead to greater stability of the party, fewer defections, and a stronger political presence of the PDP in the Nigerian democratic system.

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