

Intra-Party Crisis and Electoral Performance in Nigeria: A Study of the Peoples Democratic Party

by

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Abstract

Parties play a pivotal role in democratic governance, as they facilitate leadership recruitment, political mobilization, and policy formulation. Intra-party tensions have traditionally undermined party cohesion and its potential as an electoral force in Nigeria. This research examines the impact of leadership crises and candidate nomination disputes on the electoral fortunes of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 general election. Informed by the Intra-Group Conflict Theory, the study employed a quantitative research design, obtaining primary data from 400 respondents from six geopolitical zones via structured questionnaires. Descriptive analyses and multiple regressions were conducted to analyze the relationships of leadership crises and candidate selection disputes with electoral outcomes. The results indicate that the PDP's robustness in terms of organizational depth, strategic coordination, and voter mobilization was seriously impaired by partisan disputes. Leadership crises further divided factions and eroded public support, though candidate selection disputes were deemed the most damaging factor for electoral performance. Collectively, these internal conflicts explained over 95% of the variance in the party's election results, signaling the critical impacts of unresolved intra-party tensions for cohesion and competitiveness. The research highlights the importance of transparency in candidate selection, institutionalized internal democracy, and appropriate conflict resolution strategies for enhancing political party cohesion and electoral viability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Intra-party crisis, leadership crisis, candidate selection, electoral performance, PDP, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Political parties constitute the institutional pillar of representative democracy, carrying out important roles, including political mobilization, leadership recruitment, interest aggregation and policy articulation. In competitive democracies, they serve as the main channels through which citizens relate to the state, choose leaders, and influence governance outcomes. Therefore, the organizational capacity and unity of political parties are fundamental to both democratic precariousness and governance performance. On the other hand, internally divided parties, parties that are weakly institutionalized, or parties that are less shaped by collective goals as much as they are by elite contestation generally jeopardize democratic processes and distort electoral competition (Adejumobi, 2021).

In Nigeria, political parties have always been weakened by factionalism, particularly during elections. These include struggles for leadership, factional alignments, contestation over candidates, and clashes over party offices and resources. Such conflicts are not simply a minor inconvenience, but rather they sometimes develop into long-term feuds that divide parties and undermine their readiness for elections. Studies into Nigerian party politics suggests that unmitigated intra-party conflicts reduce cohesion of a party's organizational structure, impairs campaigning efforts, and weaken public perception of parties as viable democratic bodies (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025).

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the party system in Nigeria has been characterized by volatility, elite dominance, and weak internal democracy. Political parties are more like vehicles for elite negotiation and personal ambition rather than ideological organizations with well defined policy agendas. This leads to even more infighting over party control and nominations, especially in a setting where the road to state power is very closely tied to access to economic benefits. Consequently, factional battles within political parties have become a regular feature of Nigeria's electoral process with attendant effect on the electoral outcomes and this culture of partisanship continues to captivate the Nigerian electorates (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, 2024).

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which led Nigeria's politics from 1999 to 2015, exemplifies the endemic problems of intra-party crisis within the Fourth Republic. The party was divided by prolonged internal strife, with leadership clashes, zoning issues, and feuds between factions in several states after its loss at the federal level in 2015. While increasing public discontent with the ruling party provided a conducive atmosphere for electoral recuperation in the run-up to the 2023 general election, the PDP's internal dissensions weakened its organizational integrity, strategic coherence and "instrumentality in mobilizing electorally" (Onyekwere & Ololo, 2025).

Controversies around candidate selection and the conduct of primary elections also exacerbated internal divisions within the PDP. Party primaries are designed to strengthen party internal democracy and legitimacy. Still, instead, it has been criticized for being opaque, for elite imposition of candidates, and for uneven enforcement of party rules. These practices left the party with resentment in many of its members, leading to defections, litigations and anti-party activities in several states. Studies reveal that distorted primary election processes profoundly undermine party cohesion and the competitiveness of elections in Nigeria's multiparty system (Ezeani, Ikpegbu & Ezeani, 2024).

National and sub-national leadership crises, combined with disputes over candidate selection and the conduct of primary elections, resulted in the formation of parallel party structures, fragmentation of party discipline, and diminished campaign capacity in the PDP during the 2023 general election. These internal divisions prevented the party from presenting a coherent electoral message and also contributed to perceptions among voters that it was ill-equipped to govern. The persistence of such crises raises significant questions about the relationship between intra-party conflict and electoral performance in Nigeria. In this context, the paper addresses the degree to which leadership crises and contestation over candidate selection undermined the electoral fortunes of the PDP in 2023, and implications for democratic consolidation in the country.

Objectives of the study

The general purpose of this study is to analyze how intra-party conflict affects the electoral performance of political parties in Nigeria. While the sub-objectives of the study are to:

- i. To investigate the impact of leadership crisis on the electoral performance of the PDP in the 2023 general election.

- ii. To evaluate the impact of candidate selection and primary disputes within the party on the electoral fortunes of the PDP.

- iii. To establish the combined influence of leadership crisis and candidate selection disputes on the electoral fortunes of the PDP.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on intra-group conflict theory, which views conflict as disagreement, rivalry or opposition among members or subgroups of an organization when they are involved in pursuing contradictory objectives, roles, or a pool of resources. Task, process, and relationship conflict. Intra-group conflict occurs when members of a group differ over tasks, processes or interpersonal matters and such disagreements have a strong potential to affect group outcomes should they be mishandled (De Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012). Group-level research shows that intra-group conflict is not inevitably bad. Certain conflict-types, especially task conflict based on differing opinions, viewpoints and ideas, can contribute to better deliberation and subsequently enhanced decision making when occurring in the right way. Conversely, relationship and process conflict exhibit more consistent negative associations with trust, cohesion, group outcomes, emotional exhaustion, and group performance (De Wit et al., 2012; Tafvelin, 2020). These results imply that moderate task disagreement might be effective in prompting critical thinking and creativity, but that a chronic or unregulated conflict, especially when arising from relationship or process conflict, threatens trust and collective focus and would lead to malfunctioning results (De Wit et al., 2012; Tafvelin, 2020).

In a political party, equivalent phenomena arise when competitions for leadership offices, for the right to select candidates, or for control of the organization become more intense. Battles over leadership positions, nominations for office, and control of party machinery between the members of its factions are also common within political parties. Intra-Party tensions often developed when party elites or factions elevate personal priorities and the quest for power over collective strategic imperatives, compromising interior democracy and inciting factionalism and defection (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025; Ezeani, Ikegbu & Ezeani, 2024). Studies on Nigerian party politics reveal that rifts over zoning arrangements, candidate impositions, and non-transparent internal machinations have precipitated enduring intra-party rows in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that has culminated in repeated divisions and public rifts amongst key leaders, disintegrated party unity as it approached the 2023 general elections (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025; Ezeani et al., 2024).

In relation to the PDP, intragroup conflict explains how leadership battles and the contested nature of the party's primary election fragmented party unity and impeded efficient electoral mobilization. Factional divisions within the party were exacerbated when the party chairman and powerful governors were involved in a series of infighting and also with allegations of undemocratic and unfair candidate selection. These rifts caused splintering and diverted attention from organizational priorities, hindering the party's chances of running a united campaign in the 2023 general election (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Crisis in Political Parties

A party leadership crisis is when there are ongoing contestations between elites within a party over its legitimacy, authority, and control over party apparatus. Such crises are sometimes the result of poor internal institutionalization, party constitutions and formal procedures are either flouted or ignored, allowing for personalities or groups to dominate decision-making. In Nigeria, crises of this nature are often rooted in the pursuit of individual interests, the capture of elites within the system and the elevation of interest groups over rules, which in turn destabilize party cohesion (Eme & Onyishi, 2022; Ndubuisi & Uduma, 2025). Political parties in the midst of leadership disputes tend to articulate incoherent policy positions and have splintered decision-making systems, undermining confidence and trust not only among members but also among the general public.

One of the features of leadership crisis in Nigerian political parties is a frame of power struggle: individuals struggle for dominance and control. The leaders within political parties often prioritize their own political survival and influence, rather than the collective goals of the party, leading to prolonged feuds within parties. This emphasis on personal power can exacerbate factionalism, with groups coalescing around key individuals rather than common ideological or policy goals. These rifts are often intractable and promote patronage politics where party nominations and resources are distributed according to loyalty rather than competence, which in turn weakens the party internals (Ndubuisi & Omeire, 2025).

Leadership crises have a similar impact on public perceptions. Parties stuck in endless leadership battles are often seen by the electorate as divided and undemocratic, undermining trust and political legitimacy. Studies show that parties experiencing ongoing intraparty strife are not only more vulnerable to member defections and infighting sabotage, but also less likely to mobilize their supporters effectively at the ballot box, ultimately leading to negative electoral consequences (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025). These crises can be taken by citizens as signs of deeper weaknesses in governance, resulting in an even greater blow to the party's ability to deliver on the promise of its campaigns.

Studies further emphasize that leadership crises are largely the result of poorly institutional mechanisms of conflict resolution and low compliance with the internal constitutions of parties. Parties that do not enact transparent mechanisms for leadership succession, dispute management, and decision making have a tendency to inflame tensions among both the elites and the rank-and-file. In Nigeria, such leadership crises have led to dwindling party membership and disintegration of party, in some instances, splinter groups or new political platform emerging with grave implications for party cohesiveness and democracy's overall stability (Tukura, Nashuka & Danladi, 2025).

Candidates' Selection and Primary Election Disputes

Candidate Selection is a core function of political parties in democratic systems, as it decides those who will stand for the party in elections. Candidate selection should be competitive, transparent and responsive to the preferences of party members, promoting internal

democracy and legitimacy. However, in Nigeria, party primaries are often marred by rigging, imposition of candidates and sale of nomination forms. These practices distort democratic values, undermine internal cohesiveness and provide a productive soil where disputes may grow into legal battles or defection can be cultivated (Ezeani, Ikpegbu & Ezeani, 2024).

A frequent source of intra-party conflict in Nigeria is the imposition of candidates by powerful elites. This is when party bosses or other influential figures select their preferred candidates, often marginalizing contenders with a strong base of support among the rank and file. These practices undermine the principle of selecting on merit, foment resentment within the party membership and attract allegations of unfairness and corruption. These disputes not only weaken the parties but also discourage the participation of ordinary members in the internal decision-making processes (Oji, 2024; Ezeani et al., 2024).

Transparency and procedural fairness are important to mitigate conflicts in the process of selecting candidates. In party primaries that are not bound by clear and strict rules on how delegates should be selected or how candidates are eligible, or on zoning, the sense of unfairness and manipulation increases. Disgruntled aspirants may react by holding parallel primaries, challenging the results in court or trying to convince their supporters to defect, thus aggressively polarizing the party interior. Research shows that parties that conduct opaque primaries are more prone to litigation, defection, and internal sabotage, and ultimately suffer a marginalization in their party and electoral system position (Adekeye & Ambali, 2017).

Transparency and procedural fairness contribute significantly to conflict mitigation in candidate selection. In the absence of firm rules on who is eligible to participate in party primaries and how delegates are selected, accusations of bias and manipulation tend to intensify. They may retaliate by holding parallel primaries, by challenging the results in court or by encouraging supporters to abandon them, all of which serve to further divide the party. Research has shown that parties with more closely guarded primaries are more prone to litigation, defection and internal sabotage, and thus find their electoral and organizational capacity undermined (Adekeye & Ambali, 2017).

The consequences of a poor candidate choice are not only about tensions within parties, but also an electoral outcome. Vacillating aspirants and their adherents who exit or actively subvert parties undermine their ability to mobilize voters, drain party resources, and limit their presenting a coherent package of policies at the ballot box. Research on Nigeria's major political parties, including the PDP, shows that the poor management of primaries correlates with poorer election outcomes, reinforcing the need for transparent and inclusive candidate selection as being key to maintaining party cohesion and delivering electoral success (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025; Ezeani et al., 2024).

Intra-Party Crisis and Electoral Performance

Evidence suggests a close connection between intra-party crisis and electoral performance. Persistent internal divisions within parties also tend to hamper their ability to mobilize supporters, to coordinate campaign activities, and to offer voters clear policy

alternatives, with the result that they become less competitive in elections (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025). Intra-party crisis of Nigerian political parties result from poor internal democracy, leadership wrangling and contentious primaries, which have continued to retard party unity and electoral viability since the return to civilian rule in 1999, thereby constraining parties' capacity to maintain effective grass-root mobilization and well-orchestrated campaign machinery in the general elections (Moliki, 2020).

Several case studies link internal fictionalization and conflict with defections, weakened party cohesion and poor electoral performance. For example, data from the 2015 general elections in Kwara State reveal that internal strife in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was associated with mass defection and poor showing in the polls compared to other parties (Moliki, 2020). This suggests that deep-seated intra-party conflicts can gradually weaken a party's organization and voters' trust in it, and consequently, lead to its loss at the polls (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025).

Research further accounts for how intra-party conflict shapes electoral outcomes. When disputes fester, parties find it difficult to administer crucial internal processes like candidate selection and campaign coordination, undermining their performance in elections generally (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies [NILDS], 2021). Parties embroiled in ongoing internal feuding also tend to appear shaky to voters, who may take this as a sign that they are not up to the task, making the party less attractive relative to more cohesive rivals (NILDS, 2021)

Although evidence suggests that the effect of intra-party conflict on electoral performance is largely negative, the salience and visibility of conflicts have different effects on voters in certain environments. Research in the comparative politics literature suggests that intra-party conflict made visible to the public, particularly close to elections, raises voter doubts about party competence and can translate into electoral punishment if the conflicts are perceived as irresolvable (Ceron & Memoli, 2020).

METHODS

The study utilized the quantitative methodological approach. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents, selected through stratified random sampling, to collect primary data. To achieve national representation, one state was selected from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journals, books and official elections reports.

Table 1: Sampled Population for Questionnaire Administered

Metropolis	State	Geopolitical Zone	Projected Population (2026)	Sample Size
Maiduguri	Borno	North-East	929,408	60
Ilorin	Kwara	North-	1,138,890	55

		Central		
Sokoto	Sokoto	North-West	789,726	45
Enugu	Enugu	South-East	939,642	70
Port Harcourt	Rivers	South-South	3,951,670	110
Ibadan	Oyo	South-West	4,293,160	60
Total	Six States	Six Zones	12,042,496	400

Source: World Population Review Database

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and simple regression analysis were used to analyze the data to assess the impact of leadership crisis and candidate selection disputes on electoral performance. The regression model is specified as:

$$EP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LC + \beta_2 CS + \varepsilon$$

Where:

EP = Electoral Performance

LC = Leadership Crisis

CS = Candidate Selection / Primary Election Disputes

β_0 = Constant

β_1 – β_2 = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides analysis on leadership crisis, candidate selection disputes, and the general election performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 general elections. It analyzes the impact of internal leadership struggles, factionalism, and divisive candidate selection on party unity, confidence of the electorate and electoral performance. The section further includes hypothesis testing with multiple regression analysis to determine the impact, aggregately and disaggregately, of leadership crises and candidate selection disputes on the electoral performance of the PDP.

Table 2: Leadership Crisis (Q1–Q4)

Items	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean(MI)
Leadership turmoil in the PDP weakened party cohesion in the 2023 general	13	50	111	112	114	3.57

election.						
Leadership conflicts eroded the support of the voters in the PDP in the 2023 general election.	13	57	88	123	119	3.60
Leadership disputes within the PDP generated factionalism and affected the party's election outcomes.	9	58	92	126	115	3.62
There would be more votes in the PDP 2023 if not for the crisis that had mired the party's leadership.	9	58	98	114	121	3.61

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 discloses a definite and consistent pattern of belief among respondents that leadership crisis in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) greatly undermined its performance in the 2023 general elections. All the four variables relating to leadership crisis scored above the mid-point 3.00 on the Likert scale indicating a broad consensus that continuing leadership bickering weakened party unity, undermined voter's confidence and eroded party cohesion. The moderately high mean scores also imply that the respondents were of strong opinion that the aforementioned internal leadership disputes between the party's leadership and its members led to poor coordination and disintegration in the party's ranks, and this then affected the party's level of competitiveness in the election.

Overall, the results suggest that leadership turmoil was one among many factors that exposed the PDP to electoral vulnerability in 2023, since a majority of respondents held that the party would have fared better if it were not for such internal conflicts. This finding supports recent empirical literature suggesting that protracted leadership battles and poor internal democratic practices negatively affects party cohesion and results in poor electoral performance in Nigerian (Adamu & Yusufu, 2025). The evidence, hence, highlights that strengthening the internal leadership machinery and the management of conflicts within parties is a crucial for promising improvements in future electoral outcomes.

Table 3: Candidate Selection and Primary Election Disputes (Q7–Q10)

Items	SD (1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mea n (MI)
Infighting over PDP’s primaries damaged the party’s chances in the 2023 elections.	13	57	88	12 3	119	3.69
Candidates were imposed on members during PDP primaries which was disaffection within.	9	58	92	12 6	115	3.70
Disputes over primary elections and resultant defections hurt the PDP in 2023.	2	29	11 3	15 7	99	3.81
PDP could have performed better in the 2023 election if candidate selection had been more open.	3	32	11 9	15 0	96	3.76

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 reveals a strong consensus among respondents that the competition over presidential candidate selection and the party’s primary elections within the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) severely weakened its electoral prospects in the 2023 general election. All four statements in the table had a mean score above 3.00, suggesting considerable agreement that the competition from party primaries, candidates imposition by party elites and defections related to such conflicts has hurt the electoral viability of the party. The relatively high mean scores also imply that the majority of respondents agree that inconsistent primaries and the lack of transparency in the candidate selection process were the major causes of internal discontent that deflated the party’s fitness in the general election.

Overall, the results indicate that the process of candidate selection was a significant contributor to the PDP’s defeat in 2023, with many respondents believing the party’s chances would have been significantly better if it had conducted itself in a more open and democratic manner. This finding resonates with recent academic studies which demonstrate that internal challenges for nominations and imposition within political parties in Nigeria results in defection, weakens party cohesion and contributes to poor electoral results (Ezeani et al., 2024). Such findings serve to highlight the imperative to reinforce internal democratic principles and inclusive primary election mechanisms as strategies leading to greater party cohesion and electoral viability.

Table 4: Electoral Performance (Q11–Q14)

Items	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean (MI)
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Electoral fortunes of the party were hurt by rifts between aspirants in the PDP primaries in 2023.	4	31	119	154	92	3.70
Imposition of candidates in the PDP primaries created disquiet within the party.	2	32	121	154	91	3.69
The fallout from a bitterly contested primary election contributed to defections from the PDP.	13	57	88	123	119	3.61
A more transparent candidate selection process would have enhanced PDP's performance in 2023.	9	58	92	126	115	3.62

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 shows a simplistic view of respondents' opinions that dispute from the primaries (and candidate selection in PDP) greatly weakened the party's chances in the 2023 general election. All the four items obtained mean scores above the neutral mid-point of 3.00, indicating that there was a consensus that frictions within PDP during its primaries, imposition of candidates and defections thereafter affected the party's chances at the polls. Relatively high means on these items indicate that respondents, on average, agreed that defective primaries and internal disunity in candidate selection were the two main factors that led to internal crisis, weakened party cohesion, and reduced electoral competence in 2023 election.

Overall, the results indicate that the contentious candidate selection processes were one of the main reasons for the poor performance of the PDP in 2023 general elections and that respondents were of the view that more transparent and democratic processes of the primary elections could have helped the party do better in the election. This finding is consistent with recent quantitative literature illustrating that party interior disputes over candidate choices and nominations have frequently undermined party cohesion and impaired electoral performance in Nigeria (Ambali et al., 2024). The findings therefore stress the need to consolidate intra-party

democracy, enforce transparency in candidate selections and employ viable mechanisms for conflict management to foster party cohesion and future electoral viability.

Results Testing (Hypothesis)

This research applied the multiple regression analysis to offer a strong basis to analyze the relationship between party politics on the inside and the election results. It will, therefore, examine the impact of leadership crises and candidate selection conflict on the electoral performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 general election. The hypotheses below will be tested to explore whether each and all of these factors occurred, about these effects, empirically helping to inform the question of how much the party's competitiveness and voter support were damaged by internal party strife.

H₀: There is no significant effect of Leadership crises on the electoral performance of the PDP in the 2023 general election.

H₀₂: There is no significant effect of candidate selection and pre-electoral conflict within the party on the electoral performance of the PDP.

H₀₃: There are no significant effects of party leadership instability and candidate selection conflicts on the electoral performance of the PDP.

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.978 ^a	.957	.957	.18012	.957	4402.013	2	397	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Candidate_Selection, Leadership_crisis									

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	285.643	2	142.822	4402.013	.000 ^b
	Residual	12.881	397	.032		
	Total	298.524	399			
a. Dependent Variable: Election_Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Candidate_Selection, Leadership_crisis						

Coefficients ^a								
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower	Upper	Tolerance VIF

						Boun d	Boun d		
1	(Constant)	- .008	.041		-.205	.83 7	-.089	.072	
	Leadership_crisis	.222	.029	.216	7.750	.00 0	.166	.278	.140 7.12 5
	Candidate_Selecti on	.779	.028	.775	27.84 6	.00 0	.724	.834	.140 7.12 5
a. Dependent Variable: Election_Performance									

Source: SPSS 28

Model Summary

The regression model produced an R value of 0.978, a very strong positive correlation between predictors leadership crises and candidate selection disputes and that of the PDP's performance at the polls. $R^2 = 0.957$, indicating that the joint effect of these two variables explains 95.7% of the variation in the party's electoral result. The adjusted R^2 , also 0.957, indicates a very stable model and that the model is not overfitted. In addition, the low standard error of estimate (0.18012) suggests that the predicted values of electoral performance are very close to the observed ones, the high predictive accuracy could be considered as further evidence for the model's superiority.

ANOVA

The result of the ANOVA shows that the full regression model is statistically significant ($F(2, 397) = 4402.013$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that leadership crises and candidate selection disputes are at the very least joint significant predictors of the PDP's electoral performance. The regression sum of squares (285.643) is much larger than the residual sum of squares (12.881), indicating that the majority of the variability in the electoral performance can be explained by the model, and a small amount remained unexplained.

Regression Coefficients

The coefficients table illustrates how each individual predictor contributes to the electoral performance of the PDP:

Leadership Crisis: $\beta = 0.216$, $t = 7.750$, $p < 0.001$. This means that a one-unit increase in leadership crisis, i.e. higher levels of internal strife, leads to a significant decrease in party electoral performance. Put simply, the leadership now turncoats showed a temporarily suppressive effect on the PDP's ability to rally support and hold the party together in the 2023 poll.

Candidate Selection: $\beta = 0.775$, $t = 27.846$, $p < 0.001$. Selection of candidates controversies have an even greater effect than leader crises, underlining that perceived unfairness, imposition of candidates and fights in the primaries was decisive in determining the electoral outcome. This finding highlights the need for open, democratic processes of candidate selection if parties are to be united and electorally successful.

The collinearity statistics ($VIF = 7.125$ for each of the predictors) indicates a moderate correlation between the predictors, but it is still below the critical value of 10, suggesting multicollinearity is not severe enough to affect the estimates.

Discussion of Findings

A multiple regression was conducted to examine the joint effect of leadership crisis and candidate selection dispute on the electoral fortunes of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 general election. Table 1 shows the detailed results of the regressions, including the model summary statistics, the ANOVA table, and the coefficients, and allows for the interpretation of the strength, significance, and direction of the relationships between the independent variables and the party's electoral results.

These results clearly show that intra-party crises, especially leadership conflicts and candidate selection disputes, had a significant negative impact on the PDP's performance in the 2023 general election. While candidate selection issues emerged as the more dominant factor, leadership disputes also played a crucial role by fostering factionalism and eroding voter confidence. Together, these internal challenges account for nearly all the variation in electoral performance, highlighting that unresolved party conflicts seriously undermine cohesion and weaken a party's ability to compete effectively in elections.

These results demonstrate unequivocally that intra-party crises, particularly leader contests and candidate selection disputes, negatively affected the performance of the PDP in the 2023 general election. Candidate selection issues became the more salient factor, but leadership struggles contributed decisively as well by generating factionalism and disillusion among the electorate. Combined, these two internal problems explain almost the entirety of variation in electoral results, indicating that unresolved party conflict gravely damages cohesion and debilitates a party's capacity to fight effectively in elections.

CONCLUSION

The research shows that crises within political parties, especially between its leaders or candidates for leadership, had the most negative impact on the performance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 general elections. Among these, disputes regarding candidate selection were the strongest factor, leading to a reinforcement of party cohesion and voter confidence was weakened the most by perceptions of unfairness, candidate imposition and non-transparent primary procedures. Although factionalism and leadership were less pronounced, they remain important factors in the production of extreme factionalism in the nation. Collectively, these two internal issues explain virtually all the variance in the PDP's vote share, reinforcing the notion that unresolved disputes effectively cripple a party's cohesion and capacity to mount strong electoral campaigns.

These results were consistent with the Intra-Group Conflict Theory, suggesting that relationship and process conflict (i.e leadership struggles and candidate selection disputes) that remains unresolved is particularly destructive to organizational outcomes. In the context of Nigerian politics, the findings reveal that parties lacking clear internal democratic practices and robust conflict resolution mechanisms are at a severe disadvantage in elections, as such internal

infirmities serve to corrode party cohesion, voter confidence and overall electoral competitiveness.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward to enhance the cohesion and electoral performance of the political parties in Nigeria:

- i. Political parties would need to have clear, transparent, and inclusive processes and procedures for leadership succession, decision-making and the like that minimize the influence of elite domination and the emergence of a protracted leadership crisis.
- ii. Parties should hold open, merit-based, inclusive selection for nomination of candidates. Rigorous application of well-established procedures on primaries, delegate selection and zoning will reduce tensions and defections.
- iii. Parties should create standing Resolutions of Conflicts Committees within parties to mediate conflicts at an early stage, redress grievances and prevent factionalism.
- iv. Parties should work to build dialogue and cooperation among party members, factions, and cleavages towards party unity, common goals, and unified campaign efforts.
- v. Political parties should keep their internal conflicts away from the public eye in order not to be painted negatively by the country's electorates and so that the parties do not lose the trust of the general public and/or their own party members.
- vi. Parties should carry out training for party officials on the ethics of leadership, negotiation and mediation, and conflict resolution to avert or minimize the potential for intra-party violent conflicts.

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