© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 1631-1642 | ISSN: 2636-4484

PARTY SUPREMACY AND LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY IN NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0538
Accepted Date: 11/08/2026
Published Date: 07/09/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
Political parties are indispensable to the functioning of representative democracy in Nigeria, yet the expansive influence they exercise over legislators generates a persistent institutional tension between party supremacy and the constitutional imperative of legislative autonomy. Despite a growing body of scholarship on party politics and legislative behaviour, insufficient attention has been paid to the complex interaction between formal constitutional arrangements and informal party practices in shaping the autonomy of Nigeria's legislature. This article interrogates the nature, extent, and democratic implications of party influence on legislative autonomy within Nigeria's presidential system. Adopting a qualitative and doctrinal approach, the study critically examines relevant constitutional and electoral provisions alongside empirical literature on party–legislature relations and the operation of Nigeria's National Assembly. The study finds that although party sponsorship remains fundamental to legislators' political emergence and continued tenure, party control over legislative conduct is neither absolute nor uniform, thereby underscoring the need to strengthen internal party democracy while safeguarding the institutional autonomy and self-governing capacity of the legislature.

Keywords: political parties; legislative autonomy; party supremacy; party discipline; democratic governance; Nigeria.
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Introduction

Political parties rank among the most important institutions of modern representative government. They give citizens an organised means of contesting for power, help translate scattered individual interests into coherent political programmes, train and recruit political leaders, mobilise voters at election time, and put forward candidates for public office. Within legislatures themselves, parties perform a similar coordinating role: they group elected representatives around common platforms and shared strategies, whether the system in question is parliamentary or presidential. Where this works well, party organisation can make a legislature more coherent, help coordinate policy, and make it easier for voters to hold government to account. But the relationship is not without friction. It raises a genuine question about how far party discipline should be allowed to limit the independence of individual representatives and the institutional autonomy of the legislature as a whole.

This friction is especially sharp in presidential systems, where the legislature is constitutionally a separate branch from both the party system and the executive. Legislators are meant to represent their constituents, take part independently in law-making, approve public spending, and check the executive. At the same time, their careers usually depend heavily on party structures that decide who gets a ticket to run, who receives campaign support, and who is renominated. The result is that lawmakers can find themselves pulled in several directions at once — toward their constituents, toward their constitutional duties, toward their own political survival, and toward the party that put them in office in the first place. What emerge from this pull is neither full party control nor full legislative independence, but an ongoing negotiation between collective party interests and the individual and institutional responsibilities of legislators.

Nigeria illustrates this tension in a particularly acute form. Because candidates can only contest legislative elections under the banner of a registered political party, parties function as the principal gatekeepers to legislative office. Indeed, the Supreme Court has treated party sponsorship as foundational to the entire electoral process: in *Amaechi v Independent National Electoral Commission*, the Court held that it is ultimately the political party, through its chosen candidate, that contests and wins an election, and that sponsorship of a candidate is a matter falling within the party's own internal discretion rather than an individual's guaranteed right. Rt Hon Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi v Independent National Electoral Commission & Ors (2008) 5 NWLR (Pt 1080), where the Supreme Court affirmed that it is the party that contests and wins an election through its sponsored candidate This is reinforced by Section 221 of the 1999 Constitution, which reserves the right to canvass for votes exclusively to registered political parties. Section 221 of the Constitution provides that no association other than a political party may canvass for votes or contribute to a candidate's election expenses Yet the same Constitution establishes the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly as independent institutions, vested with their own law-making, appropriation, and oversight powers. Parties, in other words, control the door into legislative office, but they have no constitutional mandate to run the legislature once members are inside it. Whatever influence parties do exert over leadership contests, committee assignments, or relations with the executive is therefore largely informal built on negotiation, patronage, and the leverage that comes from controlling future nominations, rather than on any explicit constitutional grant of authority.

That informal influence, however, appears to be far less consistent than is often assumed. In a survey of members of the 8th and 9th National Assemblies, Demarest and Langer found that most legislators reported receiving no regular instructions from their party leadership

on how to vote, and that a majority indicated they would be willing to break from the party line if a proposal conflicted with their own convictions. Analysis of survey responses indicated that most MPs do not receive regular party instructions, and most respondents indicated they would vote against party lines if a proposal clashed with their convictions Several legislators told the researchers that the relevant survey questions were difficult to answer for the simple reason that party positions on most issues were rarely articulated in the first place. Many MPs indicated that it was difficult to answer statements on party discipline because instructions or the development of party lines were so rare Related work by Demarest on legislator behaviour in the same period similarly points to a system in which party ties to voters and to individual lawmakers remain comparatively weak and clientelistic rather than programmatic. This evidence pushes back against any simple story of Nigerian legislators marching in lockstep with party leadership. It suggests instead that party influence is strongest at specific points in the political process above all candidate selection, recruitment, and career advancement without necessarily carrying over into tight control of how members actually vote once they take their seats. The real puzzle, then, is not whether Nigerian parties are powerful or whether legislators are free agents, but how the formal constitutional architecture and the informal political practices layered on top of it jointly determine where legislative autonomy actually begins and ends.

This question matters well beyond questions of institutional design. If party control becomes excessive, legislators may lose the practical capacity to exercise independent judgment, represent their constituents honestly, or hold the executive to account functions the Constitution assigns to them directly. If, on the other hand, legislative behaviour becomes too individualistic, parties lose their ability to deliver coherent policy programmes, and voters lose a meaningful basis for holding any collective actor accountable at the ballot box. A well-functioning democratic system needs parties strong enough to coordinate and provide direction, without those parties hollowing out the legislature's constitutional standing and capacity for self-governance.

Statement of the Problem

The literature on Nigerian legislative politics tends to split into two camps that do not talk to each other very well. One strand emphasises party dominance, portraying the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly as largely captured by party leadership and executive patronage a reading with real support in accounts of executive-legislative relations and legislative oversight in Nigeria. Fashagba's study of legislative oversight under the Nigerian presidential system examines how the National Assembly's oversight function operates within this politically constrained environment A second, more recent strand grounded in direct survey and interview evidence from sitting legislators complicates that picture considerably, showing that formal party discipline over actual voting behaviour is weak, inconsistently applied, and frequently absent altogether.

Survey evidence from the 8th and 9th National Assemblies indicates that party instructions to members are irregular and that most members are prepared to vote against party lines where their convictions require it what the existing scholarship has not done well is reconcile these two pictures. Nobody has fully explained how it is possible for parties to be constitutionally decisive at the point of entry into legislative office through the sponsorship requirement affirmed in *Amaechi* and informally influential over leadership contests and committee politics, while at the same time exercising only patchy and inconsistent control over how members actually vote in the chamber. Few studies bring a doctrinal, constitutional lens to this apparent contradiction, and fewer still translate the empirical picture of weak party discipline

into concrete proposals for reforming the legal and institutional rules governing candidate selection, internal party conduct, and legislative self-governance. This article takes up that gap directly.

The stakes of leaving the gap unaddressed are not merely academic. Where party influence goes unchecked, legislative independence and the representative function of individual lawmakers can be quietly eroded. Where party coordination is too weak, policy coherence and collective electoral accountability suffer instead. The problem this article addresses, then, is not the mere existence of party influence over Nigeria's legislature some degree of that influence is inevitable and, within limits, desirable but the absence of a sufficiently clear institutional framework for distinguishing legitimate party coordination from excessive party control.

Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of this article is to examine the tension between party supremacy and legislative autonomy within Nigeria's presidential system. More specifically, it sets out to:

i. Examine the constitutional and institutional foundations of the relationship between political parties and legislative autonomy in Nigeria, including the sponsorship requirement and its judicial interpretation;
ii. Analyse the formal and informal mechanisms through which parties shape legislative behaviour, decision-making, and institutional independence — from leadership contests and committee politics to the day-to-day voting conduct of individual members; and
iii. Propose institutional and legal reforms capable of drawing a clearer boundary between legitimate party discipline and excessive party control, while protecting the legislature's constitutional capacity for self-governance.

Conceptual Clarifications

Political Parties and Democratic Representation

A political party is best understood as an organised association that seeks to influence or capture government through electoral competition. Its significance lies not simply in winning elections but in the way it links ordinary citizens to the machinery of the state recruiting leaders, mobilising voters, aggregating scattered interests, and giving the electorate a recognisable set of policy alternatives to choose between.

This is the premise behind the idea of "party government" the expectation that officials elected under the same banner will work together, once in office, toward broadly shared goals. Medina's formal work on party discipline suggests that this kind of coordination does not require unlimited control over individual legislators. Because elections are contested across many separate districts, party behaviour can be correlated without being uniform parties can achieve reasonably coherent outcomes through looser mechanisms than strict command. Medina's model of party discipline with legislative initiative shows how the multi-district structure of elections permits correlated rather than uniform legislative behaviour within a party (Medina, 2006). How well this works in practice, though, depends heavily on what kind of party is doing the coordinating. Programmatic, internally democratic, durable parties can use discipline to turn an electoral mandate into policy. Parties built around patronage networks or shifting elite coalitions tend to use the language of loyalty to protect factional interests instead with little connection to any coherent public programme. Recent scholarship on Nigeria falls squarely into the second category: Nigerian parties are repeatedly described as weakly institutionalised, ideologically thin, and prone to capture by narrow elites, which makes any straightforward application of party-government theory to Nigeria difficult. Madueke's 2026 analysis characterises Nigerian political parties as weakly institutionalised and vulnerable to elite capture (Madueke, 2026)

The Legislature and Legislative Autonomy

The legislature sits at the foundation of constitutional democracy, carrying responsibility for representation, law-making, appropriation, oversight, and deliberation. Legislative autonomy, in this context, means the legislature's capacity to run its own internal affairs and carry out these functions free from improper direction whether that direction comes from the executive or from party structures. Autonomy does not require legislators to shed their political affiliations; it simply requires that the institution itself retain the authority it needs to do its constitutional job. This matters especially under a system built on separation of powers: a legislature that has effectively become an instrument of the executive, or of an external party hierarchy, loses much of its capacity to scrutinise government, investigate wrongdoing, and represent the full diversity of its constituents.

Party Discipline and Party Supremacy

Party discipline, narrowly defined, is a party's ability to secure cooperation and adherence to agreed collective positions among its members and some degree of it is ordinarily necessary for coherent governance. Party supremacy is a broader and considerably more contested idea, one often invoked in Nigerian political discourse to suggest that party decisions should simply override the preferences of individual office-holders. The trouble starts when this principle is stretched to imply unlimited authority for party leaders over institutions that are constitutionally independent. What's needed is a clear line between legitimate party coordination policy development, caucus organisation, reasonable expectations of cooperation and control that displaces constitutional procedure altogether. The real question is not whether parties should influence legislators at all (they should, and normally do, in any representative system), but how that influence is structured, limited, and held accountable.

Clientelism and Patronage Politics

Any account of Nigerian party-legislature relations has to reckon with clientelism: access to nomination, appointment, and future advancement in Nigeria often turns on personal loyalty and reciprocal obligation rather than programmatic commitment. Where nomination processes are opaque and controlled by small elite, legislators dependent on party gatekeepers for renomination may hesitate to challenge those gatekeepers even where their constituents' interests, or their own judgment, would suggest otherwise. This produces a form of informal discipline exercised not through parliamentary rules but through control over political careers. Nigeria's electoral regulator, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has periodically updated its regulatory framework for party administration; it began a 2026 review of its 2022 Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, aimed at aligning party administration, candidate nomination, and internal compliance with the Electoral Act 2026 ahead of the 2027 general election cycle. INEC commenced a 2026 review of its 2022 Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties to align them with the Electoral Act 2026 ahead of the 2027 elections (INEC, 2022, 2026)

Theoretical Framework

This article relies mainly on party government theory, read together with insights from the literature on clientelism and political institutionalisation. Party government theory explains why some cohesion among elected representatives matters: without it, voters have no reliable way to hold parties collectively accountable for how government performs, and the link between electoral promise and legislative outcome simply breaks down. But the theory has a built-in limitation — party discipline is only democratically defensible where party positions themselves emerge from reasonably transparent and participatory processes. Medina's framework implies

that party discipline is democratically defensible only where party positions emerge from transparent and participatory processes (Medina, 2006) Where a small elite sets party policy unilaterally and simply demands obedience, discipline can weaken representation rather than strengthen it.

Applied to Nigeria, this calls for a modified version of party government theory: parties should supply policy coordination, but their authority has to operate within constitutional limits, and legislative institutions need to retain real capacity for independent judgment particularly in oversight, appropriation, and matters of internal self-governance. Clientelism theory fills in the rest of the picture, explaining why formal constitutional guarantees don't always predict how legislators actually behave: informal patronage networks frequently shape legislative conduct even where the constitutional text formally protects institutional independence.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design built on documentary and doctrinal analysis. It draws on the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, and the empirical and theoretical literature on political parties, legislatures, and democratic governance in Nigeria. The analysis works through three central themes: the constitutional position of political parties in relation to elected representatives; the formal and informal mechanisms through which parties influence legislative governance; and the implications of these relationships for democratic accountability and institutional autonomy. Documentary analysis fits this task well; since the central questions here are ones of constitutional interpretation and institutional relationship how formal rules interact with political practice rather than questions that require original fieldwork.

Review of Relevant Literature

Scholarship on Nigerian democracy has long treated political parties as indispensable but institutionally fragile. Aiyede's analysis of executive-legislature relations in the early Fourth Republic traced much of the period’s recurring political conflict to weak institutional development and party incoherence evidence that weak parties do not automatically produce autonomous or stable legislatures; institutional weakness can just as easily generate fragmented alliances and repeated turf wars among competing political actors. Aiyede’s study of executive-legislature relations in the early Fourth Republic identified weak institutional development and party incoherence as significant sources of recurring political conflict (Aiyede, 2005)

More recent empirical work complicates the conventional story of overwhelming party control. Demarest and Langer surveyed 119 members of the 8th and 9th National Assemblies and conducted 23 in-depth interviews; they found that most legislators do not regularly receive voting instructions from party leadership, and that many members said they would be willing to vote against their party's position, particularly where a proposal conflicted with personal or constituency conviction. Demarest and Langer's study, based on surveys of 119 MPs and 23 in-depth interviews, found that most legislators do not regularly receive voting instructions from party leadership and many would vote against the party position where it conflicted with their convictions (Demarest & Langer, 2023) The same study found that formal party structures play only a limited role in organising cross-regional cooperation within the Assembly. Instead, informal “ethno-regional balancing” the deliberate spread of leadership and committee positions across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones does more to keep parliamentary business stable than party discipline itself. The study found that informal ethno-regional balancing across the six geopolitical zones does more to stabilise parliamentary business than party discipline (Demarest, 2023) This matters because it points to selective, rather than absolute, party influence: parties

remain decisive at the point of candidate recruitment and sponsorship, but exercise far less continuous control once legislators are actually making decisions in the chamber.

Work on party institutionalisation adds another layer to this picture. Madueke argues that Nigerian parties remain plagued by elite capture, weak internal democracy, and thin grassroots engagement with the result that party manifestos are poorly circulated and rarely translated into actual legislative or executive decisions once a party takes power. Madueke argues that Nigerian parties suffer from elite capture, deficient internal democracy, and limited grassroots engagement, leaving manifestos poorly disseminated and rarely operationalised (Madueke, 2026) Weak institutionalisation of this kind has consequences beyond party politics narrowly conceived: parties that cannot aggregate interests programmatically tend to push elites toward ethnic or religious mobilisation instead.

Taken together, the literature reveals something of a paradox at the centre of Nigerian party politics. Parties are indispensable to democratic competition access to legislative office runs through party sponsorship, full stop and yet too weakly institutionalised to deliver coherent, programmatic governance once legislators actually take their seats. The debate over party supremacy and legislative autonomy has to be situated inside that paradox, not treated as though it could be resolved by picking one side or the other.

Constitutional and Institutional Framework of Party–Legislature Relations in Nigeria

Constitutional Recognition of Political Parties

The 1999 Constitution (as amended) recognises political parties as essential participants in the electoral process and ties eligibility for legislative office to nomination and sponsorship by a registered party. This makes parties constitutionally significant gatekeepers of representation: a person may command substantial public support and still find that access to legislative office runs entirely through the party system. INEC, as the constitutionally established electoral management body, regulates key aspects of party administration and periodically issues and revises its Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, covering registration, primaries, and compliance. INEC periodically issues and revises the Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties governing registration, primaries, and compliance (INEC, 2022, 2026) That regulatory role, however, does not transfer legislative power to party executives, nor does it make party directives superior to legislative procedure.

Party Sponsorship and the Retention of Legislative Seats

The Constitution also ties retention of a legislative seat to continued party membership, subject to recognised exceptions such as division or merger within the party. Nigerian legislators are therefore never fully detached from the party that sponsored them party affiliation carries continuing constitutional weight even after election. That said, this should not be read as granting parties unrestricted authority over every aspect of legislative conduct: the power to sponsor a candidate is not, by itself, the power to direct every decision that candidate later makes as a lawmaker. The constitutional framework thus creates a relationship of interdependence rather than outright subordination legislators emerge through parties, but once elected, they become members of constitutionally established institutions whose responsibilities extend well beyond party interest.

Legislative Powers and Institutional Independence

The National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly hold constitutionally defined powers over law-making, appropriation, investigation, and oversight, and each operates under its own internally adopted rules and procedures. The capacity to organise their own affairs is central to the doctrine of separation of powers. Parties can certainly shape the political environment in

which legislative decisions get made, but they cannot legitimately substitute party preference for constitutional procedure a party may well endorse a candidate for legislative leadership, but the process by which that office is actually filled has to remain governed by the chamber's own constitutional and standing-order requirements, not by party fiat.

Political Parties and the Organisation of Legislative Governance

Recruitment and Candidate Selection

Parties exert their most direct influence before legislators ever take their seats, through primaries and other nomination procedures that determine who gets access to the electoral platform in the first place. Because legislators seeking re-election typically need renewed access to these same structures, candidate selection creates strong incentives for continued loyalty to party gatekeepers. Where nomination procedures are transparent and genuinely competitive, this dynamic can reinforce collective accountability. Where party structures are characterised by opacity and elite domination, legislators may become increasingly beholden to the political actors who control the machinery of party nomination and advancement, thereby weakening their accountability to the electorate and compromising the representative character of legislative governance.

Legislative Leadership

Party involvement is equally visible in contests for legislative leadership, which are usually preceded by intense negotiation within and across party structures. Party endorsement confers real organisational advantages, but it does not eliminate the chamber's own constitutional role in selecting its officers and the ultimate legitimacy of any leadership outcome still depends on compliance with the applicable constitutional and standing-order procedures. Nigeria's own record bears this out: in 2011, the PDP's zoning arrangement for the Speakership was overturned when the House instead elected Aminu Tambuwal, and in 2015 the APC's preferred candidates for Senate President and Speaker were similarly displaced by Bukola Saraki and Yakubu Dogara, each of whom built cross-party and cross-regional coalitions of support.The 2011 and 2015 Speakership and Senate Presidency contests, in which chamber outcomes diverged from party zoning preferences, illustrate the limits of formal party control over leadership selection (Demarest & Langer, 2023) Episodes like these illustrate both the real limits of formal party control over leadership selection and why the chamber's own constitutional procedures need to be protected from being treated as a mere formality.

Legislative Agenda and Policy Coordination

Parties can contribute positively to governance by coordinating policy priorities — a governing party that campaigns on an identifiable programme can reasonably expect legislative cooperation in turning that programme into law, and this kind of coordination genuinely strengthens the link between electoral promises and governmental performance. Problems arise when coordination hardens into arbitrary instruction, or when legislators from the governing party are discouraged from scrutinising poorly designed policy simply because it came from a government of their own party. A healthy system needs legislators who support legitimate collective commitments while retaining the ability to question legislation and investigate executive conduct when it's warranted.

Committee Assignments and Parliamentary Caucuses

Committees do much of the real work of a legislature examining bills, conducting oversight, scrutinising public expenditure. Empirical evidence from the National Assembly suggests that committee assignments in Nigeria are shaped less by strict party allocation than by the constitutional principle of federal character, under which chairmanships and committee

memberships get distributed across the six geopolitical zones to preserve cross-regional balance. Committee assignments in the National Assembly are shaped less by party allocation than by the federal character principle, distributing chairmanships across the six geopolitical zones (Demarest & Langer, 2023) where that distribution follows transparent, established rules, it can be democratically legitimate. The risk is that access to influential committees instead becomes a tool of personal reward or punishment in which case both legislative expertise and institutional accountability tend to suffer.

Party Supremacy and Legislative Autonomy: The Central Tension

The tension between party supremacy and legislative autonomy is often framed as a choice between two extremes: total legislative subordination to party direction, or total legislative independence from any party commitment. Neither extreme reflects what democratic governance actually requires. Unqualified legislative independence weakens party accountability, since voters would have no reliable way to connect their electoral choices to governmental outcomes if legislators could simply disregard every commitment tied to their electoral platform Conversely, unchecked party supremacy may undermine legislative autonomy at both institutional and individual levels: institutionally, by constraining the legislature's capacity to determine its internal affairs and exercise its constitutionally assigned law-making, appropriation, and oversight functions without undue external direction; and individually, by limiting legislators' ability to exercise independent judgment in representing their constituents and participating in legislative decision-making.

The Nigerian evidence suggests the practical relationship is considerably more fluid than the rhetoric of "party supremacy" usually implies. Survey data from the National Assembly point to limited and inconsistent party direction over legislative voting, alongside considerable room for individual and cross-party political behaviour particularly around resource allocation and committee bargaining. Survey data show limited and inconsistent party direction over legislative voting, alongside room for individual and cross-party behaviour around resource allocation and committee bargaining (Demarest & Langer, 2023) The real reform challenge, then, is not simply to weaken parties in order to protect individual legislators. It is to build both stronger, more internally democratic parties and legislative institutions capable of resisting inappropriate external interference from any source, including party leadership itself.

Implications for Democratic Governance

Parties can improve policy consistency by coordinating the activities of elected officials around a shared programme, cutting down on political fragmentation and making collective decision-making across the executive and legislative branches easier to sustain.

Excessive dependence on party elites, though, risks weakening the relationship between legislators and the citizens they represent. A legislator who sees party gatekeepers as the main determinant of political survival is more likely to prioritise elite interests over constituency concerns opening a gap between what citizens elect representatives to do and what those representatives are structurally incentivised to do.

The consequences of excessive party control are especially serious for oversight, since members of a governing party may face real political pressure when investigating an executive drawn from their own party. Party loyalty should never become an excuse for shielding public officials from constitutional scrutiny oversight is a responsibility of the legislature as an institution, not a favour extended to the executive at the party's discretion.

The overall quality of party-legislature relations tracks closely with the quality of internal party democracy. Where party decisions emerge through transparent, participatory

procedures, legislators have real grounds for treating those positions as legitimate expressions of collective will. Where decisions are simply imposed by narrow elite, demands for discipline carry correspondingly weaker democratic legitimacy. Strengthening internal party democracy, then, is not merely an electoral reform it is a precondition for improving the overall quality of legislative governance.

Conclusion

Political parties are indispensable to Nigeria's democratic system they remain the principal organisational channel through which candidates contest elections and citizens choose among competing alternatives. That importance, though, does not amount to a warrant for unlimited control over legislative institutions. Nigeria's constitutional democracy needs both effective parties and autonomous legislatures: parties for recruitment, mobilisation, and electoral accountability; legislatures for representation, law-making, and oversight. The relationship between the two is best understood as one of constitutional interdependence, not institutional subordination. The Nigerian challenge is made harder by weak party institutionalisation, thin ideological differentiation, and persistent elite dominance.Nigerian parties continue to suffer from weak institutionalisation, thin ideological differentiation, and persistent elite dominance (Madueke, 2026) Under these conditions, the rhetoric of "party supremacy" can be, and sometimes is, deployed selectively to protect influential political actors rather than to advance coherent public policy. Even so, the empirical record from the National Assembly suggests Nigerian legislative politics is not simply a story of party capture: informal mechanisms of cross-regional balancing, coalition-building, and individual legislative initiative continue to operate alongside — and sometimes in real tension with formal party structures.Informal mechanisms of cross-regional balancing, coalition-building, and individual legislative initiative continue to operate alongside party structures in the National Assembly (Demarest & Langer, 2023) The right response, then, is not to try to eliminate party influence from legislative politics that would be both impractical and out of step with representative democracy itself but to institutionalise that influence within clear, transparent democratic and constitutional boundaries.

Recommendations

1. Constitutional and legislative reform should more clearly define the relationship between parties and elected representatives, recognising the legitimate coordinating role of parties while preserving the constitutional authority of legislative institutions. The selection of presiding and principal officers and the internal organisation of legislative chambers more generally, should remain governed by constitutional provisions and duly adopted standing orders parties may negotiate and express preferences, but external party directives should never substitute for constitutionally prescribed procedure.
2. Parties should improve transparency and inclusiveness in candidate selection and internal decision-making, giving party positions greater legitimacy and reducing the dominance of unelected elites. Political competition should increasingly be organised around identifiable policy programmes rather than patronage, ethnicity, or shifting elite alliances, providing a more legitimate basis for whatever discipline parties do ask of their members.
3. Legislators should learn to distinguish legitimate party cooperation from their constitutional responsibility to scrutinise executive action; membership of a governing party should never foreclose investigation of misconduct or demands for accountability. Party primaries, in turn, should be conducted transparently and in line with INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, reducing legislators' dependence on informal patronage networks.

4. Parties and legislative caucuses should establish structured channels for discussing policy priorities and resolving disagreements, encouraging coordination without reducing legislators to passive recipients of instruction. Greater public understanding of the distinct responsibilities of parties, legislators, and legislative institutions would also help citizens tell the difference between legitimate party coordination and conduct that actually undermines constitutional representation.

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