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**POLICY ADVISORY TO  
INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION  
ON STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTIES**

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## **Introduction**

Strong, programme based and ideologically inclined political parties are very critical for credible elections and deepening democracy. By fielding candidates for elections, setting policy agenda and engaging in political campaigns, political parties play a pivotal role in ensuring the success or failure of elections. The extent of their compliance with electoral rules broadly set the pace of electoral outcomes. For this reason, the role of political parties in the democratic process, and the credibility/quality of elections has been widely recognized in all spheres. This recognition underpins the existence of provisions specifically directed at regulating party activities, especially finance and monitoring of campaigns, in the country's electoral legislations – the Constitution and Electoral Act. More so, political parties' conduct has been at the front burner of the concerns of The Electoral Forum.

Premised on the above, the Eleventh Technical Session of The Electoral Forum, held on Friday, 14 July 2023 was focused on understanding the impact of political parties on the quality of elections in Nigeria. The meeting was convened to explore lessons from the roles played (activities or inactivities) of political parties in the country and propose solutions to stakeholders to raise the standard of elections. Specific objectives and areas covered during the session were:

- Examine the role, significance and performance of political parties in Nigeria as critical institutions for electoral credibility and democratic consolidation.
- Review the engagement between the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties.
- Identify strategies and mechanisms for addressing the challenges impeding political parties' functionality as agents for delivering quality elections.

## **Issues Identified**

In pursuit of the afore-stated objectives, members of the Forum explored theoretical, historical and practical issues arising from political parties' activities in Nigeria. From the insightful discussion by members of the forum, the following key issues were identified:

- a. **Internal Power Dynamics:** Political parties have a general tendency to develop internal oligarchies of the rich and powerful who are in full control of these parties.
- b. **Ethnic and Religious Leanings:** There is a proclivity for political parties and candidates to rely on ethnic-regional and religious appeals in the conduct of elections. This challenge has a long historical root and has subsisted to present times as evident in the rush for ethnic voting blocs during the 2023 general elections. Consequently, the country today has neither a national party nor a national leader.
- c. **Factions in political parties** due to oligarchic tendencies has dovetailed with the unpatriotic desire to gain power not to serve but for selfish ends, resulting in the proliferation of intra and inter party court cases.
- d. **Standardized Procedure for Party Formation:** Weak entry points resulting in the proliferation of political parties created a need for the Commission to prune down the number of parties in the country. The Commission has made some gains in this regard but the standard needs to be maintained.
- e. **Inadequate Knowledge of Electoral Laws:** Stakeholders in political parties across the country have limited knowledge of the provisions of electoral rules. Many do not even fully understand their own internal party rules and this constitutes a problem for compliance to rules.
- f. **Party Monitoring, Documentation and Record Keeping:** There are challenges with managing campaign finances, primaries and conventions. These challenges stem partly from inadequacies of human and material resources required for monitoring and from poor record keeping by political parties.
- g. **Stakeholders Engagement:** The Commission has exerted enormous efforts at engaging with political parties and strengthening them for better democratic outcomes. These efforts include monitoring party finance, convention and primaries, capacity-building programmes, and enforcement of requirements of national spread and presence in the FCT, amongst others. The success of these efforts was shown to have been limited by several challenges including trust gaps between parties and INEC, disregard for electoral rules by political parties, and malfeasance by some staff of the Commission.

- h. **Party System Reform:** The continued problems of the party system has necessitated the need for improving the party system in the country which involves reengineering the political parties and party system to get the desired outcome.
- i. **Poor Democratic Culture:** The lack of a supportive democratic culture for operating in a democratic space amongst political parties in Nigeria is a challenge. Parties are not open to accepting election results due to poor sportsmanship and this often leads to prolong litigations by parties and politicians
- j. **Constitutional Interpretation/Clarity:** The constitutional provision on party registration/deregistration is not clear enough. This simply means that the provision on party registration/deregistration is vague and this has led to confusion and misinterpretations to suit personal gains.
- k. **Trust Deficit:** The issue of trust deficit cut across two standpoints, trust deficit between citizens and stakeholders – parties and INEC which is very critical as it affects voter’s turnout as well as the conduct of elections. Also, the dearth of trust between political parties and INEC which has made monitoring difficult.

Addressing the issues and challenges captured above is a prerequisite for strengthening political parties, enhancing the quality and credibility of elections and advancing toward democratic consolidation.

### **Policy Recommendations**

To address the issues and challenges identified, the Forum proposed far-reaching recommendations for improving political parties and ensuring that they contribute to credible elections. The following are policy recommendations for the Commission arising from the session:

1. The Commission should be firm enough to fully exercise its powers as allotted by the Electoral Act, 2022. Specifically, section 77(2 & 3) requires parties to maintain a membership register and present same to the commission not later than 30 days before party primaries, congresses and conventions, section 82(5) requires that parties provide the Commission with at least 21 days’ notice before conventions,

and section 84 (13) which requires parties to conduct primaries for aspirants to all elective positions also empowers INEC to disqualify party candidates where these set criteria are not met. However, the commission has, thus far, been refraining from the exercising these powers.

2. The Commission should also exercise its powers to decide on, and provide verdicts, on party candidacy and leadership as stipulated in the Electoral Act, 2022.
3. The INEC Department on Election and Party Monitoring should be reorganised to focus strictly on political parties matters – registration, regulations and monitoring. Also, campaign finance monitoring should be given more visibility.
4. The INEC political party department should be strengthened and well-resourced including professionalisation of the staff.
5. INEC should collaborate with CSO, and former INEC non-partisan staff in monitoring political party elections, particularly, their primaries, congresses, and conventions.
6. Capacity building programmes should be organized for political parties and their attendance should be made mandatory and codified.
7. To increase public trust in the Commission’s impartiality in monitoring political parties, INEC should make continuous investments in enhancing the capacities and professionalism of the staff of INEC at all levels to effectively perform their duties.

## **Conclusion**

Political parties are crucial for the conduct of credible elections and democratic advancement. Their compliance with electoral rules and constructive engagement with the government during and beyond the electioneering period is key to ensuring quality elections and responsive governments. The experience in Nigeria is, however, one characterized by a panoply of issues which impede political parties' ability to contribute towards quality elections in the country. In fact, political parties and their activities in the country constitute a large part of the threats facing electoral credibility in the country. The implication of this is that the INEC and other stakeholders are required to take steps toward ensuring that parties in the country serve, not as platforms for promoting authoritarianism, but as instruments for enhancing electoral credibility and democratic advancement.

To this end, this advisory to INEC on strengthening political parties in the country lays out key issues arising from party activities and appropriate policy recommendations for strengthening parties in the country. The Electoral Forum hopes that the policy recommendations proposed here would be adopted and meaningful policy actions would emerge within the Commission to consolidate on the gains made in improving the country's electoral governance while simultaneously addressing subsisting challenges.

**Signed**

**Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Chairman of The Electoral Forum**



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## About The Electoral Forum

The Electoral Forum is an initiative of The Electoral Hub that brings together resource persons from electoral management bodies together with other electoral stakeholders to conceptualise solutions to the unique problems facing electoral governance in Nigeria. It is chaired by Professor Adebayo Olukoshi and supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and the MacArthur Foundation.

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