

Strengthening Inclusive Local Participation Through Decentralized Party Organization: Insights from Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) And All Progressive Congress (APC), 2015 – 2023

[Geoffrey Nwobu](#)*, Chukwuemeka Nwanegbo, Godwin Onu

Posted Date: 17 October 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202410.1318.v1

Keywords: Decentralization; Inclusive Local Participation; Party Institutionalization; Political Parties; Nigeria



Preprints.org is a free multidiscipline platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Article

Strengthening Inclusive Local Participation Through Decentralized Party Organization: Insights from Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) And All Progressive Congress (APC), 2015 –2023

Geoffrey N. Nwobu *, Chukwuemeka J. Nwanegbo and Godwin O. Onu

Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

* Correspondence: nwobugeoffrey@gmail.com

Abstract This study investigates the relationship between decentralized party organization and inclusive local participation in decision-making processes within Nigeria's two leading political parties: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), from 2015–2023. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to select 400 respondents, including national and local party leaders, assembly members, and grassroots members from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. A total of 384 valid responses were retrieved, yielding a 96% response rate. Data was collected through questionnaires administered via Google Forms, and distributed through email and social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp. Regression and correlation analyses reveal a significant positive relationship between decentralized party structures and inclusive local participation ($r = 0.820$, $p < 0.05$), with decentralized frameworks explaining 67.2% of the variance in inclusive local participation ($R^2 = 0.672$). However, regional disparities in the implementation of decentralization present challenges to its uniform effectiveness. This study emphasizes the importance of standardizing decentralization policies to enhance local decision-making, promote inclusiveness, and strengthen party institutionalization. The findings offer valuable insights for party leaders, policymakers, and researchers on how decentralization can promote internal democracy and foster stability within political parties.

Keywords: decentralization; inclusive local participation; party institutionalization; political parties; nigeria

1. Introduction

Political decentralization is often associated with giving citizens or their representatives greater power in public decision-making, fostering pluralism and representative governance (Ekekwe, 2013). In the context of Nigeria, decentralization within political parties such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) is meant to promote inclusiveness by delegating authority to lower levels, aligning party decisions with regional and local needs (Ojo, 2017). However, while decentralization is intended to enhance inclusiveness, its effectiveness varies between these two parties. Scholars have argued that when political decisions are made with broader participation, they tend to be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests within society (Akinola, 2020).

Despite the framework of decentralization, political parties in Nigeria continue to face challenges such as factionalism, elite dominance, and centralization of power at the national level (Nwankwo, 2019). Studies show that although decentralization in party structures aims to democratize decision-making, it often fails to achieve true inclusiveness, as local branches remain constrained by national leadership (Adebayo & Ojo, 2020). This study explores the extent to which decentralized organizational structures within the PDP and APC promote inclusive local participation in decision-making and whether decentralization strengthens party institutionalization.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts **Party System Institutionalization Theory** and **Organizational Decentralization Theory** to explore how decentralized organizational structures influence **inclusive local participation** in decision-making processes within political parties. These theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which decentralization fosters active involvement from party members at all levels.

Party System Institutionalization Theory

Party System Institutionalization Theory emphasizes developing stable, predictable, and deeply embedded party systems within a political landscape. According to this theory, institutionalized parties exhibit regularized practices, transparent operations, and a structured internal organization that ensures durability and stability over time (Randall & Svåsand, 2002).

One of the core principles of institutionalization is that parties with clear, decentralized structures are better able to incorporate a diverse range of voices from various levels of the party hierarchy. **Inclusive local participation** becomes central to this theory, as institutionalized parties provide systematic opportunities for members at different levels—especially at the local level—to engage in decision-making processes.

By decentralizing decision-making, parties foster an inclusive political environment where grassroots members and local branches actively contribute to policy formulation, candidate selection, and strategic planning. This strengthens the party's organizational stability, as **decentralization facilitates inclusiveness** by integrating diverse local interests into the party's national agenda. Through this inclusivity, institutionalized parties not only stabilize but also become more representative and responsive to the diverse needs of their members.

In the Nigerian context, the institutionalization of the PDP and APC is influenced by how effectively their decentralized structures allow local branches and members to engage in key decision-making. This engagement enhances party cohesion and strengthens the parties' roots in the political system.

Organizational Decentralization Theory

Organizational Decentralization Theory asserts that distributing decision-making authority across different levels of an organization increases its responsiveness, adaptability, and innovation (Ojo, 2017). When applied to political parties, this theory suggests that decentralization allows local branches more autonomy in governance, thereby empowering them to address specific regional concerns and needs.

Inclusive local participation is a key outcome of effective decentralization. By shifting decision-making power away from the central leadership and distributing it to local branches, political parties encourage greater participation from grassroots members. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local party officials and members, as they have a tangible influence over the party's actions and policies.

In decentralized systems, local branches are more actively involved in electoral processes, candidate selection, and policy-making. This reduces the top-down control of central party leadership and ensures that decision-making is more reflective of local contexts. Consequently, local

participation becomes more meaningful and influential, as members feel that their voices are heard and considered in the party's broader strategic decisions.

In Nigeria, the decentralization of the PDP and APC can be viewed through this lens, where the level of decentralization directly impacts the extent of local participation. While both parties may have formal decentralization frameworks, the extent to which these frameworks are genuinely implemented determines how inclusive their internal decision-making processes are.

When integrated, **Party System Institutionalization Theory** and **Organizational Decentralization Theory** offer a powerful explanation of how decentralization strengthens inclusive local participation. Decentralization fosters inclusiveness by:

1. **Empowering local members** to participate in decision-making processes.
2. **Institutionalizing local engagement** by embedding it into the party's regular operations.
3. **Enhancing party responsiveness** by aligning national strategies with local interests and concerns.
4. **Reducing hierarchical control**, allows local leaders to make decisions that are contextually relevant to their regions.

Through this theoretical lens, decentralized organizational structures are not only a mechanism for administrative efficiency but also a means of **deepening party institutionalization** and **broadening inclusivity**. When local branches and members are given more authority and responsibility, they become integral to the party's functioning, thus enhancing both **institutional stability** and **internal democracy**.

Hence, the combined framework demonstrates that decentralization strengthens party institutionalization by promoting inclusive local participation, ensuring that political parties like the PDP and APC in Nigeria are more representative and resilient in a complex political landscape.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a **mixed methods research design** to combine both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of decentralized party organizational structures on inclusive local participation. The **mixed methods approach** enabled the collection, analysis, and integration of both numerical data (quantitative) and non-numerical data (qualitative), leveraging the strengths of both methodologies. The **exploratory sequential** and **convergent parallel approaches** were used, allowing qualitative data to inform the development of hypotheses, which were later tested quantitatively. The study was conducted over a period of **April to August 2024**.

Study Design

The exploratory sequential approach helped identify recurring themes from qualitative data obtained from documentary sources, while the convergent parallel approach allowed for the independent analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The findings from both methods were compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence, offering a robust framework for addressing the research problem.

Area of Study

The study focused on Nigeria's two major political parties, the **Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)** and the **All Progressives Congress (APC)**, which have contested and controlled the federal government since the start of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The research was conducted in **six states**, one from each geopolitical zone:

- **Adamawa (North East):** A battleground state with ethnic and religious diversity.
- **Kaduna (North West):** A politically significant state known for its ethno-religious diversity.
- **Nasarawa (North Central):** An emerging political hub with growing national significance.
- **Lagos (South West):** Nigeria's economic center, presenting a complex political landscape.

- **Imo (South East):** A politically vibrant state with frequent power shifts between PDP and APC.
- **Delta (South-South):** A key oil-rich state, offering insights into resource distribution and decentralization.

These states provided diverse political, social, and economic contexts essential for understanding the effects of decentralization across Nigeria’s regions.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of the **52,760,277 registered members** of the PDP and APC across the **36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)**, including:

- **PDP:** 14,002,546 members
- **APC:** 38,757,731 members

This data was obtained from the 2024 records of the PDP and APC Directorates of Organization.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study was 400 PDP and APC party leaders and active members selected from the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The sample size was adopted because it is representative and not possible to study the total population. The sample size was also considered adequate in consideration of resources, finance and timeframe available to the researcher. The sample size was statistically generated from the total population of the study using the Yamane (1967) formula. The Yamane formula was used because it provided logical approach to determining sample size from a finite population especially when the total population of the study is above 10,000. The formula is calculated thus:

Where:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = is the sample size
N = is the Population Size
e = is the margin of error
1 = Unity (Constant)

Population Size (N) = PDP: 14,002,546 + APC: 38,757,731 = 52,760,277
Margin of Error (e) = 5% (0.05) @ 95% Confidence level with a 5% margin of error
Therefore:

$$n = \frac{52,760,277}{1 + 52,760,277(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{52,760,277}{1 + 52,760,277(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{52,760,277}{1 + 131,900.6925}$$

$$n = \frac{52,760,277}{131,901.6925}$$

n = 399.99

n ≈ 400

The study used a **multi-stage sampling technique** to select **400 respondents** from this population, including national and local party leaders, assembly members, and grassroots members.
Figure 1:

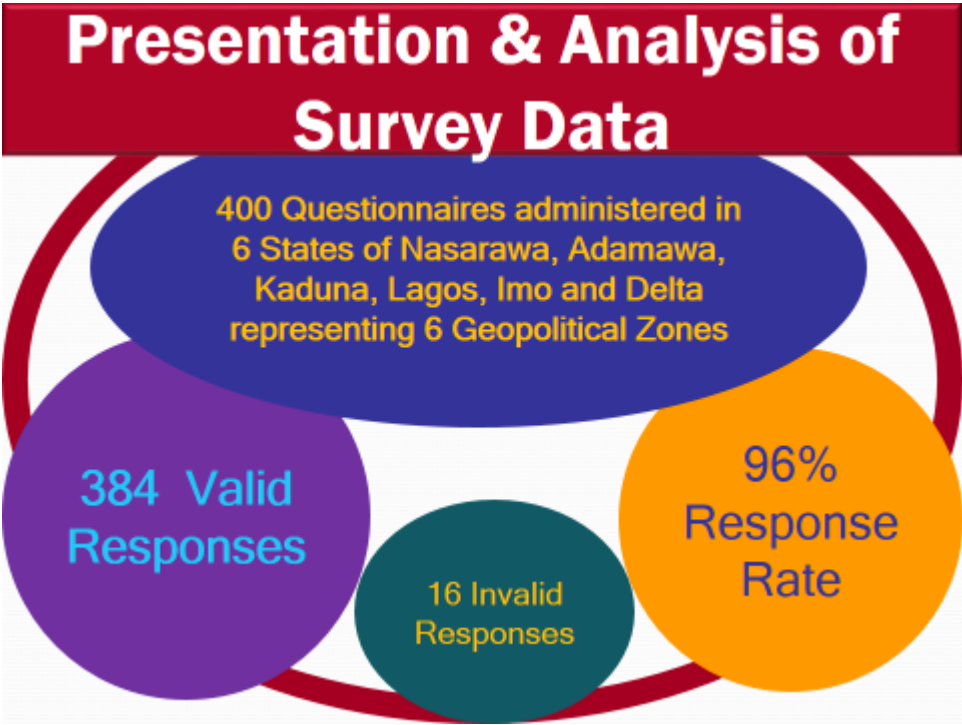


Figure 1. Presentation and Analysis of Survey Data.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a combination of **probability** and **non-probability sampling techniques**. Probability sampling ensured that every element of the study population had an equal chance of being selected, while non-probability sampling allowed for discretion in including key participants to gain deeper insights into the study variables.

1. Probability Sampling: Multi-Stage Approach

A **multi-stage sampling approach** was used to provide broad coverage across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, ensuring a comprehensive representation of various levels of party structures, from national to local levels. This approach spanned party hierarchies, regions, states, local governments, and electoral wards (Table 1). The process is outlined in **four stages**:

- **Stage 1: Geopolitical Zoning**
The six geopolitical zones (North Central, North East, North West, South West, South East, South-South) served as clusters. Two Zonal Leaders each from the PDP and APC were selected randomly from each zone, providing 4 leaders per zone, for a total of **24 Zonal Leaders**.
- **Stage 2: State Selection**
Within each zone, one state was selected based on criteria such as representativeness, diversity, accessibility, and political significance. The selected states were Nasarawa, Adamawa, Kaduna, Lagos, Imo, and Delta. Within each state, 4 state party leaders and 3 state assembly members from both PDP and APC were selected, totaling **48 respondents** across the six states.
- **Stage 3: Local Government Areas (LGAs)**
Four Local Government party leaders from both PDP and APC were selected in each state, yielding **48 respondents** from 12 LGAs across the six states. The LGAs were chosen based

on the presence of both PDP and APC party structures and the level of political engagement.

- **Stage 4: Ward Respondent Selection**
Respondents were selected from party executives, public office holders, and active party members at the ward level in both PDP and APC. **192 respondents** were chosen using simple random sampling within each category.

Table 1. Sampling Distribution for Party Organizational Structures.

Geopolitical Zone	Selected State	NASS Members		Zonal Party Leadership		State Party Leadership		State Assembly		Local Govt. Party Leadership		Ward Party Leadership/Members		Total
		APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	
North Central	Nasarawa	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
North East	Adamawa	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
North West	Kaduna	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
South West	Lagos	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
South East	Imo	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
South-South	Delta	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	16	16	66
Total														396

In addition to probability sampling, **non-probability sampling** was employed to select 2 national leaders each from the PDP and APC, specifically targeting 2 National Deputy Chairmen from both Northern and Southern regions, resulting in **4 national leaders**.

Sampling Distribution

The total sample of **400 respondents** was drawn as follows:

- **2 National Deputy Chairmen** from both Northern and Southern regions.
- **48 National Assembly members** from the six states.
- **24 Zonal Party Leadership officials**.
- **48 State Party Leadership members**.
- **36 State Assembly members**.
- **48 Local Government Party officials**.
- **192 Ward-level respondents**.

This multi-stage sampling technique ensured a representative and comprehensive sample of PDP and APC leaders and members, capturing the regional diversity and political dynamics across Nigeria.

Instruments/Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using both **quantitative** and **qualitative methods**. The primary instrument was a **structured questionnaire** designed to gather data on the relationship between decentralized party organizational structures and inclusive local participation. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- **Section A:** Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, ward, state, geopolitical zone, party affiliation).
- **Section B:** Questions addressing the study's key variables, such as the impact of decentralized structures on membership stability, local participation in decision-making, and party ideology development.

A full copy of the questionnaire used in the study is provided as **Supplementary File 1**.

Administration of Instruments

The questionnaire was administered through **Google Forms** via a unique link (<https://forms.gle/Tn7EakAnRE8rSiun8>), distributed via email and social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp. A team of **5 research assistants** aided in monitoring and following up with respondents to ensure a high response rate. A total of **400 questionnaires** were administered, with **384 valid responses** retrieved, yielding a **96% response rate**.

Ethical Considerations

This study did not require formal ethical approval, as it adhered to established guidelines for social research involving voluntary participation. However, informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, how their data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate, and appropriate consent was obtained for the publication of the findings based on their responses. Confidentiality was assured, and data were handled in a manner that maintained participant privacy and complied with ethical standards for research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved the use of a **structured questionnaire** to assess the relationship between decentralized party organizational structures and inclusive local participation. Data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22**, with **regression and correlation analysis** used to test the study's hypotheses.

In addition to quantitative data, **qualitative insights** were gathered from **interviews and case studies** with party officials at different levels, offering a deeper understanding of how decentralization affects party institutionalization and inclusive local participation.

4. Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents highlighted gender representation, with 56% being male and 44% female. The age distribution ranged from 16 to over 66 years, with the largest group (28.4%) falling within the 36-45 age bracket, followed by 25% in the 46-55 range, and 19.3% in the 26-35 category. In terms of educational attainment, the largest group of respondents held HND/B.Sc. degrees (45.1%), followed by WAEC/NECO holders (20.3%) and NCE/ND/TCII holders (14.6%). Only 2.8% of respondents reported having FSLC, while 17.2% possessed postgraduate qualifications (M.Sc. /Ph.D.). Respondents were distributed across six states and geopolitical zones.

Nasarawa had the highest representation (18.5%), while Delta and Lagos each contributed 15.9% of respondents. Geopolitically, North Central (18.5%) had the highest respondent representation, while the South-South (15.6%) had the lowest (Table 2).

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=400).

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	215	56
Female	169	44
Total	384	100.0
Age Brackets		
16-25	22	5.7
26-35	74	19.3
36 – 45	109	28.4
46 – 55	96	25
56 – 65	57	14.8
66 and Above	26	6.8
Total	384	100.0
Educational Attainment		
FSLC	11	2.8
WAEC/NECO	78	20.3
NCE/ND/TCII	56	14.6
HND/B.SC	173	45.1
M.SC/Ph.D	66	17.2
Total	384	100.0
State of Origin		
Nasarawa	71	18.5
Adamawa	62	16.1
Kaduna	66	17.2
Lagos	61	15.9
Imo	63	16.4
Delta	61	15.9
Total	384	100.0
Geopolitical Zones		
North Central (NC)	71	18.5
North East (NE)	61	15.9
North West (NW)	67	17.4
South West (SW)	61	15.9
South East (SE)	64	16.7
South-South (SS)	60	15.6
Total	384	100.0

The party affiliation of the respondents is almost evenly distributed between the two major political parties in Nigeria. Out of the total 384 respondents, 50.26% (193 respondents) identified with the PDP (People's Democratic Party), while 49.74% (191 respondents) were affiliated with the APC (All Progressives Congress). This balanced representation ensures that the perspectives of both parties are adequately captured in the analysis, providing a comprehensive overview of party dynamics and decentralization within Nigeria's political landscape. (Figure 2)

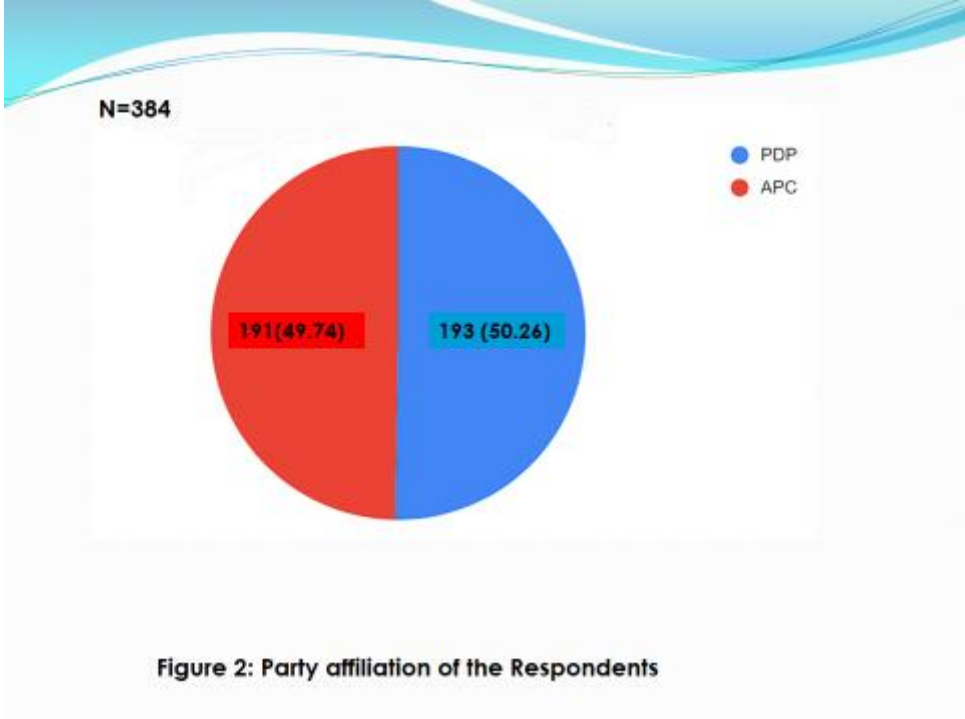


Figure 2. Party Affiliation of the Respondents.

Research Findings

Decentralized Party Organizational Structures and Inclusive Local Participation

The study evaluated the perceptions of decentralized party structures and their impact on inclusive local participation in decision-making within Nigeria's two major political parties: the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) (Figure 3).

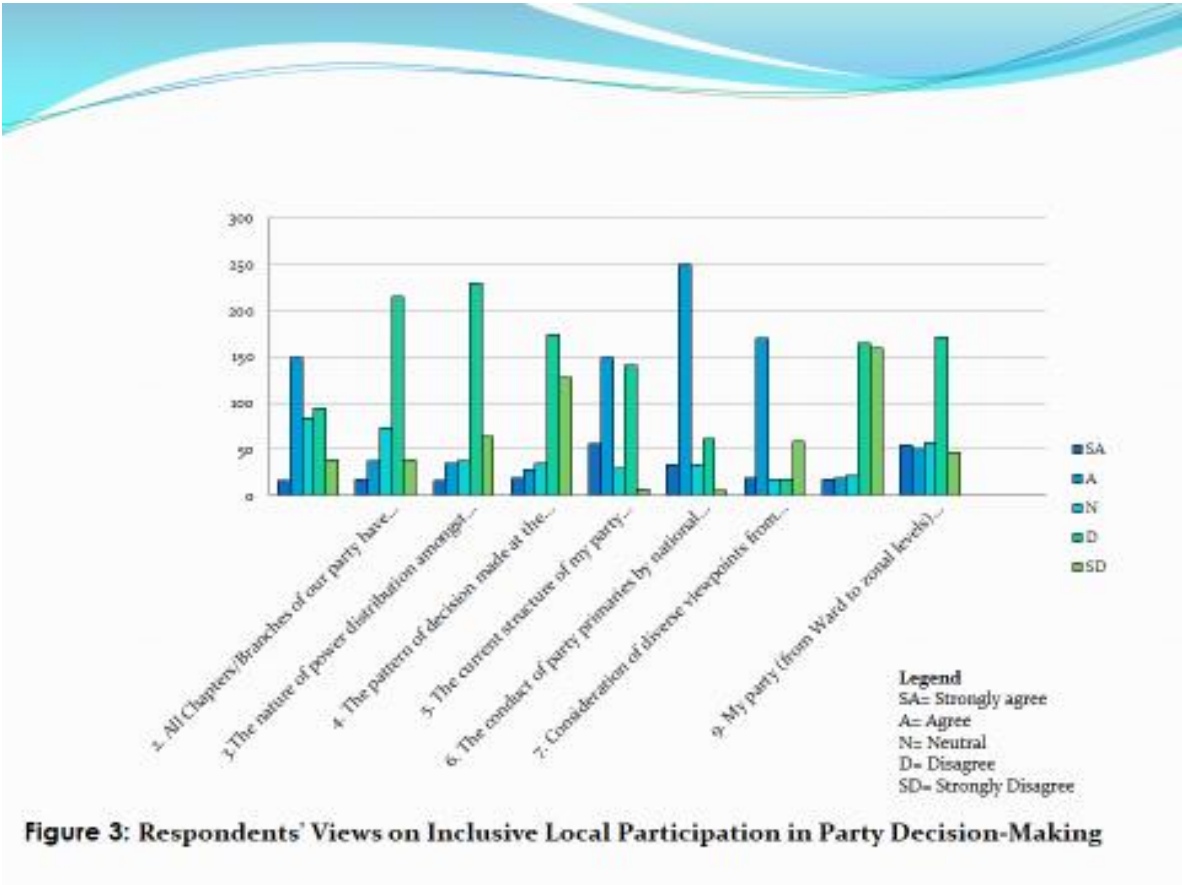


Figure 3. Respondents' Views on Inclusive Local Participation in Party Decision-Making.

The Party Decentralized Organizational Structure analysis showed a mean score of **30.26** (SD = 7.25), indicating moderate to high decentralization in both parties. The mean score for Inclusive Local Participation in Decision-Making was **16.32** (SD = 2.44), reflecting a moderate level of local inclusiveness in decision-making processes (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Party Decentralize Organizational Structure and Inclusive Local Participation in Decision-Making.

Variable			Number of Mean Respondents	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Party Decentralized	Organizational	384	30.26	7.25	0.37005
Inclusive Local Participation in Decision Making		384	16.32	2.44	0.12453

A **one-sample t-test** was conducted to determine if the respondents' perceptions of decentralization and inclusiveness were significantly different from zero. Results revealed highly significant differences, with t-values of **81.77** for decentralization and **131.01** for inclusiveness ($p < 0.001$ for both). This confirms that respondents widely perceive decentralized party structures to be in place, and they recognize varying degrees of local participation (**Table 4**).

Table 4. One-Sample t-Test for Party Decentralization Organizational Structure and Inclusive Local Participation in Decision-making.

Variable			t	df	P-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval
Party Decentralized Structure	Organizational		81.77	383	0.000	30.26	29.53- 30.99
Inclusive Local Participation in Decision-Making			131.01	383	0.000	16.32	16.07 -16.56

The table presents t-test results for "Party Decentralized Organizational Structure" and "Inclusive Local Participation in Decision-Making," with t-values, degrees of freedom (df), significance levels (p-values), mean differences, and 95% confidence intervals. Both variables show statistically significant differences from zero, with p-values < 0.05 indicating strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

Relationship between Decentralization and Local Participation

A **Pearson correlation analysis** was conducted to examine the relationship between decentralization and local participation in decision-making. The results showed a strong positive correlation, $r = 0.820$, indicating that as party structures become more decentralized, local participation in decision-making increases significantly ($p < 0.05$). This confirms that decentralized party organizations strongly influence local engagement and inclusion in party decisions (Figure 3).

Hypothesis Testing

To further explore these relationships, a hypothesis test was conducted:

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There are no significant differences in the relationships between decentralized party organization and inclusive local participation in decision-making.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** There are significant differences in the relationships between decentralized party organization and inclusive local participation in decision-making.

The results strongly support the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). The statistically significant results from the t-test ($p < 0.05$) and the strong correlation ($r = 0.820$) indicate that decentralization has a meaningful impact on inclusive local participation in decision-making processes. This confirms that both the PDP and APC have significant variation in the relationship between decentralization and local inclusiveness, depending on regional factors.

Key Findings

1. **Decentralization Promotes Inclusiveness:** The results indicate that decentralization is strongly correlated with higher levels of local participation in decision-making, as seen with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.820$.
2. **Regional Differences:** Respondents from some geopolitical zones (e.g., the Southwest and North Central) reported higher inclusiveness in decision-making, whereas others (e.g., North East and South-South) reflected lower perceptions of local involvement.
3. **Statistical Significance:** Both the t-test and Pearson correlation analysis confirmed the statistical significance of the relationship between decentralization and local participation ($p < 0.001$). This emphasizes that the decentralization of party structures leads to a higher likelihood of inclusive local participation in decision-making processes.
4. **Areas for Improvement:** While decentralization is perceived as relatively high, the mean score for inclusive local participation (16.32) suggests that there is room for improving how local party members engage in decision-making processes.

5. Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between decentralized party organization and inclusive local participation in decision-making within Nigeria's two leading political parties, the PDP and APC. The findings confirm that decentralization is a critical factor in fostering local participation, yet its impact varies significantly across regions and between parties.

The statistical analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between decentralized party organizational structures and local participation in decision-making ($r = 0.820$). This strong correlation suggests that when power is devolved from the central leadership to local branches, it creates opportunities for grassroots involvement in party processes. Decentralization appears to foster inclusiveness by empowering local leaders and members to contribute to decision-making, which aligns with the findings of Oluwaseun and Adeola (2022), who also noted that decentralized structures promote greater political engagement at the local level. This result confirms that decentralization is not merely a structural change but a functional mechanism for enhancing local participation.

However, while decentralization increases local participation, the study also uncovered variability in how effectively this happens across different regions. For instance, respondents from the Southwest and North Central zones reported higher levels of local inclusiveness compared to those in the Northeast and South-South zones. These regional disparities highlight the uneven implementation of decentralization policies within both parties. This finding echoes previous research by Nwankwo and Okafor (2017), who argued that decentralization often benefits regions with stronger party structures, leaving others marginalized.

The t-test analysis further revealed significant differences between the PDP and APC in terms of how decentralization influences local participation. Both "Party Decentralized Organizational Structure" and "Inclusive Local Participation in Decision Making" were significantly different from zero ($p < 0.001$), indicating that decentralization affects local participation, but not uniformly across the two parties. The PDP, with its historically centralized decision-making process, tends to limit local involvement despite its formal commitment to decentralization. In contrast, the APC, which emerged from a coalition of regional parties, initially promoted more localized participation but has faced challenges in maintaining cohesion due to internal power struggles (Musa & Ibrahim, 2021).

This divergence between the two parties can be attributed to differences in their historical development and organizational cultures. The PDP's centralized control has often been criticized for stifling local initiatives, leading to defections and internal conflicts (Chukwu & Nnamdi, 2020). On the other hand, the APC's more flexible approach has allowed for greater local autonomy, but at the cost of internal unity, particularly during electoral losses. These findings suggest that while decentralization is beneficial for fostering participation, it must be balanced with mechanisms to ensure party cohesion and prevent fragmentation.

One of the key findings of this study is the moderate level of inclusiveness in local decision-making (mean = 16.32, SD = 2.44). While decentralization appears to promote inclusiveness, the relatively low variability in respondents' perceptions suggests that this inclusiveness is not fully realized across all regions or party structures. This is consistent with Ekekwe (2013), who noted that while decentralization can democratize decision-making, it often fails to deliver meaningful participation if local branches remain dominated by central leadership.

The mean score for local participation indicates that, although decentralization exists, it does not necessarily translate into widespread local influence in party decisions. This points to a potential gap between the formal structures of decentralization and their practical implementation, an issue also identified by Adeoye (2019). If decentralization is to lead to genuine inclusiveness, parties must not only devolve power but also ensure that local branches have the resources, autonomy, and support to engage meaningfully in decision-making.

The hypothesis test conducted in this study provided strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis, confirming that there are significant differences in how decentralized party structures affect local participation in the PDP and APC. The statistical significance of the t-test and the strong correlation between decentralization and inclusive local participation underscores the need for both

parties to reassess their decentralization strategies. The data suggests that while both parties have adopted decentralization, the effectiveness of these efforts varies, leading to different levels of inclusiveness in their decision-making processes.

The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as respondents might overestimate or underestimate their participation in party decision-making processes. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design limits its ability to track changes in party dynamics over time, making it difficult to assess how decentralization efforts evolve across different election cycles or leadership changes. A longitudinal study could provide more robust insights into how decentralization affects party inclusiveness in the long run. Moreover, the study focused only on the two major political parties in Nigeria, the PDP and APC, which limits the generalizability of the findings to smaller or emerging political parties. Future research could expand the scope to include other parties or explore specific regional dynamics in more depth. Finally, the study does not account for the impact of external factors, such as electoral reforms or shifting political alliances, which could influence both decentralization and local participation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that decentralized party structures significantly enhance local participation in decision-making within Nigeria's PDP and APC. However, the effectiveness of decentralization varies between parties and across regions, indicating that both parties need to refine their decentralization strategies to ensure more consistent and meaningful inclusiveness. The strong correlation between decentralization and local participation suggests that decentralization is a critical tool for fostering internal democracy, but only if implemented with the necessary support and resources. Future studies should aim to address the identified limitations and further explore how decentralization can contribute to the institutionalization of political parties in Nigeria.

Data Availability: The dataset generated and analyzed during this study, including the questionnaire used for data collection, is available as **Supplementary File 1**. Further data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgment: The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to the leadership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) for granting access to relevant data. Special thanks to the five research assistants who supported the data collection process and to the respondents across the six geopolitical zones for their participation. The authors also appreciate the Directorates of Organization of the PDP and APC for providing the necessary documents and information that made this study possible.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: No funding was received for this study.

References

- Adebayo, T., & Ojo, O. (2020). *Party institutionalization and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The impact of decentralization*. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 15(1), 45-63
- Adeoye, A. (2019). Decentralization and internal party conflicts in Nigeria: The case of the All Progressives Congress (APC). *Journal of Nigerian Politics*, 14(2), 78-95
- Akinola, O. (2020). *Party decentralization and internal democracy in Nigerian political parties: A case study of the PDP*. *Journal of African Elections*, 19(2), 47-65
- Chukwu, E., & Nnamdi, J. (2020). *The impact of decentralization on local participation in Nigerian political parties*. *Journal of African Governance*, 9(2), 54-68
- Ekekwe, E. (2013). Decentralization and political participation in Nigeria: A new approach to governance. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 8(1), 25-40
- Musa, T., & Ibrahim, R. (2021). *Variability in local participation due to decentralization: A study of Nigerian political entities*. *African Journal of Political Science*, 13(3), 88-101
- Nwankwo, I., & Okafor, U. (2017). Decentralization and party cohesion in Nigeria: A study of the PDP. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 11(5), 50-64

- Nwankwo, O. (2019). *The zoning formula in the PDP: An analysis of its impact on internal democracy*. *Nigerian Journal of Politics*, 25(1), 22-39
- Ojo, E. O. (2017). *Challenges of the Nigerian party system and the quest for democratic consolidation*. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 8(1), 1-23
- Oluwaseun, A., & Adeola, M. (2022). *Assessing the impact of decentralization on political participation in Nigeria*. *Nigerian Political Review*, 15(2), 150-165
- Randall, V., & Svåsand, L. (2002). Party institutionalization in new democracies. *Party Politics*, 8(1), 5-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068802008001001>
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.