

PARTY POLITICS AND AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Patrick O. Okigbo III in conversation with
Dr. Salihu Mohammed Lukman

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PARTY POLITICS AND AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE



Patrick O. Okigbo III
Founding Partner,
Nextier
Host



Dr Salihu Mohammed Lukman
Former Vice Chairman (North), APC
Former DG, Progressive Governors Forum
Speaker

zoom bit.ly/DevDiscourse_PartyPolitics_Lukman

Wed. Mar. 06, 2024 3:00PM – 4:30PM (WAT)

Upcoming Sessions



Jude Chike
Uzonwanne

Author, The First
Trillion,
Board, MyMD
Pharmaceuticals
USA

THE TRILLION DOLLAR ECONOMY

Arbitrage and the
Nigerian Dream

Mar. 20, 2024
3:00 – 4:30 (WAT)



Dr Tayo
Aduloju

Chief Executive
Officer, The
Nigerian Economic
Summit Group.

HOW TO GROW NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

April 03, 2024
3:00 – 4:30 (WAT)

PARTY POLITICS AND AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Internal party democracy is central to strengthening the political party system and governance. A robust internal democratic process enables political organisations to serve as a medium for gathering and prioritising citizens' preferences and transforming them into actionable policies and programmes. It is how political parties fulfil their mandates and ensure that democracy delivers its promises. Nigeria's political parties do not encourage contesting ideas; party members do not have a voice in critical decisions, including candidate selection, and this system impedes democracy.

[Patrick O. Okigbo III](#), the Founding Partner at [Nextier](#), used this [Development Discourse](#) session with Dr Salihu Mohammed Lukman, Former Vice Chairman (North), APC, Former DG, Progressive Governors Forum. to discuss mechanisms and opportunities to strengthen internal party politics to enable strong democracies and a prosperous continent. This document provides an annotated transcript of the discussion. Click [here](#) to watch the discourse.

ANNOTATED TRANSCRIPT

PARTY POLITICS AND AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Patrick O. Okigbo III, in conversation with Dr. Salihu Mohammed Lukman
March 06, 2024

Video: <https://youtu.be/-pv3d0bEm24?si=vCFEgNuzHgqxuTed>

Patrick O. Okigbo III: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Development Discourse, where we ideate for Africa's development. My name is Patrick Okigbo III, Nextier's founding partner. Nextier is a multi-competency advisory firm focused on solving complex development challenges in the continent.

My guest today is a rare Nigerian. Only a few Nigerians can match his bulletproof credentials in civil activism. Salihu Mohammad Lukman was the President of the *National Association of Nigerian Students* from 1988 to 1989. In 1991, after his [youth service](#),¹ he became the National Secretary of the *Committee for the Defence of Human Rights* in Lagos. Later that same year, he was elected the founding Deputy General Secretary of the [Campaign for Democracy](#), working closely with the legendary [Beko Ransome Kuti](#). In 2002, he became the Education Secretary of the [Nigeria Labour Congress](#), where he worked closely with [Adams Oshiomhole](#). In 2006, he returned to Zaria and founded the *Movement for a Better Future*, a platform for community organising and development. From August 2009, he served as the CEO of the *Good Governance Group*. He later joined a group of 54 Nigerians that initiated the *Save Nigeria Group*. He was one of the early members of the [Action Congress of Nigeria](#), where he ran for a senate seat in Kaduna North In 2011. He was one of the brains behind the merger of the three or four political parties that became the [All Progressives Congress](#) (APC), which saw its electoral victory in 2015. This achievement is unique because it is unheard of in Africa for an incumbent political party to lose an election. He became the Director General of the APC Governors Forum or the [Progressive Governors Forum](#). In that role, he was the brain and soul of APC's philosophy, if one exists. He sought the nomination for APC Governor of Kaduna State. He later became the Vice Chair of APC North and subsequently resigned from that role because of the party's plans to impose candidates in the 2023 general elections. His resignation, another rare feat within the Nigerian context, came after several fights, some of which he won and many of which he lost. So, no one in Nigeria today is better qualified to discuss our topic: *Internal Party Politics and Africa's Democratic Future*. Salihu, welcome.

Dr. Salihu Mohammed Lukman: Thank you very much for the privilege. However, I am unsure if I can own some of what you said.

Okigbo: You are one of Nigeria's most prolific public intellectuals today. You probably post a democracy and development essay every week. In your view, what is the best argument for democracy as Africa's preferred and optimal political system?

¹ Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps programme is a compulsory one-year service for all Nigerians who graduates from tertiary institutions before their thirtieth birthday. Created in the aftermath of the Nigeria Civil War (1967-70), it aims to help reconstruct, reconcile, and rebuild the country.

Lukman: The starting point is to retrace our steps. From 1998 to 1999,² we emphasised the choice of political candidates. We assumed that good governance and democratic development would follow that choice. However, problems arise when you ignore the political organisation that should regulate candidate selection. That said, there was some level of sanity in the political parties from 1998 to 1999. To be fair to them, they held meetings, and, to some extent, everyone respected the decisions.

It appears that things changed around 2003. President Obasanjo struggled to win his second term nomination, and from then on, he consciously decided to subordinate the party to himself. Unfortunately, this posture cascaded down the line. Governors took the same steps at the state level. These actions wholly erased internal contests. For instance, there was no internal contest with late President Umaru Yar'Adua's emergence as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate in the 2007 elections. There were reports of aspirants at the state level who, before they got to the election venue, learned of the conclusion of the process. This abnormality became Nigeria's political culture and cascaded across all the political parties.



President Olusegun Obasanjo (Civilian President from 1999 to 2007). Dr. Lukman posits that internal party politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic began to flounder after Obasanjo usurped his political party's powers in response to his challenges with securing his second term candidacy. State governors and other opposition parties implemented similar undemocratic practices.

So, when we started advocating for a merger (that resulted in the All Progressives Congress), many of us knew we had to solve this problem.³ We wanted people to join political parties and compete. Competition regulates conduct because how one wins party members' support determines the type of loyalty and commitment one can expect from the party.

Okigbo: Your response posits that democracy is the best system for Nigeria. Let me play the devil's advocate and challenge this political system as the best model for ensuring development. Given your extensive scholarship on this topic, convince me that one is not backing the wrong horse by campaigning for democracy.

Lukman: We can only work with some assumptions. First, democracy is supposed to be representative, where the people speak through their elected officials. For instance, I just finished reading your last post about the [national blackout](#). It worries me that we have a

² With General Sani Abacha's death on June 08, 1998, Nigeria began a journey back to democracy. The February 27, 1999, general elections saw the emergence of President Olusegun Obasanjo. It announced the start of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the unbroken civilian rule to this day.

³ Formed in February 2013, the (All Progressives Party) is the result of a merger of Nigeria's three largest opposition parties – the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All-Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) along with a breakaway faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and the new PDP – a faction of then-ruling People's Democratic Party. The resolution was signed by Tom Ikimi, who represented the ACN; Senator Annie Okonkwo on behalf of APGA; Ibrahim Shekarau, the Chairman of ANPP's Merger Committee; and Garba Shehu, the Chairman of CPC's Merger Committee. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

democracy that is not responsive. You can't even access the leaders. The political parties do not hold meetings. If that's the case, do we truly have a democracy?

My response is no. We may not reach that point until we focus on the right things. If you remember, between 2007 and 2015, civil society organisations and several activists focused on the reform of Nigeria's [Independent National Electoral Commission](#) (INEC). While we achieved significant reforms, we haven't accomplished much with democratic political parties.

Okigbo: Exactly

Lukman: Even if you have the right conditions at INEC, we won't make much progress if we do not have political parties that will take up what the former is offering. Hence, my advocacy over the last four to five years is that we must produce a party that respects its own rule and allows for internal competition before we can have a democracy that is responsive and genuinely representative. It must be a party where decisions are binding on all the elected leaders.



APC's lack of an internal democratic process for selecting its representatives created the opportunity for Senator Bukola Saraki (left) and Honourable Yakubu Dogara (right) to execute their "bloodless coup" and secure respectively the Senate Presidency and the Speakership of the House of Representatives in Nigeria's 8th National Assembly.

Cast your mind to the 2017 to 2018 debates in the APC about party supremacy. Go back to 2015 when Bukola Saraki [rebelled](#) to become Senate President.⁴ Some of us drew attention to factors that led to that rebellion and what made it successful. These factors include the absence of a process for the party's decisions and an over-reliance on the party leader's sentiments. For instance, APC did not convene a National Executive Committee meeting to articulate its decision about the leadership of the 8th National Assembly. That was why Saraki and co. could rebel. If, for instance, the party attempted to discipline them, and Saraki's group decided to contest it in court, the latter would win because they didn't break any party rules.

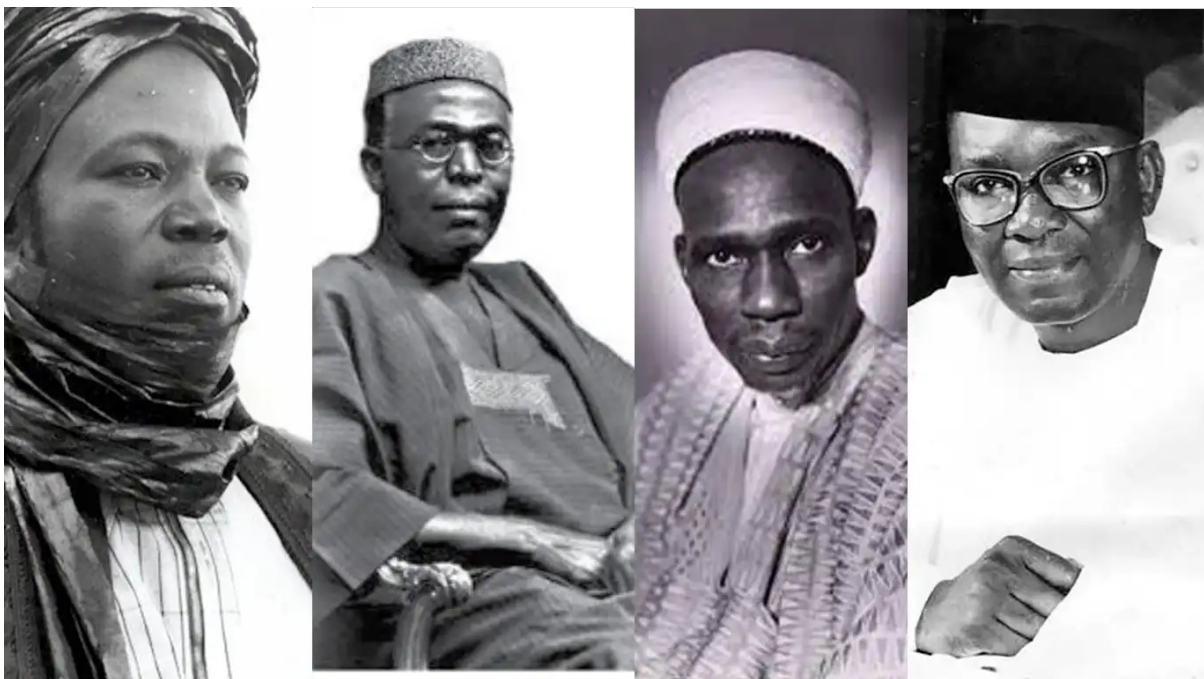
Okigbo: Sure

Lukman: I have emphasised this in the last two to three years. We have an APC that neither respects its Constitution nor convenes meetings. For instance, there are a lot of complaints that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Asiwaju) is not taking the necessary steps to translate the "Renewed Hope" agenda into policies and plans. Yet, no one can challenge him because the party does not hold meetings to discuss such issues. The consequence is that he has almost become a king.

⁴ Oluokun, A (2015). *Saraki's Bloodless 'Coup,'* The News, June 16, 2015. Available at: <https://thenewsnigeria.com.ng/2015/06/16/sarakis-bloodless-coup/> (Accessed: April 10, 2024)

Okigbo: Can democracy work in Africa? It is almost like the system is not fit for Africa's purposes. What is your take on that? If it can't work in Africa, should we be thinking of a new way of galvanising our worldviews and fighting for development? If yes, what should it be?

Lukman: In the 1960s, there was an indication that democracy could work in Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, political leaders competed for development. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe developed industries in the East and built educational institutions like the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Chief Obafemi Awolowo did the same in the West. Sir Ahmadu Bello and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa led similar development efforts in the North. The problem was that the politicians could not learn how to engage themselves, negotiate and improve on what they had done. The military rulers of that generation were frustrated by the slow pace of development. We were young then but agreed with the military that the First Republic had to go. Sadly, the rascality continued in the Second Republic.



Nigeria's First Republic Leaders. From Left to Right: Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. In the first decade of Nigeria's independence, the country had regional governments that engaged in constructive regional competition for development. The model did not differ much from the structure that ensured China's phenomenal economic growth. A series of political errors resulted in a restructuring to a unitary form of government with many powers concentrated at the centre. Nigeria has continued to falter ever since.

Part of our role is to be courageous in talking about these things. We must open the issues for discussion and negotiation. We must be confident to test what will work or not. For instance, why was it possible for democracy to produce some development in the First Republic? The generation of leaders at that time was relatively young and more adventurous. Now, we have a situation where this generation of leaders is, on average, in their 60s. So, the capacity for adventure is low.

Okigbo: Energy levels as well.

Lukman: Yes, they have no energy. I have repeatedly said that we need an activist president if Nigeria is to move forward. A president who, if there is a problem anywhere, will appear in

the next minute and sit down with all leaders and make decisions. Part of the problem is that leaders in their 60s or 70s cannot act as such. However, it doesn't disqualify older politicians from continuing to exercise leadership.⁵ However, they must blend it by bringing in younger people, trusting them, and establishing parameters for what the party must achieve. It is like setting up a company. You know your targets. If the people you hire are not giving you that target, you fire them.

Okigbo: Exactly, so we must be bold and confident in trying things to see what works. That is the underlying factor in China's success. It is probably the same story with the 2014-15 APC experiment. How else can one explain the boldness of thinking you could couple such strange bedfellows into a political party?⁶ The architects included "Progressive" in the party's name, and you, as the mouthpiece, kept reminding us that it was indeed one. Yet, there was hardly anything that made it "progressive." It was almost like you felt that if you kept shouting that it was progressive, that would make it progressive. Am I correct to assume that's the experiment you set out to conduct? And if yes, how is that playing out?



Even if you have the right conditions at INEC, we won't make much progress if we do not have political parties that will take up what the former is offering.

⁵ Ageism and the performance of elected officials is an ongoing debate. It may be a key factor in the 2024 United States presidential elections. A recent CBS News [poll](#) concludes: "In the eyes of Americans, age brings experience and seniority in elected office, but that's outweighed by concerns that elected officials might be "out of touch" or unable to do the job past the age of 75." [Salvanto, A. et al. (2023) *Age and elected office: Concerns about performance outweigh benefits of experience*, CBS News. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/age-president-senator-performance-concerns-outweigh-benefits-of-experience/> (Accessed: 11 April 2024)].

⁶ While contemporary Nigerian political parties are not reputed for their philosophical clarity, the parties that formed the All Progressives Congress has some distinct leanings that could have made the merger difficult to sustain if the country's politics paid heed to developmental ideologies.

Lukman: Let me correct you. I am not the spokesperson or the mouthpiece of the merger. I was an advocate for it, and I believed in it. From the merger until now, a clear vision has been to have a truly progressive party that is ideologically oriented as a [social democratic](#) party and modelled after the Nordic experience. The Nordic region has led in social development, such as health and education. Life expectancy is almost the highest in those countries.

While we were very clear on the vision, some of us understood the limitations of our leaders: President Buhari and Asiwaju. Those limitations notwithstanding, we were courageous to believe we could negotiate and produce a party that would be substantially different from the PDP and other parties.

Many of us in APC have had some freedom to engage and critique when things are not going well. Somehow, it has produced a dynamic where we can remove leaders when they fail. Whether we can return to the party's founding vision after removing the leaders is another thing entirely. It has frustrated many of us. For example, recall the struggle to remove Senator Abdullahi Adamu as our National Chairman. The objective was to unfreeze the APC structures and ensure the party respects its Constitution. I have expressed publicly that the first shocker was that the choice of Senator Abdullahi Adamu's successor was neither democratic nor progressive. It was a significant injustice against the North Central people, and a progressive party should not be associated with such a decision. I say so without apology. I respect both President Asiwaju and Dr Ganduje. However, as an individual, my contribution is to push them to do the right thing, succeed, and be on the right side of history. The risk is that they may be on the wrong side of history and heading towards self-destruction.

Nigeria needs an activist president ... who, if there is a problem anywhere, will appear in the next minute, and sit down with all leaders and make decisions



Okigbo: You have been at this battle for propriety within the APC for a while, under the Adams Oshiomhole-led APC, under Senator Adamu's leadership, et cetera. You have had a few wins. What are some of the factors that enabled these victories? I can't say it is internal party democracy. Whatever it is allowed you the triumph of changing some of the national chairmen but made it difficult for you to go the whole hog. Can you help us unpack it?

Lukman: Let's get it clear. No one set out to get any national chairman out. When the advocacy started, it was about influencing them to do the right thing. Regarding Comrade Adams, my position was simple. Here is a man whose primary strength is being a great negotiator. He is one of the best negotiators this country has produced. I have worked with him for 16 years and know what he can do. He came in when the party had internal problems with leaders. If you remember, it was around the time of the 2019 election, and virtually every state had a leadership crisis. At that point, I felt it was necessary to get him to deploy his negotiation skills, sit down with several leaders in Ogun, Imo, Zamfara, and all the places, and reconcile them. I knew he could do that, but unfortunately, there was some resistance on his part. And even though I was close to him, I couldn't access him.

That is how we began the public advocacy. Some opponents led a smear campaign that we were doing the hatchet job for some unnamed people. At that point, my attitude was that no one could blackmail me. I knew what I was doing. And everybody knew, including those alleged to be sponsoring me, who, by the way, I had no discussions with. We continued our advocacy, and in no time, the situation gained traction, and other leaders began to raise different issues.

The court case against Comrade Adams in Edo State became an issue, which held the party almost at a standstill. Most party leaders and officials felt the best way to reconcile the party was to let go of all National Working Committee members and institute a Caretaker Committee. Hopefully, with three years to the next election, the party could attain some level of sanity before the election's madness sets in.

Unfortunately, other sets of madness crept in, and the Caretaker Committee started doing the wrong things. So, we opened a fight with the new team. Eventually, we succeeded in holding an election that produced Senator Abdullahi Adamu. We had other issues, such as building a consensus for a presidential candidate. All these challenges took us away from sitting down to do the right thing. At this point in the process, many party leaders were beginning to think about the 2023 elections. They were concerned with becoming candidates or producing aspirants they could control. And when that is the case, nobody is interested in whether the party's structures are working.

The more significant issue with political parties is regulating the conduct of elected representatives to deliver on the manifesto of the party and the campaign promises. Once meetings do not occur, the party will be weak in achieving that goal. Part of the crisis in Africa, which our democracy must correct, is that we produce leaders who have little or no experience, and there is no strategy to guide them.

Okigbo: Experience in what?

Lukman: In leadership.

Okigbo: In leadership or party politics?

Lukman: Both. Let me give you a typical example. For instance, party conventions produce a new set of party leaders. However, candidates for higher political office sponsored several of

them. Most of the elected officials see their primary responsibility as guaranteeing their sponsor's emergence without necessarily looking at the party's Constitution regarding the duties of the office. There should be a situation where the elected party leaders are put in a room, maybe for a week, to go through the gamut and assemble people who can provide that guide. The other consideration is at the level of elected representatives. Now, you elect a governor. Maybe that governor, at best, was a legislator or a commissioner. He may have, from a distance, seen as active. That does not necessarily mean he has the skills to make decisions that translate to the proper set of projects that will deliver his mandate. Part of our tragedy is that we end up with leaders whose foremost priority is how to liberate resources that will benefit them.

Okigbo: Did you try to address this problem as the Director General of the Progressive Governors Forum? I know that the Nigeria Governors Forum tries to organise these training sessions from time to time. Did you do any of those? If yes, what were some of the lessons?

Lukman: The Progressive Governance Forum emerged with a clear vision, and the generation of governors who made that decision gave us a free hand to do several things. We put in place programmes that translated into experience sharing. For instance, we meet with the

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Secretaries of the State Government every quarter. Also, we had what we called the Governance Lecture Series, which was to be quarterly, even though we did it once a year. At the end of the series, we identified a significant challenge to solve in line with the mandate of the Secretariat of the

Progressive Governors Forum to facilitate the evolution of policy synergy among APC states.

One of the first things that emerged was the [Security Trust Fund model](#),⁷ which Lagos State pioneered. Lagos used this excellent model to mobilise resources to arm and equip the security agencies. Many APC states adopted the model. However, part of our problem was that we didn't develop the capacity to have strong buy-in within the party. Party buy-in is critical because it compels the governor and the state government to incorporate the ideas into their policies.

Okigbo: Let's zero in now on internal party politics. How would you define this term for the layman? Why is it important? Why is it a critical component of democracy and development?

Lukman: Let us clarify the meaning of internal party politics. It is the process that regulates the conduct of elected representatives in delivering on their party's Constitution and mandate. It involves the process of nominating candidates. However, people usually focus on just the latter part.⁸

⁷ The Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF) was established by the Law of the Lagos State House of Assembly in 2007 to source resources in cash and kind from the government, corporate organisations, and well-meaning individuals to *facilitate safety and security in Lagos*. The LSSTF supports the acquisition and deployment of security equipment, human, material and financial resources necessary for the effective functioning of all Federal, State, and Local government security agencies operating in Lagos State, and for the training and retraining of these security operatives. Several Nigerian states have adopted variants of this model.

⁸ Internal party politics is the range of methods allowing party members access to party deliberation and decision-making. Ojukwu et al. (2011) refer to the arrangements and structure that enable political parties to coordinate – based on

A review of party constitutions shows that they contain a regulation that determines all the required processes. However, across all the parties, we seem to focus mainly on the process of the emergence of candidates. In States with APC Governors, the latter become like gods

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and determine what happens in the party. Where we don't have a governor, some party leaders exercise that authority. This point is where we are getting it wrong. This structure produced frustrations that led to anger against the PDP. APC has failed to do things differently. Internally, we

have had situations where governors don't allow people to buy forms to contest elections. Or party leaders don't allow people to purchase nomination forms. This anomaly continues because the party structures are not working.

The APC should have quarterly National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings to enhance internal party governance. The election was in March 2022, but we only had meetings in April that year. Since then, we have not had any other meeting. We held the April 2022 meeting to adopt the proposed fees for the nomination form for the 2023 election. We discussed the proposed process and the timetable for that election. That's all. We didn't hold any other NEC meeting until August 2023; since then, there has been no other NEC meeting.

In addition, APC should have national and state caucuses. These are consultative platforms where party members file their complaints and find solutions to problems. However, none of these caucuses have met. The first thing to do with internal party governance is sanctioning party leaders who refuse to convene meetings. Otherwise, we will not improve the current anarchical situation. Internal party governance must rise qualitatively to the point whereby immediately after elections, we ask elected governments to present their policy proposal for debate and adoption.

Okigbo: Can we get into the "how"? You lay out these points in your book, *APC and Transition Politics*, and many of your writings. How do you sanction party leadership that is in cahoots with national leadership? You said here that the governors or the political elites sometimes select candidates they can control. So, who is going to sanction such action? The national government could sanction the party leadership, but how would that happen if they were in cahoots?

Lukman: I think this is where I want to be blunt. First, the notion of producing rational leaders doesn't exist, and the idea of trusting leaders is faulty. You will get it wrong if you operate on the expectation that leaders are rational, can be trusted, or that, once elected, they will do the right thing. We need a regulatory commission to point out to leaders when they have gone wrong and, if possible, be empowered to charge those leaders to court. The current situation is one of impunity. Someone sits somewhere, writes the results of the so-called primaries, and audaciously has the confidence to face the public and say everybody knows that no primaries are taking place.

democratic principles – how candidates are selected, leaders emerge, policies are made, and funding is provided. [Ojukwu, C.C. and Olaifa, T., 2011. [Challenges of internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties: The bane of intra-party conflicts in the People's Democratic Party of Nigeria. Global Journal of Human Social Science](#), 11(3), pp.25-34.]

Okigbo: But how is this regulatory commission different from all our other similar institutions, such as the Supreme Court, INEC,⁹ the Police, and other institutions, which are supposed to act as checks and balances on other arms of government? How will this one be different?

Lukman: The regulatory commission will take part in INEC's functions, have the power to relate with parties directly, and have some supervisory mechanism. The regulatory commission can ask for an audit report and query it. It will be more effective because the current situation does not work. INEC attends all party meetings and primaries, but it has no power. Even when

The first thing to do with internal party governance is sanctioning party leaders who refuse to convene meetings.

parties make contradictory claims from decisions taken at meetings where INEC was present, the latter still has no power to take them to court. Part of the power of this Commission will be that

they can enforce decisions that they substantiate and enforce decisions.

Okigbo: One other point you firmly made in the book is to have a code of conduct for the political parties. I like the idea, but I can't get beyond that we are hostages to the political elite. The proposed Code of Conduct is to check their actions. Help me understand how it will work.

Lukman: First, to free yourself from your hostage mentality, you must be adventurous. You must believe that certain things are possible. If you assume you can't do anything about it, you remain a hostage. Part of the reason I write sometimes is to regain myself because when things happen that I see as entirely wrong, I don't know who to talk to. I sometimes share it without even expecting anybody to give me feedback. When they do, I am amazed that people listen.

The best way to free ourselves from that hostage mentality is to believe certain things are possible. Those creating these problems do not have the power of finality, and we must contest it. Our inability to challenge them gives them the audacity to continue to do what they

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are doing. It comes with a price. If you are going to do that kind of thing, you must be ready to make all the sacrifices. The capacity to make sacrifices is a function of the individual's ability to plan their lives. Many of us fail to make the necessary sacrifices to push leaders to do the right thing because we are overwhelmed by

survival challenges. For instance, when one has so many mouths to feed, one's capacity to make sacrifices, which may lead to job loss, will be weak. So, that is my advice if we must get to a point where we can force people to do the right thing.

In the Code of Conduct, I was part of the party leadership, which was expected to guide the emergence of the leadership of the 10th National Assembly. I went to the party office and saw that it had almost become a warehouse. Aspiring candidates were sending bags of rice and sugar (to party officials), and no one saw anything wrong with the situation. I felt scandalised. AS party leaders, we should be above this level.

⁹ Independent National Electoral Commission

Okigbo: How would the Code of Conduct solve that problem?

Lukman: A Code of Conduct will criminalise such action. Read the political parties' Constitutions in Nigeria's First and Second Republics. Although I was young during the Second Republic, I know that the candidates didn't pay fees to political parties. For instance, there was a case where a candidate for the House of Representatives paid a fee of ₦100 naira to the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) because the party was taking time to mobilise its resources and pay for all candidates. The party sanctioned him because of the action and didn't give him the ticket to contest. They gave the ticket to someone else. We must address the problem of political party funding as a precondition for addressing the above challenges. They have no funding source, so they depend on some questionable sources.

Okigbo: Elected officials?

Lukman: Sincerely speaking, there is no reason why APC, as a ruling party, cannot have a budget of at least ₦100 billion annually for its operational costs. Now the question would be, how can the party mobilise that money? From a civil society perspective, party members should fund it. APC claims to have about 41 million members, but none pay their membership dues. The party can charge an annual subscription. For instance, a member can pay 1-~~₦~~₦1,000 membership fee annually. Multiply that by 41 million.

Okigbo: But 41 million is a fictitious number, right?

Lukman: You and I know it is a fictitious number. I question it anytime the parties say it is organising direct primaries because, to do so, APC must have a verifiable membership register. We don't have such a register. We started the process in 2014. We set up the data centre in Ikeja, but the PDP government attacked it. Since that attack, we never got back to it. We expected that the Membership Revalidation exercise the Caretaker Committee conducted in 2020 would have created the database, but it didn't. So, it is a fictitious number, but nothing stopped us from having a verified membership register.

Okigbo: Most political parties around the world have their member register. Yet, neither the APC, PDP, nor the Labour Party has such a register. Why is this the case? If we don't understand why, we may never accomplish this building block for internal party democracy.

Lukman: We have not done it because we have allowed the culture of impunity to take over political parties. These parties can produce a candidate without any records or due process. The Electoral Act stipulates the qualification for registering political parties. However, the whole question of political party membership is taken for granted. The party must have leadership that draws people from at least 24 states. It must have a registered office and so on. So, if we consider having a verifiable membership register a qualification, all parties will put it in place, and this current madness will stop. INEC has so much to do, hence the need to transfer several of these functions to a dedicated Party Regulations Commission to ensure their implementation.

Okigbo: Let's get to the brass knuckles of this issue. I understand the ideas you espouse in your essays and books. They make sense theoretically; however, I struggle with how they will

be implemented in our polity. Why would the political elite implement a Member Register if they are not convinced that mass participation in the political process is in their parochial interest? Why would they empower INEC or your proposed regulatory commission to become more effective if such action could negate their interests? As one who fought consistently to improve democracy from within a political party, what lessons have you learned from your many battles that can help us begin to think of how to get these things done?

Lukman: One of the lessons I learnt is that if you don't fight for certain things, you will never get it. If you remember, up to 2011, I think it was under [Maurice Iwu](#); the situation at INEC was quite hopeless. Very hopeless. At this point, people were resigning themselves to how desperate the problem was. Many of us wrote off democracy. However, the late [President Yar'Adua](#), may God rest his soul, despite winning that fraudulent election, pushed for electoral reform. He was a beneficiary of the broken system. Ideally, he should have looked the other way.



Professor Maurice Iwu (INEC Chairman: 2005-10) oversaw an election that even the beneficiary, Umaru Yar'Adua (Nigeria President: 2007-09) acknowledged as fraudulent. The latter instituted an electoral reform process that enabled Professor Attahiru Jega (INEC Chairman: 2010-15) to conduct an election that saw the Peoples Democratic Party relinquish the reins of state after 16 years in power. Nigerians expected the electoral reforms to continue under Professor Mahmood Yakubu (2015-date) but the 2023 elections raised several questions about the integrity of the process.

Okigbo: Yar'Adua was a man of character. But we can't put all our hopes for democracy and development in men, no matter their character? That's not what social science teaches us.

Lukman: Everybody has some character quotient, so I have not lost hope in President Asiwaju. Whether we like it or not, up to 2027, he will remain our President at the minimum. So, I believe the more pressure you put on leaders, the more you recover some of their good character to show up in how they run government affairs. But once you give up, if you are not lucky, the wrong side of them will continue to show up.

Okigbo: I have a question from Jesse (a participant). "I have followed Mr. Salihu and the values he stands for, and I am very proud of him. When political leaders like you stand for truth, there is a mass of people that you directly or indirectly influence positively." You should be proud of that compliment. Jesse continues, "Isn't the grave decadence of the political class a reflection of what obtains in the larger society? If so, please provide details and recommendations regarding your position."

Lukman: First, let me thank Jesse for his kind words. Yes, the problems of our political parties reflect our national character challenges. I highly recommend that people summon the

courage to join politics. We have been in a mess lately because several of us vacated the scene in 1998-1999.¹⁰ Back then, parties were shopping for candidates. It's not like now. With less than ₦100,000, you could pick up a governorship form from any major political party. With ₦20,000, you could pick up a form to run for a seat in the House of Representatives. However, we allowed the wrong people to get into politics and convert it to their meal tickets. They have converted public resources into their assets. These are some of the reasons why we are now playing catch-up.

My biggest recommendation is that more people should join politics. People must not wait until they are ready to contest elections. Unfortunately, this is what weakens our politics. Most people enter politics only because they want to contest elections. I would like to see a situation where people become active in political parties because they want a say in the decision-making process, or government, or through the political parties (on how elected representatives conduct themselves).

Okigbo: How can they have that say if the political parties do not convene meetings?

Lukman: I want us to focus on the positives. Something must give. This country can't continue the way we are now. Before 2027, things will begin to change for the better. We must come back to the business of organising political parties. We are in a situation where people are crying about hunger. Yet, the ruling party is not even holding caucus meetings with interest groups to see how to manage the problem and prevent anarchy in the country. I believe that in a short time, parties will begin to come back. We must change that, and I have confidence in that.

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Okigbo: Another question from a participant. "Do all parties have to be national? Parties with specific subnational focus could address the financing challenges and elite capture and may even become channels for more accountable alliances?" What are the pros and cons of this idea?

Lukman: This is an excellent question. Part of the argument for national parties is the Constitutional requirement of producing Members of the Federal Executive Council from at least 24 states as stipulated in the Electoral Act. However, NNPP (New Nigeria People's Party) controls only one state, Kano. It is the same for the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), which controls just one state in the Southeast. One may argue that APGA and NNPP are regional parties. For instance, up to the APC merger, NNPP was concentrated in the North, and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) was more of a Southwest party. I honestly think these are some of the debates we must have. The inability to have these debates is fueling the anger and frustration in the country.

¹⁰ This is an often-made point that the colouration of Nigeria's politics in the Fourth Republic resulted from the social activists refusal to join the political process in the 1998-1999 transition to democracy. They fought for democracy but then decided that politics was a "dirty game" and sat it out.

People are beginning to question why we must remain a nation. I think it reflects that anger. I believe the way to go is openly engaging in these debates. We can expand the questions to include the viability of independent candidates. Why must candidates run through political parties and not as independents?

Okigbo: You took that question off my notepad.

Lukman: We must have these debates. Part of our frustration with democracy is that these debates are not occurring. This is why I am asking: why did we even fight against the military?

The military stopped us from having this debate. If we have a democracy that is stopping us from having this debate, then it loses its value.

The military stopped us from having this debate. If we have a democracy that is stopping us from having this debate, then it loses its value. We must summon the confidence to debate. Debating these ideas does not mean we are breaking up. I do not support breaking up, but we must respect different

viewpoints. We can convince break-up advocates through these debates that we are better united. When they see that we appreciate them, respect their opinion, and that they can get what they want by engaging with others, we can pre-empt them and get them to come back and accept and be loyal to the country called Nigeria.

Okigbo: People argue for breaking up Nigeria when they don't have a voice or when their views are not accorded any consideration. We can build a more united Nigeria by demonstrating that we hear the viewpoints.

I have a question from Emeka Diru. What three things should political organisations interested in strengthening political parties do to promote internal party democracy in Nigeria's political party system? If some organisations out there want to focus on this issue, what are the three things they should focus on?

Lukman: This reminded me of our debates when campaigning for the merger. One of the things that we recommended was that political parties should have interest groups because the whole concept of such organisations is to aggregate interests. APC, for instance, has a youth wing, a women's wing, and a persons-with-disability wing. However, they have no structure. I see many professional groups that want to engage with the government but do not have a channel for such conversations. We should expand the notion of caucusing to have such professional organisations. So, my first recommendation to Emeka Diru is that they must push for a situation where, internally, parties have caucus groups. This point is essential because you need a base to engage the government and negotiate policy.

Groups or organisations interested in strengthening political parties must find a way to enhance groups within a political party to hold their candidates accountable. Democracy can't be just about producing candidates. Even when candidates rig an election, we have no option but to work with such candidates.

The essence of political parties is to aggregate disparate viewpoints. Hence, they must encourage discussions and debates.



Furthermore, I want to encourage Emeka Diru to test the waters by summoning the courage to start. Please don't make the mistake of supporting all political parties. Some of our international organisations make this mistake. Identify a party and focus on it. With the country's state, if we can get one party right, we have made much progress.

Okigbo: But it's difficult to pick a party to support because they do not have distinct philosophies. They don't represent anything. They are all the same. There is no substance, although you may disagree because your essays position APC as progressive.

Lukman: No, you are wrong. I admit that it is just a vision for now. I keep arguing and highlighting what we need to do to qualify the progressive credentials of APC.

Okigbo: Did you attempt to help APC articulate its viewpoint, what it stands for, and its core philosophy? Is there any effort in the APC to have a document articulating its vision and philosophy?

Lukman: There was an attempt during the merger to produce such a document. The merger resulted from a robust internal debate, and I highlighted this point severally. Those internal discussions aggregated into the broader national debate. If you remember, I think it was in 2014 when we even held a conference at the Transcorp Hilton in Abuja. We presented research that led to APC's three priority areas for the 2015 campaign.

Okigbo: We have a question from Jamilu Rabi, PhD student at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. He asks, "Do you think people will subscribe to pay party membership fees when they have less of a say in the party, particularly on the issue of candidate nomination? At the moment, people have lost confidence in parties in Nigeria. How do you rebuild this confidence?"

Lukman: The party membership fees will not be an isolated decision. Recall the discussion about the political party's regulatory commission. Once that is done, it signals a new era. Parties must produce their membership register. This action will enable members to see that they are the voters, and if you want your name to appear on the register, you must pay your membership fee. These processes will build confidence and remove us from the lawless reality whereby people don't see value.

Okigbo: Let's bring the discussion up to the continental level. In the last three years, we have seen a spike in coups, especially in our neighbourhood, the Sahel. Afrobarometer studies show an increasing number of Africans say they are not sure that democracy will deliver the goods,

Parties must produce their membership register. This action will enable members to see that they are the voters, and if you want your name to appear on the register, you must pay your membership fee.

given Africa's chequered history and experience with democracy. What gives you the confidence that this system will or can work now? I have asked this question: Should we avert our minds to a new political arrangement? If yes, what could it be? If not, what is the argument to convince Africans

whose faith in democracy is waning? Should they hold on to the fact that this experiment will ultimately work?

Lukman: Let me talk like a conservative. There is a common saying that the devil you know is better than the angel you don't know. I know what we have now is not the best. The spike in the coups should serve as a warning to our leaders. Many leaders believe they can do anything and get away with it. Take Niger Republic, for instance. The people celebrated in the streets. That act reflects the bad governance the people have endured. Here we are in Nigeria with all the promises of "Renewed Hope." In the last week, the state of electricity supply, even in Abuja, has worsened. People are hungry. In the previous six to eight months, people's income has crashed to less than 25 percent of its value before the last election. There is no end in sight because we have not produced a clear policy plan that points people to a development trajectory. In this situation, it just takes the madness of an individual to lead a coup. We have experienced coups in the past. Those who execute coups don't consult anybody. In the current madness, I don't think we are helping ourselves by just sitting down and thinking it can't happen. We must continue to appeal to our leaders and push them to do the right thing. The right thing to do is to engage leaders and influence their decisions. The leaders need some humility as well. Even if there is hardship, citizens will recognise that hardship is not the product of the decision of this leader but that he is working to solve it.

Okigbo: I agree with you. Another question from a participant. "How do you get political parties active outside of election cycles? Several suggestions seem to allude to that as an ingredient for creating active citizens. So far, it doesn't seem citizens, party members, and non-party members find political parties useful other than during elections. Any thoughts or comments on that?"

Lukman: I think this is part of the broader frustration. Sincerely speaking, no answer will immediately open the space. We must continue challenging leaders and the establishment. The last part asks whether the issue is about ditching the presidential system for the parliamentary system. Honestly, I believe that whether you change the parliamentary system or not, it will not change what we have today. It would take us back to where we started. We must make political parties functional. Once political parties are not functional, we will continue to have a closed setup. The whole system will be closed, and leaders will be acting as dictators. They will be like Kings, which is what we have succeeded in producing so far. To change that, we must build political parties that hold meetings and make decisions binding on elected and appointed leaders. Such a structure creates the incentive because if, as a member of a political party, I see my view translated into the decision of an elected governor or a

president, I will be more committed to attending party meetings. I think it was Jamilu who made the point. As he said, there is no incentive now because they don't even hold the meetings in the first place.

Okigbo: And I couldn't have summarised it any better than that. Thank you so much, Salihu Mohammed Lukman, for spending this time with us to discuss Internal Party Politics, Governance, and Africa's Democratic Future. Thank you to everyone who joined us today.

Two Wednesdays from today, we will have another enriching discussion with Jude Uzonwanne on his book, *The First Trillion*, where he lays out how Nigeria can become the first trillion-dollar economy in Africa. Thank you very much for always joining us, and thank you very much, Salihu, for making time.

Lukman: Thank you very much, Patrick, for the opportunity. I am very grateful and look forward to continuous engagement. We must produce functional political parties in this country.

Okigbo: Thank you, sir. And please keep writing. We are reading.

Lukman: I think that is my main source of happiness.



PARTY POLITICS AND AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC FUTURE



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info@thenextier.com

