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PARTY POLARIZATION AND ITS EFFECT ON LEGISLATIVE GRIDLOCK IN NIGERIA, 1999-2026

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ABSTRACT

This study examined party polarization and its effect on legislative gridlock in Nigeria from 1999 to 2026. The research was guided by the increasing concern that rising partisan rivalry among major political parties in Nigeria has weakened legislative efficiency and democratic governance. The study adopted a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative data from open-ended responses and documentary analysis. A total of 100 respondents were used for the quantitative analysis, while additional qualitative responses were used to enrich the study. Findings from the study revealed that party polarization in Nigeria is driven largely by ethnicity, religion, weak party ideology, winner-takes-all politics, and political patronage. The study also found that rivalry among major political parties such as the APC, PDP, and Labour Party significantly increases political tension and reduces cooperation within the National Assembly. Furthermore, legislative gridlock was found to be a direct consequence of party polarization, manifested through delayed budget approvals, executive-legislative conflicts, and poor policy implementation. The study also established that political defections weaken opposition parties and contribute to legislative instability, while opposition coalitions may improve democratic competition if properly structured. Finally, the study found that institutional reforms, stronger party ideology, and improved bipartisan cooperation are key strategies for reducing both party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria. The study concluded that increasing party polarization significantly undermines legislative effectiveness and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It therefore recommended institutional strengthening, electoral reforms, and promotion of ideological party politics as measures to improve governance and legislative performance.

Keywords: Party, Polarization, Legislature, Gridlock, Nigeria

Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has undergone significant political transformation marked by competitive party politics, shifting alliances, electoral disputes, and rising partisan divisions. Although the return to civilian rule was expected to strengthen democratic institutions, enhance governance, and stabilize the political system after decades of military rule, Nigeria continues to experience persistent governance challenges such as corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, political instability, and legislative inefficiency. Among these challenges, the growing phenomenon of party

polarization has become particularly significant in shaping legislative performance and broader governance outcomes (Omotola, 2019).

Party polarization refers to the increasing ideological, political, and strategic division among political parties, leading to reduced cooperation and heightened partisan conflict within democratic institutions. In theory, political parties are expected to aggregate citizens' interests, formulate policy alternatives, and facilitate governance through negotiation and compromise. However, when competition becomes excessively adversarial, legislative institutions often become dysfunctional, as cooperation gives way to rivalry. In Nigeria, polarization is visible in the intense competition among major political parties such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Progressives Congress (APC), and the Labour Party (LP). These rivalries have deepened political tensions, weakened bipartisan collaboration, and contributed to legislative delays and executive–legislative conflicts (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020).

The Nigerian National Assembly plays a central role in democratic governance, being responsible for lawmaking, budget approval, oversight of the executive, and representation of citizens' interests. Effective legislative performance is therefore crucial for accountability and national development. However, since 1999, the legislature has been characterized by internal disputes, leadership crises, party conflicts, and frequent confrontations with the executive arm of government. These challenges have often resulted in delayed legislation, weakened institutional capacity, and recurring legislative gridlock, which has become a defining feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Oni, 2018).

Legislative gridlock occurs when a legislature is unable to pass laws or implement policy decisions due to political disagreements, partisan obstruction, or institutional conflicts. In Nigeria, this phenomenon is evident in key governance areas such as constitutional amendments, electoral reforms, security legislation, anti-corruption policies, petroleum sector reforms, and annual budget processes. Budget delays are especially common and often arise from disagreements between the executive and legislature over fiscal priorities, resource allocation, and political interests. These delays negatively affect governance planning, economic stability, and service delivery. In many cases, legislative inefficiency reflects deeper partisan tensions rather than purely technical policy disagreements (Yusuf & Hassan, 2021).

The emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013 marked a major turning point in Nigeria's political landscape. Prior to this, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominated the political system for sixteen years. The APC's victory in the 2015 general elections represented the first democratic transfer of power between parties at the federal level. While this was widely seen as progress toward democratic consolidation, it also intensified political competition and polarization, particularly between APC and PDP lawmakers within the National Assembly. Executive–legislative relations became increasingly strained, contributing to legislative instability and reduced policy cooperation (Adeoye, 2019).

The 2023 general elections further deepened political polarization in Nigeria. The Labour Party (LP) emerged as a significant political force, especially through its presidential candidate, Peter Obi, who gained strong support from young voters, urban populations, and reform-oriented citizens. The rise of LP disrupted the traditional APC–PDP dominance and

created a more competitive multiparty environment. While this expansion of political participation strengthened pluralism, it also increased fragmentation and intensified partisan competition within the legislature, making consensus-building more difficult (Okeke & Eme, 2024).

Political polarization became more pronounced during and after the 2023 elections, which were characterized by strong partisan rhetoric, regional alignments, electoral disputes, and legal challenges. These tensions extended into legislative institutions, where lawmakers increasingly prioritized party loyalty over national interest. This development further weakened bipartisan cooperation and contributed to delays in policymaking and legislative decision-making processes (Afolabi, 2025).

This study therefore examines the effect of party polarization on legislative gridlock in Nigeria between 1999 and 2026. It analyzes how partisan rivalry, executive–legislative conflict, political defections, and opposition coalitions contribute to legislative inefficiency. The study also evaluates the broader implications of legislative gridlock for governance and democratic development. Ultimately, it argues that increasing party polarization significantly undermines legislative effectiveness by reducing cooperation, increasing political conflict, and weakening institutional performance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Statement of Problem

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has experienced increasing political polarization marked by rivalry among major political parties such as the PDP, APC, and Labour Party. Rather than promoting effective democratic competition, party politics has been characterized by partisan conflicts, ethnic and regional divisions, executive–legislative tensions, and struggles for political dominance. The rise in political defections to the ruling APC after the 2023 elections, along with coalition movements involving the ADC and NDC, has further weakened party cohesion and intensified instability within the political system. These developments have reduced bipartisan cooperation within the National Assembly and contributed to growing legislative tensions. As a result, legislative gridlock has become a recurring problem, evident in delays in budget approvals, constitutional amendments, and key policy reforms. This study therefore examines how party polarization contributes to legislative gridlock in Nigeria and its implications for democratic governance and institutional effectiveness between 1999 and 2026.

Research Questions

The study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the major causes of party polarization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic?
2. How does party polarization contribute to legislative gridlock in Nigeria between 1999 and 2026?
3. What effects does legislative gridlock have on democratic governance and national development in Nigeria?
4. How have political defections, rivalry among the APC, PDP, and Labour Party, and emerging coalition movements influenced legislative stability in Nigeria?

5. What measures can be adopted to reduce party polarization and improve legislative efficiency in Nigeria?

Research Objectives

The study is hereby guided by the following objectives

1. To know the major causes of party polarization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic
2. To evaluate how party polarization contributes to legislative gridlock in Nigeria between 1999 and 2026
3. To see the effects of legislative gridlock on democratic governance and national development in Nigeria?
4. To examine how political defections, rivalry among the APC, PDP, and Labour Party, and emerging coalition movements influence legislative stability in Nigeria
5. To recommend measures that can be adopted to reduce party polarization and improve legislative efficiency in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature on party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2026), focusing on how partisan rivalry affects legislative efficiency and democratic governance. It examines key concepts such as party polarization, legislative inefficiency, executive–legislative conflict, political defections, and coalition politics. The review highlights competition among major parties including the APC, PDP, Labour Party, ADC, and NDC, and explains how these dynamics shape legislative behavior. It further shows that political defections and partisan conflicts contribute to legislative gridlock, affecting policy implementation and institutional stability. The chapter provides a foundation for understanding governance challenges in Nigeria's democratic system.

Party Polarization

Party polarization refers to the increasing ideological, strategic, and behavioral distance between political parties in a democratic system, resulting in reduced cooperation and heightened conflict in legislative and policy processes. In polarized systems, parties no longer function primarily as collaborative competitors but as adversaries, leading to lower legislative productivity and weakened governance outcomes. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that polarization is multidimensional, involving ideological polarization (differences in policy positions), affective polarization (emotional hostility and distrust among party supporters), and organizational polarization (strong internal party cohesion and discipline that limits internal dissent). These dimensions collectively shape how political actors behave within democratic institutions and significantly influence legislative performance.

The causes of party polarization are complex and context-dependent. In many democracies, electoral competition encourages parties to adopt distinct or extreme positions to mobilize support, often prioritizing core supporters over moderate consensus-building. Media fragmentation and digital communication further deepen divisions by enabling selective exposure to politically aligned information, reinforcing partisan identities. Institutional factors such as winner-takes-all electoral systems, weak ideological party structures,

economic inequality, and identity-based politics (ethnic, religious, or class divisions) also contribute to intensified polarization. These factors reduce incentives for compromise and increase political confrontation in governance systems.

In the Nigerian context, party polarization takes a distinctive form shaped less by ideology and more by ethnic, regional, religious, and patronage-based considerations. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, political parties have generally lacked strong ideological foundations, with fluid membership and shifting alliances. Political competition is therefore driven more by access to state power and resources than by policy differences. The early dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was challenged by the emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013, which consolidated opposition forces and gained power in 2015. This transition intensified partisan rivalry, particularly within the National Assembly, where legislative behavior is strongly influenced by party alignment and loyalty.

More recently, the rise of the Labour Party (LP) during the 2023 general elections further reshaped Nigeria's political landscape by introducing a more competitive multiparty environment. Its strong support among youths and urban populations disrupted the APC–PDP dominance and increased political fragmentation. While this expansion of political competition enhances pluralism, it has also deepened partisan divisions and complicated legislative cooperation. The resulting multipolar system has intensified rivalry among APC, PDP, and LP, contributing to frequent disagreements and reduced bipartisan collaboration in lawmaking processes.

Party polarization in Nigeria reflects a combination of weak ideology, identity-based politics, and intense competition for political power and state resources. These dynamics foster legislative tension, encourage party switching and defections, and weaken institutional trust. Consequently, polarization significantly contributes to legislative inefficiency and gridlock, undermining effective governance and policy delivery in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Legislative Gridlock

Legislative gridlock refers to a situation in which a legislative body is unable or significantly constrained in its ability to pass laws, approve budgets, or implement policy reforms due to persistent political disagreements, institutional bottlenecks, or partisan conflicts. In democratic systems with separation of powers, gridlock often occurs when political actors fail to reach consensus on key policy issues. While disagreement is a normal aspect of democracy, it becomes problematic when it consistently prevents governments from fulfilling their responsibilities. In political science literature, legislative gridlock is commonly linked to polarized party systems, divided government, and weak inter-party cooperation (Binder, 2015).

The causes of legislative deadlock are diverse. A major factor is party polarization, where ideological or strategic differences reduce willingness to compromise and slow legislative bargaining. Institutional design also plays a role, especially in presidential systems where the executive and legislature are separately elected, often resulting in competing mandates. Other contributing factors include weak party discipline, frequent political defections, and personal or elite-driven political interests. In developing democracies like Nigeria, these challenges are

further intensified by patronage politics and the absence of strong ideological party structures (Cheibub, Elkins, & Ginsburg, 2019).

In Nigeria, executive–legislative conflicts have been a recurring feature since the return to democracy in 1999. Although the Constitution provides for cooperation between both arms of government, political rivalry often leads to confrontation rather than collaboration. The National Assembly frequently clashes with the executive over leadership selection, ministerial appointments, oversight functions, and policy direction. These conflicts are largely influenced by partisan interests, particularly when different parties or factions control the two arms of government. Disputes over budgets, constitutional amendments, and anti-corruption policies further illustrate the depth of institutional tension (Ezeani, 2023).

A major manifestation of legislative gridlock in Nigeria is the budget process. Delays in passing annual appropriation bills have become common, often resulting in temporary funding arrangements and disruptions in governance planning. These delays are usually caused by disagreements over expenditure priorities, revenue projections, and political interests rather than technical considerations. Such delays negatively affect economic management, public service delivery, and national development (Yusuf & Hassan, 2021).

Policy stagnation is another consequence of legislative gridlock. Key reforms in areas such as electoral laws, security policy, petroleum regulation, and constitutional restructuring are often delayed or weakened due to partisan disagreements. Even when laws are passed, prolonged negotiations often dilute their effectiveness, limiting the government's ability to respond to national challenges such as insecurity, unemployment, and economic instability.

Executive–legislative conflicts further deepen gridlock in Nigeria. Relations between both arms of government are frequently marked by suspicion and competition for influence. While the executive seeks policy implementation, the legislature emphasizes oversight, sometimes resulting in obstruction or institutional deadlock. In extreme cases, partisan loyalty and personal interests override national priorities, weakening governance effectiveness (Oni, 2018).

Overall, legislative gridlock in Nigeria is closely tied to party polarization, weak institutional coordination, and executive–legislative rivalry. These factors reduce legislative efficiency, delay policymaking, and weaken democratic governance. In a developing democracy like Nigeria, persistent gridlock poses significant risks to institutional stability, policy effectiveness, and national development.

Political Defections and Opposition Coalitions in Nigeria

Political defections, or party switching, have become a persistent feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic since 1999. Defections occur when elected officials leave the party under which they were elected to join another. Unlike in established democracies where such movements are often ideologically driven, defections in Nigeria are mainly influenced by political survival, access to power, personal ambition, and patronage benefits. This pattern has weakened party institutionalization and contributed to instability in the political and legislative systems (Mbah, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC), especially after the 2023 general elections. Many governors, senators, and members of the National Assembly from opposition parties moved to the APC, often justifying their actions as aligning with the federal government for development. However, critics argue that these defections are largely strategic rather than ideological. This trend has strengthened the ruling party while weakening opposition parties' capacity for effective oversight and accountability (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2025).

The rise of the Labour Party (LP) after the 2023 elections also reshaped opposition politics in Nigeria. The party gained significant support from young voters and urban populations, challenging the traditional APC–PDP dominance and creating a more competitive multiparty system. However, internal disputes and elite pressures have limited its organizational stability and legislative effectiveness (Afolabi, 2025).

Additionally, opposition coalition efforts involving parties such as the African Democratic Congress (ADC) have sought to unify fragmented opposition groups. These efforts contributed to broader realignments, including the emergence of the National Democratic Coalition (NDC). However, these coalitions remain unstable due to leadership struggles and competing political interests (Egbuta & Mohammed, 2026).

Overall, political defections and unstable coalition movements significantly affect legislative stability in Nigeria. Frequent party switching weakens discipline, reduces ideological consistency, and disrupts policy continuity within the National Assembly. It also undermines opposition effectiveness and weakens oversight functions. As a result, legislative decision-making becomes unpredictable, increasing political uncertainty, reducing cooperation, and contributing to legislative gridlock and democratic instability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Empirical Review

The empirical literature on party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic highlights several interconnected themes, including weak party ideology, electoral behavior shaped by identity, executive–legislative conflict, political defections, and opposition coalition dynamics.

Olawale (2024) examined party ideology and political opportunism in Nigeria and found that political parties are largely weak in ideological orientation. Instead, they are dominated by elite interests focused on gaining access to state power and resources. This lack of ideological clarity was found to contribute to frequent party switching, political instability, and increased rivalry among major parties. The study concluded that weak ideological foundations weaken institutional trust and intensify political polarization.

Similarly, Madukpe et al. (2025) analyzed voting behavior in the 2023 presidential election and found that voter decisions were shaped more by socioeconomic conditions, regional identity, and youth dissatisfaction than by ideology. The emergence of new political actors such as the Labour Party significantly altered voting patterns and increased political competition. The study concluded that polarization in Nigeria is driven more by identity and economic factors than by ideological differences, reinforcing the fluid and unstable nature of party politics.

Ezeani (2023) focused on legislative–executive relations and found that persistent conflicts between both arms of government negatively affect lawmaking, oversight, and democratic accountability. The study showed that partisan rivalry within the National Assembly leads to delays in policymaking and weak institutional cooperation. It concluded that legislative inefficiency in Nigeria is largely a result of political polarization and mistrust between governing institutions.

Yusuf and Hassan (2021) investigated budget delays and legislative gridlock in Nigeria and found that disagreements between the executive and legislature over fiscal priorities and political interests often result in prolonged budget negotiations. These delays negatively affect economic planning, governance efficiency, and service delivery. The study concluded that legislative gridlock is closely tied to partisan conflict and weak coordination among political actors.

From a theoretical perspective, Binder (2015) explains that legislative gridlock occurs in systems characterized by divided government and high political polarization. He argues that when political actors prioritize partisan advantage over collective governance, legislative productivity declines. The study concludes that both institutional design and polarization contribute to inefficiency, especially in presidential systems like Nigeria.

In the area of political defections, Ibrahim and Salihu (2025) found that defections in Nigeria are largely driven by political survival, access to state resources, and elite bargaining rather than ideology. The increasing movement of politicians to the ruling APC has weakened opposition parties and reduced legislative accountability. The study concludes that defections significantly increase party instability and undermine democratic consolidation.

Mbah (2020) also examined party switching and found that frequent defections weaken party cohesion, reduce ideological consistency, and create uncertainty in the political system. The study further noted that defections weaken opposition parties' ability to perform oversight functions in the legislature, thereby contributing to democratic instability.

Okeke and Eme (2024) studied youth political participation and the rise of the Labour Party in the 2023 elections. They found that the Labour Party gained strong support from young voters and urban populations, disrupting the APC–PDP dominance. While this increased political pluralism, it also intensified competition and polarization. The study concluded that the emergence of new political actors has deepened partisan divisions within Nigeria's political system.

Egbuta and Mohammed (2026) examined opposition coalitions and found that smaller parties such as the African Democratic Congress (ADC) have attempted to form alliances to challenge APC dominance, leading to broader realignments such as the National Democratic Coalition (NDC). However, these coalitions remain unstable due to leadership struggles and ideological fragmentation. The study concludes that opposition coalitions have limited impact on legislative dynamics due to their internal instability.

Overall, the empirical literature shows strong consensus that Nigeria's party system is weakly ideological and largely driven by identity, patronage, and elite competition. This has led to frequent defections, unstable coalitions, and intensified rivalry among political parties. These

conditions contribute significantly to executive–legislative conflicts, weak institutional cooperation, and recurring legislative gridlock. The literature therefore establishes a clear link between party polarization and declining legislative effectiveness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Conflict Theory and Institutional Theory, which provide a useful lens for explaining the relationship between party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. These theories help to clarify how political competition, institutional structures, and power struggles shape legislative behaviour and governance outcomes in a developing democracy such as Nigeria.

Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory, largely associated with Karl Marx and later developed in political sociology, argues that society is characterized by continuous struggles between groups competing for scarce resources, power, and influence. In political systems, these conflicts often manifest in struggles among political elites, institutions, and social groups seeking control over state authority and resources. The core assumption of Conflict Theory is that political order is maintained not through consensus, but through dominance, competition, and unequal power relations (Dahrendorf, 1959; updated political applications in modern governance studies).

In the Nigerian context, Conflict Theory is highly relevant in explaining the nature of political rivalry and party polarization. Political parties such as the APC, PDP, and Labour Party operate within a highly competitive environment where access to state power is central to political survival. Rather than ideological differences, political conflicts in Nigeria are often driven by struggles for control of government resources, appointments, and institutional influence. This competitive environment contributes to persistent partisan hostility and weak inter-party cooperation within the legislature. As a result, legislative processes often become arenas of political struggle rather than platforms for policy consensus, thereby increasing the likelihood of legislative gridlock (Omotola, 2019).

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory focuses on the role of political institutions in shaping political behaviour and governance outcomes. It argues that institutions—such as legislatures, executives, and electoral systems—create formal and informal rules that guide the behaviour of political actors. These structures influence how decisions are made, how power is distributed, and how conflicts are managed within political systems. In this sense, institutions can either promote cooperation or intensify conflict depending on their design and functionality (North, 1990; applied in modern governance studies).

In relation to legislative governance, Institutional Theory is particularly useful for understanding executive-legislative relations and legislative gridlock in Nigeria. The Nigerian presidential system, which separates executive and legislative powers, creates multiple points of decision-making that require cooperation between political actors. However, when combined with party polarization, weak institutional norms, and competing political interests,

this system can produce frequent deadlocks in policymaking. Legislative inefficiency in areas such as budget approval, constitutional amendments, and policy reforms reflects the limitations of institutional coordination under conditions of political conflict (Ezeani, 2023).

Preferred Theory and Justification

For the purpose of this study, Institutional Theory is adopted as the primary theoretical framework, while Conflict Theory serves as a complementary explanation. Institutional Theory is preferred because it directly explains how legislative structures, rules, and executive-legislative relations influence the occurrence of gridlock in Nigeria's political system. It provides a clearer understanding of how institutional weaknesses, combined with partisan polarization, lead to policy delays and governance inefficiencies.

However, Conflict Theory remains important in explaining the underlying political motivations—particularly competition for power, resources, and influence—that drive party polarization. Together, both theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how structural institutions and political struggles interact to produce legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Identified Research Gaps

Despite the extensive literature on party politics, legislative behaviour, and governance in Nigeria, several gaps remain. First, most studies treat party polarization, legislative gridlock, and political defections as separate phenomena, without integrating them into a unified analytical framework. Second, there is limited longitudinal analysis covering the entire period of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2026) in relation to legislative performance outcomes. Third, insufficient attention has been given to the combined impact of emerging political actors such as the Labour Party and opposition coalition movements (ADC/NDC) on legislative stability. Finally, there is a lack of empirical studies that systematically link recent waves of political defections to legislative gridlock and governance inefficiency in Nigeria's National Assembly. This study addresses these gaps by providing an integrated analysis of party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for the study on party polarization and its effect on legislative gridlock in Nigeria from 1999 to 2026. It outlines the procedures and strategies used in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to achieve the stated research objectives. Methodology is a crucial component of any academic research as it provides the scientific basis for ensuring that findings are credible, valid, and replicable.

The purpose of this methodology is to clearly explain how the study is conducted, the sources of data utilized, and the analytical procedures employed in examining the relationship between party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It further demonstrates the systematic link between the research design and the objectives of the study, ensuring that each stage of the research contributes meaningfully to answering the research questions.

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Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria. The quantitative component involves the use of structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 100 respondents drawn from the National Assembly, political party officials, legislative aides, political analysts, and civil society actors. Data are collected using Google Forms to ensure efficiency and broad coverage. The qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews with selected key informants to obtain richer, context-specific insights into issues such as political defections, party rivalry, and legislative inefficiency. The mixed-method approach is adopted because it enhances the validity and depth of the study by integrating measurable trends with explanatory perspectives. This is particularly important in understanding Nigeria's complex political environment, where legislative behavior is shaped by both institutional structures and human political behavior.

Area of Study

The study is geographically focused on the Federal Republic of Nigeria, with particular emphasis on its political and legislative institutions. It centers on the National Assembly, comprising the Senate and House of Representatives, as the key institution for examining legislative processes and political decision-making. The study also considers major political parties, including the APC, PDP, and Labour Party, as well as emerging opposition coalitions such as the ADC and the National Democratic Coalition (NDC). The temporal scope covers 1999 to 2026, representing Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and capturing the evolution of democratic governance, party competition, polarization, and legislative gridlock over time.

Sources of Data

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources of data to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

The primary data is obtained through structured questionnaires administered to selected respondents via Google Forms and through one-on-one interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Nigeria's political and legislative environment. These stakeholders include legislators, political party officials, legislative aides, political analysts, and civil society actors. The primary data provides firsthand insights into perceptions and experiences relating to party polarization, defections, and legislative inefficiency.

The secondary data consists of information obtained from academic journals, textbooks, government publications, legislative records, policy documents, newspapers, and credible online databases. These sources provide historical context, theoretical grounding, and empirical evidence necessary for analyzing political developments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The reliance on secondary data is justified by the need to examine long-term political developments spanning over two decades. It also enhances the reliability of the study by ensuring that findings are supported by established scholarly and institutional records.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study is collected using a combination of document analysis, content analysis, and literature review techniques. Document analysis involves the systematic examination of official legislative records, government publications, party documents, and policy reports relevant to party politics and legislative activity in Nigeria.

Content analysis is employed to examine media reports, political commentaries, and institutional publications in order to identify recurring themes such as party polarization, political defections, executive-legislative conflict, and legislative gridlock. This method allows for the identification of patterns in political behavior over time.

In addition, an extensive review of academic literature is conducted to provide theoretical and empirical grounding for the study. This includes peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and policy analyses that address party politics, governance, and legislative performance in Nigeria.

Method of Data Analysis

The study adopts a qualitative-dominant analytical approach, supported by descriptive statistical analysis of survey data. The qualitative data obtained from interviews and documentary sources is analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, classifying, and interpreting recurring themes relevant to the study objectives. Key themes include party polarization, legislative gridlock, political defections, opposition coalition dynamics, and governance challenges.

The thematic analysis allows for an in-depth interpretation of political behavior and institutional relationships within Nigeria's legislative system. It also facilitates the identification of causal relationships between party polarization and legislative inefficiency.

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires is analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. This provides a summary of respondents' views and supports the qualitative findings. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative analysis ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and enhances the robustness of the study's conclusions.

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65	65%
	Female	35	35%
	Total	**100**	**100%**
Age Range	18–25 years	5	5%
	26–35 years	30	30%
	36–45 years	40	40%
	46 years and above	25	25%
	Total	**100**	**100%**
Educational Qualification	SSCE	5	5%
	OND/NCE	10	10%
	HND/B.Sc.	50	50%
	Master's Degree	25	25%
	Ph.D.	10	10%
	Total	**100**	**100%**
Occupation	Public Servant	45	45%
	Politician	22	22%
	Civil Society/NGO	7	7%
	Academic	15	15%
	Student	5	5%
	Other	6	6%
	Total	**100**	**100%**
Years of Political Awareness/Experience	1–5 years	15	15%
	6–10 years	25	25%
	11–15 years	30	30%
	16 years and above	30	30%
	Total	**100**	**100%**

Source: Authors' Compilation

The table shows that the majority of respondents were male (65%), within the age range of 36–45 years (40%), and possessed HND/B.Sc. qualifications (50%). Most respondents were public servants (45%), while a significant number had over 11 years of political awareness and experience (60%). This indicates that the respondents were experienced and knowledgeable enough to provide reliable information on party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria.

Table: 2. Party Polarization in Nigeria

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Political parties in Nigeria are highly polarized	76	16	3	3	0
Rivalry among APC, PDP, and Labour Party has increased political tension in Nigeria	76	21	0	3	0
Ethnic and regional interests contribute to party polarization in Nigeria	78	20	1	1	0
Political parties in Nigeria lack clear ideological differences	58	24	4	10	4
The emergence of the Labour Party during 2023 intensified political competition	42	45	10	0	3
Political defections contribute to instability within political parties	44	42	10	3	1

Source: Authors' Compilation

The table above shows that the majority of respondents agreed that party polarization is a major feature of Nigeria's political system. Most respondents strongly agreed that political parties in Nigeria are highly polarized and that rivalry among the APC, PDP, and Labour Party has increased political tension in the country.

The findings also reveal that ethnic and regional interests significantly contribute to party polarization in Nigeria. In addition, many respondents agreed that political parties in Nigeria lack clear ideological differences, suggesting that political competition is largely driven by personal and regional interests rather than policy ideology.

Furthermore, the emergence of the Labour Party during the 2023 general elections was perceived by most respondents as having intensified political competition in Nigeria. The study also found that political defections contribute greatly to instability within political parties and the broader political system. The findings indicate that party polarization in Nigeria is influenced by political rivalry, ethnic and regional interests, weak party ideology, and increasing political defections, all of which contribute to political instability and legislative tension in the country.

Table: 3. Legislative Gridlock in Nigeria

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Party polarization contributes to legislative gridlock in Nigeria	52	27	14	7	0
Executive-legislative conflicts delay policymaking in Nigeria	44	45	10	0	1
Budget approval delays are caused by partisan disagreements	28	38	13	14	7
Political rivalry reduces cooperation among lawmakers	47	29	15	9	0
Legislative gridlock affects democratic governance negatively	42	45	6	6	1
Legislative inefficiency contributes to poor policy implementation in Nigeria	49	38	6	6	1

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents agreed that party polarization contributes significantly to legislative gridlock in Nigeria. Most respondents also agreed that executive-legislative conflicts delay policymaking and slow down governance processes in the country.

The study further shows that partisan disagreements contribute to delays in budget approvals, although a moderate number of respondents disagreed with this position. In addition, respondents agreed that political rivalry reduces cooperation among lawmakers within the National Assembly.

The findings also indicate that legislative gridlock negatively affects democratic governance and contributes to poor policy implementation in Nigeria. Overall, the results suggest that increasing party polarization, partisan rivalry, and executive-legislative conflicts are major factors responsible for legislative inefficiency and governance challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Table: 4. Political Defections and Opposition Coalitions

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Recent defections of governors and lawmakers to APC weakened opposition parties	57	22	14	7	0
Political defections are mainly motivated by personal political interests	50	35	13	5	0
Opposition coalitions such as ADC/NDC can strengthen democratic competition	39	54	7	0	0
Frequent party defections weaken legislative stability	48	49	2	0	1
The current level of party polarization threatens democratic consolidation in Nigeria	47	42	10	1	0

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents agreed that the recent defections of governors and lawmakers to the APC have weakened opposition parties in Nigeria. Respondents also agreed that political defections are largely motivated by personal political interests rather than ideological considerations.

Furthermore, most respondents believed that opposition coalitions such as the ADC and NDC can strengthen democratic competition and provide stronger opposition within Nigeria's political system. The study also revealed that frequent party defections weaken legislative stability and contribute to political uncertainty within the National Assembly.

Finally, the majority of respondents agreed that the current level of party polarization poses a threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Overall, the findings suggest that political defections and unstable party alliances significantly contribute to party polarization, legislative instability, and governance challenges in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Table: 5. Party Polarization and Legislative Gridlock

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Stronger party ideology can reduce political defections	62	29	8	1	0
Dialogue and bipartisan cooperation can reduce legislative gridlock	45	45	5	5	0
Electoral reforms can improve legislative efficiency in Nigeria	47	42	7	4	0
Institutional reforms are necessary for improving executive-legislative relations	35	51	12	0	2
Political parties should prioritize national interest over partisan interest	45	42	9	3	1

The findings show that the majority of respondents agreed that stronger party ideology can reduce political defections and improve party stability in Nigeria. Respondents also believed that dialogue and bipartisan cooperation are important measures for reducing legislative gridlock and improving legislative effectiveness.

The study further revealed that electoral reforms and institutional reforms are necessary for improving legislative efficiency and strengthening executive-legislative relations in Nigeria. In addition, most respondents agreed that political parties should prioritize national interest above partisan interests in order to promote democratic governance and political stability.

The findings suggest that strengthening political institutions, promoting bipartisan cooperation, and encouraging ideological party politics are essential measures for reducing party polarization and legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Major Causes of Party Polarization in Nigeria

The responses obtained from respondents revealed that the major causes of party polarization in Nigeria include ethnicity, religion, weak political ideology, winner-takes-all politics, greed, and weak democratic institutions. Many respondents emphasized that Nigerian politics is largely driven by ethnic and regional interests rather than ideological differences among political parties. Others noted that the absence of strong party ideology encourages political opportunism, defections, and excessive rivalry among political actors.

A significant number of respondents also identified the winner-takes-all nature of Nigerian politics as a major source of polarization. According to the responses, political office is often viewed as the primary avenue for access to state resources and economic benefits, thereby making political competition highly confrontational. Respondents further highlighted greed, political patronage, and personal political ambition as factors intensifying party polarization within Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The findings indicate that party polarization in Nigeria is largely rooted in identity politics, weak institutional structures, poor ideological foundations, and intense competition for political power and state resources.

Ways of Reducing Legislative Gridlock in Nigeria

The responses showed that respondents strongly supported legislative reforms, institutional strengthening, and bipartisan cooperation as major solutions to legislative gridlock in Nigeria.

Many respondents suggested reforms in legislative rules and timelines to ensure faster and more efficient lawmaking processes.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of building strong and independent democratic institutions capable of promoting accountability and reducing partisan interference in legislative activities. Some respondents argued that reducing excessive partisanship and encouraging cooperation among political parties would improve legislative effectiveness and policymaking.

In addition, several respondents recommended electoral reforms, stronger ideological frameworks, direct primaries, and independent candidacy as mechanisms for reducing political tension and improving legislative stability. Overall, the findings suggest that legislative gridlock can be reduced through institutional reforms, stronger democratic practices, and improved cooperation among political actors.

Impact of Political Defections on Nigeria's Democracy

The findings revealed that political defections have had largely negative effects on Nigeria's democracy. Most respondents agreed that defections weaken opposition parties, undermine the multi-party system, and reduce effective legislative oversight. Respondents also noted that frequent defections weaken party ideology and create instability within the political system.

Several responses indicated that political defections strengthen political godfathers and encourage opportunistic politics, where politicians frequently switch parties based on personal interests rather than policy convictions. This situation, according to respondents, weakens public trust in political parties and reduces democratic accountability. Some respondents, however, observed that defections may occasionally promote political realignment and democratic competition, particularly when opposition parties become excessively weak or dominant parties become too powerful. Despite this, the dominant opinion remained that political defections contribute more to political instability, weakened institutions, and legislative tension within Nigeria's democratic system.

Additional Comments and Suggestions

The additional comments from respondents emphasized the need for intentional political reforms, stronger party ideology, and respect for democratic rules and institutions. Several respondents stressed that Nigerian political actors should prioritize national interest above personal or partisan interests. Some respondents expressed concerns that Nigeria is gradually drifting toward a one-party dominant system due to increasing defections to the ruling party. Others recommended stronger sanctions against political defections and stricter enforcement of constitutional provisions relating to party switching. Respondents also highlighted the need for stronger political institutions, increased political education, and reforms that would empower citizens rather than political elites. Overall, the responses suggest that democratic stability and legislative efficiency in Nigeria can only improve through institutional reforms, ideological political parties, accountability, and adherence to democratic principles.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that party polarization is a significant challenge to Nigeria's democratic system and legislative effectiveness. The study established that rivalry among major political parties such as the APC, PDP, and Labour Party has intensified political tensions and weakened cooperation within the political environment. It further showed that party polarization in Nigeria is largely driven by ethnicity, religion, regional interests, weak ideological foundations, and winner-takes-all politics. This aligns with scholars such as Omotola and Olawale, who argue that political competition in Nigeria is more identity-based than ideology-driven.

The study also found that party polarization contributes significantly to legislative gridlock. Respondents indicated that executive-legislative conflicts, partisan disagreements, and political rivalry reduce cooperation among lawmakers and delay key policymaking processes. Legislative inefficiency was found to negatively affect governance outcomes, including budget approval, policy implementation, and democratic accountability. These findings support Binder's argument that highly polarized systems experience frequent legislative deadlock, and they also align with Ezeani's view that executive-legislative conflicts weaken institutional effectiveness in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study revealed that political defections have weakened opposition parties and contributed to legislative instability. Defections were found to be driven mainly by personal political interests, patronage, and political survival rather than ideology. This has weakened party discipline, ideological consistency, and legislative oversight functions. These findings are consistent with Ibrahim and Salihu, who noted that defections in Nigeria are largely motivated by access to power and state resources.

The study also found that opposition coalitions such as the ADC and NDC may enhance democratic competition, but they remain unstable due to leadership struggles, internal disagreements, and weak ideological foundations. This supports the work of Egbuta and Mohammed on coalition fragility in Nigeria.

Finally, the study established that legislative gridlock can be reduced through stronger party ideology, institutional reforms, bipartisan cooperation, and electoral reforms. Overall, the findings confirm that party polarization significantly contributes to legislative gridlock in Nigeria by increasing partisan conflict, weakening cooperation, encouraging defections, and reducing legislative efficiency in the Fourth Republic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concludes that party polarization is a major determinant of legislative gridlock in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The absence of strong ideological party structures, combined with ethnic and regional politics, has intensified partisan rivalry and weakened legislative cooperation.

The National Assembly has increasingly experienced delays in lawmaking, budget approval, and policy implementation due to executive-legislative conflicts and party-based disagreements. Political defections further worsen the situation by weakening opposition parties and reducing institutional balance. The study concludes that increasing polarization undermines legislative efficiency, weakens democratic accountability, and slows down national development in Nigeria. Therefore, unless meaningful reforms are introduced to strengthen political institutions and reduce excessive partisanship, legislative gridlock will continue to hinder democratic governance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening ideological foundations within Nigerian political parties to reduce opportunistic defections and improve discipline. It further calls for institutional reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the National Assembly and improve executive–legislative coordination, thereby reducing policy deadlocks. Bipartisan cooperation should be promoted, with lawmakers prioritizing national interest over party loyalty. Electoral reforms are also necessary to reduce winner-takes-all politics and encourage fair competition. Additionally, stricter regulation of political defections should be enforced, alongside stronger democratic institutions such as INEC, the judiciary, and anti-corruption agencies. Finally, civic education should be strengthened to promote issue-based, rather than identity-based, politics.

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