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**Influence of Internal Democracy on the Performance of Political Parties in Kenya**

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**Abstract**

Political parties are fundamental to the functioning of democratic systems, tasked with representing diverse societal interests and formulating policies that address national challenges. The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of internal democracy on the performance of political parties in Kenya. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population consisted of key officials from the 30 top registered political parties in Kenya, specifically the party chairmen, secretary generals, and treasurers and the 47 county chief officers. A census approach was employed where the entire population of 137 was used as the sample size. The primary research instrument for this study was a semi-structured questionnaire. The data was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Simple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between internal democracy and political party performance. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically to provide deeper insights into the governance practices of political parties. The study found that internal democracy has a significant and positive impact on the performance of political parties in Kenya ( $B = 0.692$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The overall perception of internal democratic practices was neutral, with concerns about the consistency and depth of member participation in leadership selection and decision-making. The study recommends that the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties should strengthen the enforcement of internal democracy standards. The political parties should institutionalize free, fair, and competitive elections for leadership positions. Party members and the electorate should engage more actively in internal party processes. The study offers valuable insights for political practitioners, policymakers, and scholars by highlighting the governance reforms needed to enhance the democratic integrity of political parties in Kenya.

**Keywords:** *Internal Democracy, Performance, Political Parties*

**INTRODUCTION**

Political parties serve as fundamental pillars within democratic systems globally, undertaking pivotal roles in shaping governance, policy formulation, and representing the diverse interests inherent in societies (Luna et al., 2021). Their significance stems from their ability to act as conduits for political participation, providing citizens with platforms through which they can express their preferences, ideologies, and concerns. These parties contribute substantially to the

democratic process by facilitating the organization and articulation of public opinion (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022).

The performance of political parties holds immense global importance, as the extent to which these organizations fulfill their roles directly influences the health and functionality of democratic governance (Askari et al., 2020). However, the performance of political parties is not uniform across the globe; rather, it varies significantly from one country to another and even within different regions of the same country (Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021). In many established democracies, political parties have successfully represented a broad spectrum of societal interests, promoting inclusivity and diversity. These parties often engage in internal reforms to ensure better representation of marginalized groups, including women, minorities, and underprivileged communities (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021). The Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Norway for instance, have political parties that actively promote inclusivity. They have implemented measures to ensure gender parity, resulting in a higher representation of women in political offices compared to many other countries (Robinson, 2020). However, challenges persist, with some political parties facing criticisms for perpetuating exclusionary practices, favoring certain interest groups, or lacking genuine representation of diverse voices (Dover et al., 2020).

Effective political parties exhibit robust internal democratic processes. Parties that adhere to democratic principles are better positioned to contribute positively to national governance (Auerbach, 2022). Germany's political party system, particularly parties like the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), is often cited for its internal democracy. Members actively participate in decision-making processes, and leadership positions are often contested through transparent and democratic elections (Rowe & Turner, 2023). In some cases, political parties globally face accusations of internal authoritarianism, lack of transparency in decision-making, and insufficient mechanisms for member participation. Political parties, like those in parts of Eastern Europe, have been accused of centralizing power within a few individuals or cliques, limiting internal democracy and fostering a lack of accountability. Such issues can undermine the overall performance of the party system (Gherghina & Soare, 2021).

Political parties in Africa exhibit a diverse range of dynamics, influencing the performance of democratic governance across the continent. Many African nations have witnessed a trend towards increased political pluralism, with a growing number of political parties participating in elections (Rakner, 2021). This reflects a maturing democratic landscape, providing citizens with diverse choices. There is also a noticeable trend of growing youth involvement in African political parties. Many African political parties struggle with weak internal democratic practices. Instances of limited intra-party democracy can hinder the performance of these organizations. Electoral violence and intimidation tactics undermine the democratic process, creating an environment of fear and insecurity (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020).

Kenya gained independence in 1963, ushering in a complex political landscape. The country operates within a multi-party system, with political parties serving as critical actors in shaping governance. The historical evolution of political parties in Kenya is marked by shifts in ideologies, power struggles, and responses to socio-political changes. These parties play a pivotal role in representing diverse interests, fostering political participation, and influencing policy decisions (Widner, 2023). Kenya's political history includes periods of turbulence, ethnic tensions, and governance challenges.

Over recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of coalition politics in Kenya. Political parties are increasingly forming alliances and coalitions to enhance their electoral prospects (Khadiagala, 2021). This trend reflects a strategic approach to pooling resources and broadening support bases. Political parties often align along ethnic lines, reflecting the country's diverse population (Maweu, 2022). While efforts have been made to foster inclusivity, ethnic dynamics persist in shaping party affiliations. Kenya has been experiencing notable trends in electoral reforms, reflecting a commitment to enhancing the credibility and fairness of the electoral process. The ongoing efforts toward electoral reforms in Kenya also underscore a commitment to strengthening the democratic foundation of the country. According to Okul (2020), these reforms are a response to historical challenges and criticisms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Political parties in Kenya play a pivotal role in shaping democratic governance by aggregating interests, formulating policy, and representing diverse constituencies (Passanti & Pommerolle, 2022). However, governance challenges such as weak internal democracy, lack of transparency, poor financial management, and ineffective voter outreach continue to undermine their performance. Key party functions including candidate selection, policy formulation, and member engagement are often centralized and opaque, leading to internal disputes, public distrust, and a disconnect between parties and citizens. Despite the existence of numerous parties, many lack institutional strength and credibility, which hampers their ability to offer coherent policy alternatives or foster inclusive political participation (Gowon-Adelabu et al., 2018; Oindo et al., 2021; Bett, 2023).

Empirical studies (e.g., Kirwa, 2018; Malika, 2022; Oindo et al., 2021) highlight persistent structural weaknesses within Kenyan political parties, yet few have directly examined the link between specific governance practices and party performance. While factors such as ethnicity, regionalism, and clientelism are well-documented, there is a limited focus on how internal democracy influence party effectiveness in Kenya's multiparty context. This study sought to fill this gap by empirically assessing the influence of internal democracy governance practice on the performance of political parties in Kenya, offering insights that could support reforms aimed at strengthening party systems and democratic accountability.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of internal democracy on the performance of political parties in Kenya.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Empirical Literature**

Gupta and Sharma, (2020) examined how internal democratic practices within political parties in India impact their electoral performance and governance performance. This study used a combination of qualitative interviews with party leaders, members, and stakeholders, along with quantitative analysis of party election results and member surveys. The study found that parties with more inclusive internal democratic processes tended to have higher levels of member satisfaction, better electoral performance, and stronger organizational resilience. There is a need for further research on how specific types of internal democratic reforms impact party cohesion and electoral outcomes in diverse political contexts like Kenya. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions could provide insights into the universal applicability of these findings.

Cross and Katz, (2021) did a comparative study analyzing the relationship between internal democratic processes and the success of political parties across several European countries. It investigated how different levels of internal democracy influence party stability, member satisfaction, and electoral outcomes. The comparative study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining case studies of political parties in multiple European countries with surveys of party members and leaders. It analyzed party constitutions, internal election procedures, and member participation rates. The research highlighted variations in internal democratic practices across parties and countries, correlating higher levels of internal democracy with greater party stability and electoral success. Similar studies focusing on African political parties, particularly in countries like Kenya with diverse ethnic and political landscapes, could provide insights into how various governance practices influence the performance of internal democratic reforms.

Anderson (2022) examined the effect of party leadership selection processes on the performance of political parties in Canada. The study employed a survey method targeting party officials and members, finding that parties with democratic leadership selection mechanisms experienced stronger party unity and public support. Anderson concluded that inclusive leadership processes foster member satisfaction, which translates into better organizational performance and electoral success. While the study has explored the effect of party leadership selection processes which is an aspect of internal democracy on political party performance, the study was conducted in Canada providing contextual gaps. The political dynamics in Kenya, particularly in relation to ethnic affiliations, coalition politics, and the complex multiparty system, present a unique setting. Khan and Roberts (2021) explored how member participation in decision-making impacts party performance in South Asian political parties. Using a qualitative approach involving interviews with party leaders, they found that greater member involvement in party decisions led to more cohesive parties and better electoral outcomes. The study emphasized that participatory structures increase trust among members, improving overall party effectiveness.

Morris and Kelsall, (2022) explored the role of intra-party democracy in fostering innovation and adaptation within political parties in Africa. It examines how internal democratic practices contribute to parties' responsiveness to societal changes, policy development, and electoral strategies. The study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews with party officials, members, and external stakeholders. The findings highlight that political parties with robust intra-party democratic structures tend to exhibit greater flexibility and responsiveness to societal changes. Parties that embrace democratic practices are better equipped to engage with diverse stakeholder interests, navigate complex policy landscapes, and adjust electoral strategies according to shifting voter preferences. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and political systems could offer insights into the universal applicability of these findings and the impact of cultural, historical, and institutional factors on intra-party democratic practices. Ochieng (2020) investigated the role of democracy in the political parties elections in Kenya. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with party members. It found that transparent decision-making processes within political parties led to increased public confidence, which in turn enhanced electoral performance. Ochieng concluded that internal democracy plays a critical role in the long-term sustainability of political parties. The study was however limited to electoral process. The current study thus sought to fill the gap by focusing on diverse aspects of party performance.

Kirwa (2018) examined the contributions and challenges encountered by political parties in enhancing democratic governance in Kenya. It highlighted the performance and challenges of the structures and frameworks of political parties and the factors that promote the role of political

parties in enhancing democratic governance in Kenya. The research underscored the importance of citizen participation in political party activities and the inclusion of party members and supporters in party nominations and selection of party candidates to engender fairness and collective ownership of party institutions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the Democratic Theory. Democratic theory has been shaped and developed by numerous scholars and philosophers over time. Key proponents include John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill. In modern political science, Robert Dahl and David Held are prominent figures who have significantly contributed to democratic theory (Christiano, 2018). Democratic theory posits that democracy is the most legitimate form of governance because it ensures that power is derived from the consent of the governed. It emphasizes the principles of participation, equality, and accountability in the political process. The theory suggests that democratic practices lead to more inclusive, representative, and effective governance structures (Asenbaum, 2022). The main principles of democratic theory include several foundational concepts that collectively ensure a fair and effective governance system. The concept of popular sovereignty emphasizes that the ultimate source of political power lies with the people, making their active engagement and consent crucial for legitimate governance (Christiano, 2018). Majority rule and minority rights is another key principle, wherein decisions are made based on majority rule, but the rights of minorities are protected (Beitz, 2020).

Democratic theory is highly relevant to the study. Democratic theory asserts that for a political party to effectively represent the people, it must practice internal democracy. This means that party members should have the right to participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that leadership positions and policy directions are reflective of the broader membership base. This aligns with the purpose of the study. According to democratic theory, a lack of internal democracy can result in poor party performance, as it leads to disenfranchisement and weak representation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is anchored on Democratic Theory which provides the theoretical basis for understanding the mechanisms through which internal democracy governance practice influence the performance of political parties. The theory guided the conceptual framework by linking internal democracy governance practice (independent variable) to political party performance (dependent variable). The conceptual framework for this study is outlined in figure 1.

#### **Independent Variables**

##### **Internal Democracy**

- Transparency in Leadership Selection
- Inclusion in Decision-Making Procedures
- Member Participation

#### **Dependent Variable**

##### **Performance of Political Parties**

- Electoral Success
- Policy Influence
- Operational efficiency

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source; Author, 2025.



## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of governance practices on the performance of political parties.

### **Research Design**

A descriptive research design was adopted. Descriptive research is a non-experimental design that seeks to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon or the relationship between variables as they naturally occur (Sileyew, 2019). The study described the extent to which internal democracy is implemented within these parties. This design allows for a thorough understanding of how this governance practice is currently functioning, offering a snapshot of the existing situation within political parties.

### **Target population and Sampling**

The target population consisted of key officials from the 30 top registered political parties in Kenya, specifically the Party Chairmen, Secretary Generals, and Treasurers and the 47 county chief officers. These officials hold critical positions that influence governance practices and are, therefore, best positioned to provide the necessary data for this study. Given the manageable size of this population, the study employed a census approach to collect data from the entire target population of 137 individuals.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a semi-structured questionnaire, specifically designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data related to governance practices and political party performance in Kenya.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data collected from the questionnaires was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, like mean scores and standard deviations, were used to assess quantitative data. A simple linear regression was used to determine the relationship between internal democracy governance practice and political party performance. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically, with emerging themes categorized and interpreted to provide deeper insights. The simple linear regression model as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta X + \varepsilon$$

Where: (Y): is the dependent variable, X is the predictor,  $\beta$  is the coefficient,  $\beta_0$  is the intercept and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the study. The study sought approval from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) before data collection begins. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the study and their role in it. The study ensured that all participants' personal details are kept confidential. All data collected was anonymized, meaning that no individual participant can be identified from the results.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Response rate**

The study achieved a high response rate of 87.6%, with 120 out of 137 questionnaires fully completed. The high response rate of 87.6% is an indication of strong engagement from the participants and enhances the reliability of the data collected. A response rate above 70% is

generally considered acceptable in survey-based research, as it reduces the likelihood of non-response bias.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

#### **Effect of Internal Democracy on the Performance of Political Parties**

This section presents findings on respondents' perceptions regarding internal democracy within political parties and how it influences party performance. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), and the responses were analyzed to determine overall trends.

**Table 1: Effect of Internal Democracy on the Performance of Political Parties**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Political parties have transparent and democratic leadership selection processes.	120	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.34
Party leaders are chosen through fair and competitive elections.	120	1.00	5.00	2.98	1.40
The leadership selection process encourages participation from all members	120	1.00	5.00	2.97	1.37
Decision-making within the party is inclusive of all key stakeholders.	120	1.00	5.00	3.17	1.34
Party decisions are made through open discussions and consultations.	120	1.00	5.00	2.95	1.28
The decision-making process in our party is efficient and transparent.	120	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.29
Members are actively involved in key decisions affecting the party.	120	1.00	5.00	2.90	1.32
Party members are encouraged to voice their opinions and suggestions.	120	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.26
Our party provides multiple platforms for member participation in decision-making	120	1.00	5.00	3.23	1.19
<b>Aggregate</b>				<b>3.06</b>	<b>1.31</b>

The aggregate mean score for internal democracy was 3.06 with a standard deviation of 1.31, suggesting a moderate perception of democratic practices within political parties. Among the individual items, the highest-rated statement was “Our party provides multiple platforms for member participation in decision-making” with a mean of 3.23, indicating that some parties are seen to offer structured avenues for engagement. This was closely followed by “Party members are encouraged to voice their opinions and suggestions” (mean = 3.22) and “Decision-making within the party is inclusive of all key stakeholders” (mean = 3.17), suggesting a relatively positive perception of inclusiveness.

However, other aspects of internal democracy were rated lower. For example, “Members are actively involved in key decisions affecting the party” had the lowest mean score (2.90), and “Party decisions are made through open discussions and consultations” scored 2.95. These results highlight concerns over the depth and consistency of member involvement in critical decision-making processes. The mean for “Party leaders are chosen through fair and competitive elections” was 2.98, suggesting that respondents may perceive some irregularities or limitations in leadership selection procedures. The relatively high standard deviations across all items (ranging from 1.19 to 1.40) indicate variation in responses, suggesting that experiences and perceptions of internal democracy may differ significantly across parties.

Responses to the open-ended question on improving leadership selection processes provided rich qualitative perspectives. Many respondents emphasized the need for adoption of a more transparent, inclusive, and structured leadership selection processes. This includes conducting open and competitive elections, strengthening party constitutions to limit arbitrary appointments, and ensuring that grassroots members are not only allowed but actively encouraged to participate in choosing leaders. The respondents also highlighted the need for civic education within the party to inform members about their rights and the importance of democratic processes.

These findings have several important implications. Democratic inconsistency within parties threatens internal unity and public credibility. While some parties appear to offer participatory structures, others still operate under centralized, top-down leadership models, weakening institutional trust and alienating members. Fair and competitive leadership elections are fundamental to legitimacy. Without these, political parties risk internal factionalism and external perception as undemocratic entities undermining their capacity to lead in national governance.

The variation in perceptions among respondents indicates that some parties may be progressing toward democratic norms, while others remain stagnant or regressive. This unevenness reflects the broader challenge of institutionalizing democracy across Kenya's multiparty system.

The qualitative responses underline a demand from within party ranks for reform. This presents an opportunity for the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) and party leadership to prioritize internal democracy as a strategic objective, not merely a legal obligation.

In line with Democratic Theory, this study reinforces the idea that inclusive and participatory governance structures within parties are essential to their performance and legitimacy. It also supports Organizational Effectiveness Theory, which posits that structures aligned with institutional goals such as fair leadership selection enhance performance outcomes like electoral success and membership engagement.

### **Performance of Political Parties in Kenya**

**Table 2: Performance of Political Parties in Kenya**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Political parties have been successful in recent elections.	120	1.00	5.00	3.18	1.47
The political party's electoral strategies have led to increased voter support.	120	1.00	5.00	3.13	1.25
Electoral success is a key measure of political party's performance.	120	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.27
Political parties have significantly influenced national policies.	120	1.00	5.00	3.35	1.24
Party leaders are involved in important policy discussions at various levels.	120	1.00	5.00	3.57	1.35
The political party's policy positions are well-represented in legislative processes.	120	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.24
Political parties are well-organized and operates efficiently.	120	1.00	5.00	3.28	1.10
The party's administrative functions support its overall performance.	120	2.00	5.00	3.62	1.04
Operational efficiency is a priority for the political party's leadership.	120	1.00	5.00	3.78	.99
<b>Aggregate</b>				<b>3.43</b>	<b>1.22</b>



The findings on the performance of political parties in Kenya reveal an overall positive perception, with an aggregate mean of 3.43, indicating that respondents generally agree that parties are performing effectively, particularly in terms of organizational efficiency and policy influence. The highest-rated item was “Operational efficiency is a priority for the political party's leadership” (mean = 3.78), followed closely by “The party’s administrative functions support its overall performance” (mean = 3.62), showing a strong consensus that internal operations are seen as well-managed. Similarly, the statement “Party leaders are involved in important policy discussions at various levels” (mean = 3.57) and “Electoral success is a key measure of political party’s performance” (mean = 3.58) also received high ratings, indicating that leadership engagement in policy matters and electoral outcomes are considered central to evaluating party success. Respondents also moderately agreed that “Political parties have significantly influenced national policies” (mean = 3.35) and that “Their policy positions are well-represented in legislative processes” (mean = 3.38), suggesting that parties are not only active in elections but also contribute meaningfully to policymaking. However, scores on electoral-specific outcomes were slightly lower, with “Political parties have been successful in recent elections” (mean = 3.18) and “Electoral strategies have led to increased voter support” (mean = 3.13), indicating a more cautious or mixed view on their recent electoral performance. Nonetheless, the statement “Political parties are well-organized and operate efficiently” (mean = 3.28) supports the broader trend that institutional functionality is a relative strength of these organizations. Overall, the results suggest that while electoral gains may be inconsistent, political parties in Kenya are generally perceived as functionally effective, strategically guided, and influential in both governance and legislative processes.

To improve overall performance, respondents emphasized the need for political parties to: Embrace governance reforms prioritizing transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, ensure alignment between party goals and resource allocation, moving beyond election results as the sole performance metric, expand performance indicators to include policy influence, member engagement, and internal efficiency and strengthen internal systems, leadership development, and communication strategies to build credible and effective political institutions.

These results suggest that Kenyan political parties are generally perceived as functionally effective, strategically guided, and influential within governance and legislative arenas. From the lens of Organizational Effectiveness Theory, well-managed internal processes and leadership involvement contribute significantly to overall performance, supporting party sustainability and influence.

From the perspective of Democratic Theory, the moderate policy influence and legislative engagement indicate that parties play a critical role in democratic governance beyond electoral competition. However, the inconsistency in electoral success highlights ongoing challenges in voter mobilization and grassroots engagement, areas linked closely to governance practices such as internal democracy and voter outreach assessed in this study.

### **Simple Linear Regression Model**

The simple linear regression model was developed to assess the influence of internal democracy on the performance of political parties in Kenya.

**Table 3: Model Summary**

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
1	.764 <sup>a</sup>	.584	.581	.59831

a. Predictors: (Constant), Internal Democracy

The model yielded an R value of 0.764, indicating a strong positive correlation between the independent variable (internal democracy) and the dependent variable (performance of political parties). The R Square value is 0.584, meaning that approximately 58.4% of the variation in political party performance can be explained by internal democracy. This demonstrates a high explanatory power, suggesting that internal democracy is significant factor in determining how well political parties perform.

**Table 4: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	59.343	1	59.343	165.775	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	42.241	118	.358		
Total	101.585	119			

a. Dependent Variable: Party Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Internal Democracy

The ANOVA table tests the overall significance of the model used to predict political party performance based on internal democracy. The regression model produced a total sum of squares of 101.585, with 59.343 attributed to the regression and 42.241 to residual (unexplained) variance. With 1 degrees of freedom for the regression and 118 for the residual, the model yields an F-statistic of 165.775 and a significance value (p-value) of .000. This result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the model as a whole is highly significant. The high F-value and extremely low p-value confirm that the observed relationship is not due to chance, reinforcing the reliability of the regression model.

**Table 5: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	1.169	.184			6.355	.000
Internal Democracy	.692	.054	.764		12.875	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Party Performance

The unstandardized coefficient for the constant is 1.169 ( $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that when the independent variable is held constant, the baseline performance score of a political party is 1.169. Internal democracy showed a statistically significant positive effect ( $B = 0.692$ ,  $Beta = 0.764$ ,  $p = .000$ ), meaning that fair and inclusive internal governance significantly contributes to better performance outcomes.

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that respondents held largely neutral views regarding internal democracy within their political parties, as indicated by an aggregate mean score of 3.06. While there was moderate agreement that some parties provide platforms for member participation and allow expression of member opinions, perceptions were neutral or even skeptical on critical aspects like inclusiveness in decision-making and fairness in leadership selection. This suggests that while some democratic mechanisms may exist on paper, their implementation may be inconsistent or superficial, thus undermining meaningful participation.

Despite this neutrality, the regression analysis indicated that internal democracy has a statistically significant and positive effect on party performance ( $B = 0.692$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This confirms that parties perceived as more democratic tend to perform better, underlining the

importance of fair and inclusive governance structures. However, the neutrality in perception implies that such democratic practices are either not well institutionalized or not widely experienced across all levels of the party structure.

These findings resonate with Gupta and Sharma (2020), who observed that political parties in India with more robust internal democratic practices achieved stronger electoral results and greater member satisfaction. Like the current study, they found a strong link between member participation, democratic leadership selection, and party cohesion. Similarly, Cross and Katz (2021) emphasized in their comparative European study that institutionalized democratic norms lead to better party stability and voter appeal, which aligns with this study's positive regression results despite the neutral attitudes of respondents. Morris and Kelsall (2022) added a broader dimension to this discussion by highlighting the role of internal democracy in fostering party innovation and adaptability. In the African context, they argue that openness in leadership and inclusivity in decision-making empower parties to respond to societal needs and voter preferences more effectively. The Kenyan data where respondents neither agreed nor disagreed on inclusivity or consultation may indicate a missed opportunity for innovation due to weak democratic engagement at the grassroots.

Furthermore, the findings of Anderson (2022) in Canada and Khan and Roberts (2021) in South Asia show that participatory leadership processes and member engagement directly enhance party unity and electoral success. This supports the regression outcome in the current study but again contrasts with the neutral experiences reported by Kenyan respondents, revealing a performance potential gap, the parties could perform better if internal democracy were more rigorously applied.

Finally, Ochieng (2020) provides a Kenyan perspective, linking democratic internal party elections to improved public confidence and electoral outcomes. While his study focused solely on elections, the current research builds on that by evaluating broader aspects such as decision-making processes and member participation. The neutral responses in these areas indicate that, although electoral democracy may be in place, deeper participatory structures are either underdeveloped or underutilized.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that internal democracy is a vital component influencing the performance of political parties in Kenya. Although current democratic practices within parties show a neutral overall perception, there remain challenges related to meaningful member participation and the fairness of leadership selection processes. These gaps suggest that political parties must deepen their commitment to fostering genuine inclusivity and equitable decision-making mechanisms. This way, parties can build stronger internal cohesion, enhance legitimacy, and ultimately improve their effectiveness in both governance and electoral competitiveness. Practically, this calls for reforms that institutionalize transparent election processes and encourage active grassroots involvement.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

The Office of the Registrar of Political Parties should strengthen the enforcement of internal democracy standards by requiring political parties to regularly report on their leadership selection processes and decision-making structures.

Political parties should institutionalize free, fair, and competitive elections for leadership positions across all levels. This includes reviewing party constitutions to ensure clarity and enforcement of democratic principles and providing platforms for grassroots participation.

Party members and the electorate should engage more actively in internal party processes such as leadership elections, budget consultations, and policy discussions to strengthen democratic accountability.

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