

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

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Abstrak: Political parties are central actors in democratic systems, influencing policymaking, governance, and the overall stability of political institutions. In post-conflict or politically fragile societies, their role becomes even more critical as they can either facilitate reconciliation and peacebuilding or exacerbate tensions through polarizing strategies. This paper examines the dual role of political parties in conflict resolution and the strengthening of democratic resilience, drawing from theoretical perspectives on democracy, conflict resolution, and institutional stability. The analysis highlights three primary contributions of political parties: acting as mediators in political disputes, designing and promoting reconciliation policies, and fostering inclusive participation in governance. At the same time, the paper identifies persistent challenges such as political polarization, identity-based divisions, corruption, and weak internal democracy. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms, including greater transparency in party operations, stronger legal frameworks, and continuous political education for both members and the public. By aligning the functions of political parties with the principles of peace and democratic governance, societies can enhance their capacity to navigate conflict and sustain long-term democratic resilience. Ultimately, this study argues that political parties are not only instruments of power but also potential architects of sustainable peace and democratic stability.

Keywords: Energy Policy, Geoeconomic Statecraft, Geopolitics, Russian Politics, Stability Paradox

Article History: Received 21 November 2025, Revised: 10 December 2025, Accepted: 5 January 2026, Available online 18 July 2026

INTRODUCTION

In many democracies, the most serious contemporary threat comes less from sudden breakdown than from gradual erosion of the norms and institutions that constrain political power.¹ Comparative experiences show how elected

¹ Zaky Umar Rachman, "Peran Pilar Demokrasi dalam Meningkatkan Ketahanan Nasional di Tengah Tantangan Globalisasi," *Amandemen: Jurnal Ilmu Pertahanan*,

incumbents can weaken checks and balances, politicize oversight bodies, and stigmatize opponents, steps that may be justified as “reforms” but that cumulatively degrade democratic competition. The trajectories of Venezuela and Turkey, and the stress experienced even by long-established democracies such as the United States, illustrate this pattern of incremental backsliding. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) argue, democracies often erode when political actors abandon mutual toleration and institutional forbearance and when core “gatekeepers” fail to defend the rules of democratic contestation. These dynamics make it urgent to strengthen domestic institutions, especially political parties that can absorb conflict, enforce democratic norms, and prevent political disputes from escalating into violence.

Democracy is often valued not only for participation and representation, but also for its institutional capacity to manage social conflict without violence.² Elections, legislatures, courts, and an open public sphere provide arenas where competing interests can be expressed, negotiated, and translated into policy through rules rather than coercion. Yet democratic competition is not automatically stabilizing: when rivals are treated as illegitimate, when institutions cannot process grievances credibly, or when elites seek to monopolize power, ordinary political disputes can spiral into crises that test whether democracy can adapt and endure. Understanding this endurance requires attention to the institutions that connect society to the state and convert social cleavages into structured, rule-bound competition. ³⁴

In this paper, “democratic resilience” refers to the capacity of a democratic regime to withstand and recover from political shocks—such as disputed elections, polarization, or executive aggrandizement—while preserving competitive participation, pluralism, and meaningful constraints on power. Resilience is therefore not simply the absence of crisis; it is an institutional ability to process conflict through legitimate channels and to adapt through reforms without collapsing into repression or violence. To make this concept analytically usable, the article links political parties to democratic resilience through three

Politik dan Hukum Indonesia 2, no. 1 (2024): 38–46,
<https://doi.org/10.62383/amandemen.v2i1.655>

² *ibid*

³ T. Besley and S. Coate, “An Economic Model of Representative Democracy,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112 (1997): 85–114,
<https://doi.org/10.1162/003355397555136>.

⁴ G. Powell, “The Quality of Democracy: The Chain of Responsiveness,” *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2004): 105–191, <https://doi.org/10.1353/JOD.2004.0070>.

mechanisms: parties (1) mediate conflicts by facilitating dialogue and compromise, (2) design and sustain reconciliation policies and institutional reforms after crisis, and (3) promote inclusive participation that broadens representation and reduces incentives for extra-institutional contestation. The analysis and recommendations in the sections that follow are organized around these three mechanisms.

Political parties are among the most important intermediary institutions in a democratic polity. Their primary objective is to compete for and exercise governmental authority in order to implement programs rooted in particular ideologies, yet their democratic value lies in a broader set of functions⁵.

Established scholarship notes that parties socialize citizens into politics, recruit and train leaders, facilitate participation, articulate and aggregate interests, communicate demands between society and the state, and exercise oversight over government performance.⁶ Importantly, these functions include conflict management: parties can channel societal cleavages into institutionalized debate, coalition bargaining, and legislative deliberation, enabling disputes to be settled through representative bodies rather than violence. At the same time, parties can also become conflict entrepreneurs when they mobilize exclusionary identities, delegitimize rivals, or reject compromise. Recognizing this dual potential is central to explaining why parties can either strengthen or undermine democratic resilience.

Although it has a significant function in conflict resolution, it must be recognized that the function of political parties in conflict control receives less attention than other functions, especially those closely related to electoral, such as socialization and political recruitment. In fact, through this function, political parties can play a strategic role in ensuring the stability of the running of government in accordance with the constitution. Through this article, the author tries to explore the function of political parties in the aspect of conflict resolution to strengthen democratic resilience to the threats described in the previous section. The gap that occurs between the importance of the role of political parties in conflict resolution and the lack of discussion, both in practice and literature, is a basic argument that a more in-depth discussion of the role of political parties as a key actor in conflict resolution is important.

⁵ Hendrarto, "Peran dan Fungsi Partai Politik dalam Mencetak Kader Pemimpin," *Jurnal Penelitian Inovasi* 26, no. 2 (2006): 311–13.

⁶ R. Surbakti, *Memahami Ilmu Politik* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia, 2007).

Against this backdrop, this article asks how the conflict-management role of political parties can be reconceptualized to strengthen democratic resilience in an era of democratic backsliding and polarization. It addresses a persistent gap in both practice and scholarship: while parties are widely recognized for their electoral and representational roles, their capacity to prevent, de-escalate, and resolve domestic political conflict is often treated as secondary.⁷ By synthesizing literature on democratization, peacebuilding, and institutional stability, and by drawing illustrative lessons from crisis episodes in Kenya and Zimbabwe, the paper proposes a coherent conceptual framework for understanding when parties can act as peacebuilders and what reforms are required when they instead become drivers of division.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, critical literature review to build a conceptual synthesis of how political parties contribute to conflict resolution and democratic resilience. The review prioritizes peer-reviewed scholarship and major practitioner reports on democratization, party politics, and peacebuilding (including International IDEA, ACCORD, and NDI materials), complemented by foundational theoretical works on democratic erosion and institutional performance. Sources were selected based on (1) explicit discussion of party roles in managing political conflict, (2) relevance to institutional conditions associated with democratic resilience (pluralism, accountability, and constraints on executive power), and (3) applicability to post-crisis or politically fragile settings. The findings are synthesized into an analytical framework of three party functions—mediation, reconciliation policy design, and inclusive participation—which then guides the organization of the discussion and the reform recommendations.

Scope and Limitations

This paper is conceptual and normative in nature, aiming to offer an idea of how the role of political parties can be reconceptualized in the context of conflict resolution and the strengthening of democratic resilience. Accordingly, the discussion does not focus on an empirical analysis of political parties in Indonesia, including their structures, internal dynamics, or electoral behavior. Case studies such as Kenya and Zimbabwe are presented solely as comparative illustrations to support theoretical and conceptual arguments. Therefore, the scope of this study

⁷ E. W. Bulmer, *Presidential Veto Powers, International IDEA Constitution-Building Primer* 14 (2015).

is limited to a conceptual and literature-based exploration that emphasizes the ideal functions of political parties in promoting peaceful conflict management and enhancing democratic resilience.

Despite their role as core democratic institutions, political parties are frequently examined mainly as electoral competitors and vehicles for representation, leaving their function as domestic conflict managers and peacebuilding actors comparatively under-theorized. This omission is consequential: in many democracies, crises emerge not only from policy disagreements but from contested rules of the game, disputed elections, constitutional confrontations, and identity-based mobilization that can escalate when parties lack incentives or capacity to bargain responsibly. When parties fail to channel disputes into legitimate institutions, polarization deepens, trust in democracy erodes, and opportunities for anti-democratic actors expand.

Accordingly, this paper addresses two guiding questions. First, through what mechanisms can political parties contribute to conflict resolution in ways that strengthen democratic resilience, specifically through mediation, reconciliation policy design, and inclusive participation? Second, what internal party reforms and external institutional safeguards are necessary for those mechanisms to function in practice, particularly in fragile or post-crisis contexts? Answering these questions enables the article to offer a structured conceptual framework and a practical reform agenda for policymakers, party leaders, and scholars concerned with democratic stability and peacebuilding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political parties are central to democratic governance because they structure political competition, aggregate interests, and translate societal demands into policy. In fragile or post-crisis contexts, this centrality creates a dual potential: parties can facilitate reconciliation and institutional repair, or they can harden divisions and escalate contestation into violence.⁸⁹ Guided by the conceptual framework developed in the introduction, this section examines three pathways through which parties can strengthen democratic resilience—mediation in political disputes, design of reconciliation-oriented rules and policies, and

⁸ T. Meyer, *Peran Partai Politik dalam Sebuah Sistem Demokrasi: Sembilan Tesis* (Jakarta: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Kantor Perwakilan Indonesia, 2012).

⁹ International IDEA, *Demokrasi di Tingkat Lokal: Buku Panduan International IDEA Mengenai Keterlibatan, Keterwakilan, Pengelolaan Konflik dan Kepemerintahan* (Jakarta: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002).

promotion of inclusive participation—before assessing the main obstacles that prevent parties from performing these roles. The comparative discussions of Kenya (2007–2008) and Zimbabwe (2008) are used as illustrative cases to demonstrate how these mechanisms operate under pressure, not as comprehensive country studies.

The Role of Political Parties as Mediators in Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution depends not only on international negotiators but also on domestic actors. Political parties play a unique role because they represent diverse social groups and have the capacity to mobilize political support at the grassroots level. Literature on peacebuilding shows that the party must engage in open dialogue to resolve differences, negotiate a new constitutional framework, and represent their groups in negotiations¹⁰. This approach emphasizes that parties must go beyond simply winning elections; They must provide space for reconciliation, promote institutional reform, and ensure the integration of previously conflicting groups into the political process.

Political parties can act as mediators when political competition turns into confrontation because they maintain organizational links to constituencies and can credibly signal commitments on behalf of their supporters. In conflict-prone settings, this mediating role involves opening channels of dialogue, reducing misinformation, and negotiating institutional compromises that transform zero-sum struggles into structured bargaining. Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement (GPA) illustrates this capacity. Following the disputed 2008 elections and subsequent violence, negotiations facilitated through regional mediation produced a power-sharing arrangement that brought ZANU-PF and the MDC factions into a Government of National Unity.¹¹ While contested and ultimately limited, the GPA temporarily reduced large-scale violence and created a formal agenda for constitutional and electoral reforms, demonstrating that party-to-party bargaining can open political space when rivals accept compromise over zero-sum victory.¹²

Beyond brokering temporary bargains, parties contribute to democratic resilience by supporting constitution-making and other institutional reforms that

¹⁰ International IDEA, *Demokrasi dan Konflik yang Mengakar: Sejumlah Pilihan untuk Negosiator* (Jakarta: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2000).

¹¹ M. Mutisi, *Beyond the Signature: Appraisal of the Zimbabwe Global Political Agreement (GPA) and Implications for Intervention* (South Africa: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), 2011).

¹² *ibid*

entrench pluralism and constrain arbitrary power. Research on democratic resilience emphasizes that party systems committed to competitive elections, acceptance of legitimate opposition, and protection of pluralism can help shield democracy from anti-democratic actors and crisis entrepreneurs.¹³ In post-conflict settings, this implies that parties should treat constitutional negotiations as inclusionary bargaining processes: ensuring that major social groups are represented, rejecting the mobilization of violence, and avoiding anti-pluralist rhetoric that delegitimizes rivals. When parties help translate conflict-time demands into agreed constitutional rules and credible constraints, they reduce uncertainty about the future distribution of power and strengthen the institutional channels through which future disputes can be managed peacefully.¹⁴

Kenya Case Study 2008

Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election crisis illustrates how party bargaining, under credible mediation, can de-escalate violence and preserve a democratic trajectory. Following a disputed presidential election, violence spread across several regions and generated a severe humanitarian and legitimacy crisis. Mediation facilitated by the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities, chaired by Kofi Annan, brought the main political blocs—the Party of National Unity (PNU) and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM)—into negotiations that culminated in the National Accord and the formation of a Grand Coalition Government. The settlement combined short-term power-sharing with a longer-term reform agenda that included a constitutional review process and institutional measures to address accountability and reconciliation, creating a pathway toward the adoption of the 2010 Constitution.

The success of mediation in Kenya is driven by several factors. First, political parties are willing to put national interests above partisan interests, accepting compromises to avoid civil war. Second, mediation is supported by the international and regional communities, providing external pressure for the party to stop the violence. Third, the agreement itself provides a clear power-sharing mechanism between the president and the prime minister, so that neither side feels completely defeated. This case study shows that political parties can be effective mediators when they have the incentive to maintain peace and face domestic and

¹³ A. Croissant and L. Lott, *Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century: Search for an Analytical Framework and Explorative Analysis* (Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, 2024).

¹⁴ *ibid*

international pressure to compromise¹⁵.

Zimbabwe Case Study 2008 - Global Political Agreement (GPA)

Zimbabwe experienced a deep political and economic crisis in the 2000s that culminated in violence after the 2008 general elections. The rivalry between the ruling party, ZANU PF, and the MDC faction led to an economic downturn, an exodus of refugees, and an increase in human rights abuses. With the help of a mediator from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South African President Thabo Mbeki facilitated the Global Political Agreement. This agreement marked a turning point, as it closed the round of turbulence and formed a Government of National Unity (GNU) which brings together ZANU PF and MDC in government cooperation.¹⁶

The content of the agreement includes the division of executive posts: Robert Mugabe remains president and Cabinet Chairman; Morgan Tsvangirai was appointed as prime minister who heads the Council of Ministers; and Arthur Mutambara of the MDC became deputy prime minister¹⁷. The Cabinet was divided into 31 positions, with ZANU PF gaining 15 seats while the MDC gaining 16¹⁸. The parties agreed to work together to create a permanent and sustainable national solution to the Zimbabwean situation¹⁹. Despite criticism that the deal ignores the will of the people and focuses more on the political elite, the GPA shows that political parties can defuse conflict through power-sharing and setting a reform agenda. Zimbabwe's experience reminds us that such deals require strong oversight and civic participation to ensure legitimacy and minimize corruption.

The Dynamics of Mediation by Political Parties

The two case studies above show a general pattern of how parties act as mediators: they are willing to share power to stop violence; they have the support of an external mediator; and they must balance the demands of the support base with political realities. However, the party as a mediator also faces criticism. Power-sharing agreements are often seen as ignoring election results,

¹⁵ Eminent African Personalities, *Back from the Brink: The 2008 Mediation Process and Reforms in Kenya* (Africa: The African Union Commission, 2013).

¹⁶ M. Mutisi, *Beyond the Signature: Appraisal of the Zimbabwe Global Political Agreement (GPA) and Implications for Intervention* (South Africa: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), 2011).

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*

strengthening elites, and undermining accountability²⁰. In order for parties to play an effective mediation role, they must ensure that the negotiation process involves civil society groups, small parties, and other marginalized groups. This broad involvement increases the legitimacy of the agreement and encourages local ownership.

In addition to sharing power, political parties can facilitate Horizontal Dialogue between different groups to reduce stereotypes and fears. Article Journal of Democracy highlighting that political polarization often triggers zero-sum competition that views political opponents as enemies making negotiations impossible²¹. To counter this phenomenon, parties need to create spaces where citizens and politicians from various backgrounds can have a direct dialogue. Such initiatives can be seen in cross-party training programs, discussion forums, and community dialogues aimed at developing a common national identity over a partisan identity.

Political Parties in Designing Reconciliation Policies

The reconciliation process does not stop after the weapons are laid. Political parties must play a role in designing new institutions and policy frameworks that prevent the return of conflict. In the report on peacebuilding Post-conflict, it was stated that the party had the responsibility to organize support for the new constitutional framework, carry out reforms, and ensure the participation of the people in the negotiations²². The party must mobilize members to support change, explain the long-term benefits of an inclusive constitution, and counteract disinformation that could undermine the process.

In Kenya, one of the long-term outcomes of the 2008 agreement was the drafting of the 2010 Constitution. Major parties and civil society actors worked together to draft a constitution that strengthened power-sharing, decentralization (devolution), and recognition of human rights. This process includes a referendum that involves the wider community, thus creating a sense of ownership and legitimacy. The new constitution introduced a system of county government, expanded representation, and contained provisions for truth and reconciliation

²⁰ International IDEA, *Desain Penyelenggaraan Pemilu: Buku Pedoman Internasional IDEA* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2016).

²¹ C. George, "How to Fight Polarization," *Journal of Democracy* (online), August 2025, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-to-fight-polarization/>

²² Ismail, *Konflik dan Kolaborasi: Peran Negara dalam Integrasi Bangsa* (Malang: Media Nusa Creative, 2019).

commissions. Thus, the party not only de-escalated the conflict but also designed a new institutional basis to prevent a return to violence.

Zimbabwe's experience shows another dimension of reconciliation. The GPA not only divides the office but also establishes a commitment to reform the constitution, restore economic stability, and restore public services²³. Although the implementation has been slow and often hampered by mistrust, parties in Zimbabwe have been involved in constitutional negotiations and changes to electoral laws. Unfortunately, the lack of transparency and sustainability of reforms lowers public trust. These lessons show that the party must ensure the implementation of agreed reforms through strong accountability mechanisms and public participation.

Reconciliation Policy as the Party's Agenda

In addition to constitutional reform, political parties can also lead policy initiatives aimed at healing social wounds. These include the establishment of truth commissions, the provision of compensation to victims, and security sector reforms. In some countries, political parties have pushed for programs to reintegrate former combatants into society, ensuring that they gain access to education and employment. These measures prevent a return to conflict by providing economic pathways for those previously involved in violence.

However, there is a risk that parties will use reconciliation policies to promote partisan narratives or to justify impunity for their allies. To avoid this, reconciliation policies should be designed through an inclusive process, supported by data and overseen by independent agencies. When parties realize that their long-term support depends on public trust, they have an incentive to ensure that reconciliation policies actually promote social justice and integration.

Political Parties in Encouraging Inclusive Participation

In a democratic system, political parties provide a structure for political competition. Article Protect Democracy explained that the party helps organize diverse interests into coalitions that can form a government, educate and engage voters, recruit candidates, and coordinate governance²⁴. In countries just emerging from conflict, these functions are essential to restore normal political life and

²³ M. Mutisi, *Beyond the Signature: Appraisal of the Zimbabwe Global Political Agreement (GPA) and Implications for Intervention* (South Africa: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), 2011)

²⁴ Protect Democracy, "Why Do We Need Political Parties?" April 19, 2024, <https://protectdemocracy.org/work/why-do-we-need-political-parties/>.

prevent a return to violence. Without an effective party, political competition has the potential to turn into a contest without rules, which increases the risk of violence.

The party is also tasked with providing a platform for diverse votes. An inclusive multi-party system allows minority and marginalized groups to participate in formal politics. The V-Dem document emphasizes that parties committed to pluralism and non-violence strengthen democratic resilience²⁵. This means that the party must reject anti-pluralist ideology, not mobilize violence, and promote a culture of healthy competition. When parties adopt the ethics of pluralism, they help foster trust between different groups and build social cohesion.

However, parties often face challenges in connecting with younger generations and marginalized groups. NDI report on Principles and Practices of Youth Engagement for Political Parties revealed that many young activists reject political parties because they are considered elite and unresponsive. Social media allows young people to organize outside the party structure, driving demands for change directly. As a result, parties must align their strategies with the "four principles" for youth engagement: (1) ²⁶Connect - reach out to youth in the physical and digital spaces they use; (2) Build - building internal structures that enable youth from diverse identities to play meaningful roles, including creating youth wings and involving them in decision-making; (3) Serve - developing public policies that address the concerns of youth and involve them in designing the vision of the state; and (4) Guide - help young activists plan their political careers, maximize skills and achieve goals²⁷. This principle can increase youth participation, strengthen the party base, and ensure leadership regeneration.

Involvement of Women and Marginalized Groups

In addition to youth, inclusive participation includes women, ethnic minority groups, and other vulnerable groups. Many traditional party systems ignore women's votes, even though women make up the majority of the population. Therefore, gender quota and affirmation policies are important strategies to

²⁵ A. Croissant and L. Lott, *Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century: Search for an Analytical Framework and Explorative Analysis* (Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, 2024).

²⁶ National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Principles and Practices of Youth Engagement for Political Parties* (Washington, DC: The National Democratic Institute, 2023).

²⁷ *ibid*

improve representation. Some post-conflict countries, such as Rwanda, have implemented a minimum quota for women in parliament, which allows them to have a strong voice in policymaking. Political parties must identify structural barriers such as gender-based violence, household double burden, and educational inequality, then adjust their platforms to create safe spaces for women and minorities. When parties integrate gender perspectives into their platforms, public policies become more responsive to the needs of society.

In addition to quotas, parties can use political education to increase democratic literacy among women and marginalized groups. Efforts to increase the representation of women and marginalized groups in politics cannot depend solely on affirmative policies such as quotas. Although quotas have provided formal space for their representation in the legislature, in practice these positions are often not accompanied by substantial political power. Many of them are only "complementary to the list of candidates" in order to meet the administrative requirements, without being equipped with the capacity to carry out strategic roles in the decision-making process. Therefore, political education is an important instrument to build democratic literacy and strong leadership capacity for this group.

Political education can be in the form of leadership training, trial simulations, political communication briefings, and discussions based on relevant local issues. The goal of this program is not only to enable them to run for election, but also to enable them to understand civil rights, be able to build political networks, and have the courage to voice the interests of their communities. Political parties should be the main actors in this process, as they are the main entrance for citizens into the arena of formal power.

Several parties in Indonesia have started this step. PDIP, for example, has a Party School that routinely provides training for cadres, including female cadres. PKB and the NasDem Party are also involved in gender-based political education and the pesantren community. However, the challenge is to expand the reach of the program to the regions, as well as ensure that the material taught is not only normative but also equips participants with practical skills.

By integrating political education into recruitment and cadre strengthening strategies, political parties have the opportunity to create political representations that are not only numerically inclusive, but also transformative in substance. Strong democratic literacy will make women and marginalized groups active political actors, not just symbols of representation. Political parties that encourage their young members to participate in such programs contribute to leadership

regeneration and improve the quality of public discourse.

Challenges Faced by Political Parties

One of the biggest challenges for political parties around the world is increasing polarization. Article Journal of Democracy explained that political competition often turns into zero-sum conflicts where the other side's victory is considered an existential loss. Polarization creates a deep-seated "us versus them" narrative, hampers negotiations, fuels violence, and erodes the legitimacy of political institutions. In extreme situations, polarization can result in the delegitimization of election results and justify violence against opponents. This can be seen in various countries where parties use identity rhetoric (ethnic, religious, racial) to mobilize support, but instead deepen divisions.²⁸

Polarization occurs not only at the national level but also at the internal level of the party. Factions within the party often compete for leadership, dividing members, and weakening the party's ability to make decisions collectively. To confront polarization, parties need to promote open dialogue, respect differences, and build a culture of compromise. Initiatives such as multi-partisan leadership training provide a safe space where leaders from diverse backgrounds can interact and build trust²⁹. In addition, the party needs to reject hate narratives and work with the media to spread a message of tolerance and unity.

Corruption and Political Finance

Corruption is one of the causes of declining public trust in political parties. Report International IDEA shows that political parties and parliaments are the least trusted institutions among OECD citizens, with only 24.2% of citizens expressing trust³⁰. This perception stems from the close relationship between parties and private interests, the secrecy of political donations, and the influence of wealthy donors in public policy. There are several loopholes that are often exploited, such as unregulated donations, weak financial reporting, foreign influence, and loan abuse³¹. As a result, parties are often considered to serve donors more than voters.

Guide Open Government Partnership (OGP) emphasizes that non-transparent political financing increases the risk of corruption, as it allows narrow interests to

²⁸ C. George, "How to Fight Polarization," *Journal of Democracy* (online), August 2025, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-to-fight-polarization/>

²⁹ A. Kartiwa, *Sistem Politik Indonesia* (Bandung: CV Pustaka Setia, 2013).

³⁰ Y. Hamada and K. Agrawal, *Combating Corruption in Political Finance: Global Trends, Challenges and Solutions* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2025).

³¹ *ibid*

influence policy unreasonably³². Openness, reporting, and disclosure of party funding sources can increase public trust and reduce the influence of wealthy donors³³. The OGP recommends that party financial data be linked to other public data, such as government contract listings to identify conflicts of interest³⁴. Transparency also helps underrepresented groups access funding and reduces party dependence on large donors.

To tackle corruption, political parties need to push for legislative reforms that require regular financial reporting and independent oversight. In addition, parties must implement an internal code of ethics that prohibits the receipt of funds from dubious sources, imposes donation limits, and requires independent audits. Without these reforms, public trust will remain low and the party will find it difficult to play a constructive role in conflict resolution.

Internal Democracy and Party Elitization

Weak internal democracy hinders the party's ability to represent the people and results in destructive power struggles. Studies of Nigerian parties (APC and PDP) show that internal democracy is limited by elite manipulation, "godfatherism," money politics, and factionalization³⁵. These practices result in a non-transparent candidate selection process, weaken the party structure, and slow down the deepening of democracy³⁶. Many members feel alienated because decisions are made by a handful of elites who have access to resources.

In addition to internal problems, parties often fail to pay attention to the aspirations of their members. Lack of member participation in decision-making reduces a sense of belonging and increases the risk of splitting. To address this, national regulations may require parties to implement democratic mechanisms such as primaries, leadership rotation, and member participation in the drafting of platforms. The law could also prohibit the financing of internal campaigns by non-transparent donors, thereby reducing the influence of the "godfathers." This effort must be accompanied by political education to members so that they understand their rights and responsibilities.

³² P. Wilkinson, *10 Prinsip Anti Korupsi Badan Usaha Milik Negara* (2017), <https://ti.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/10-Prinsip-Antikorupsi-BUMN.pdf>.

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ A. U. Usuanlele and A. S. Ajisebiyawo, "Internal Democracy among Political Parties and the Quest for Democratic Deepening in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of APC and PDP," *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* (2025): 574–586.

³⁶ *ibid*

Lack of Political Education and Leadership

When political leaders do not have adequate support and training, they risk failing to meet the expectations of the people. In fact, every political decision has a wide impact on people's lives. Unfortunately, in many cases, the roles and capacities of political leaders are often not clearly defined or supported by strong institutional systems. Without sufficient attention, without ongoing training programs, and without research based on local needs, leaders who actually have passion and goodwill can get lost in the complexity of practical politics³⁷.

This phenomenon shows that political education and leadership training are not complementary, but rather an important foundation for the birth of ethical, reflective, and effective leaders. Political education allows prospective leaders to understand democratic values, citizens' rights, public policy mechanisms, and ideological challenges in exercising power. Meanwhile, leadership training strengthens practical skills-such as political communication, data-driven decision-making, and conflict management-all of which are urgently needed in government practice.

Without investment in these aspects, political parties can easily be taken over by demagogic figures who take advantage of the ignorance of members and the lack of critical culture within the party. As a result, the party is no longer an institution for the regeneration of public leaders, but merely a short-term electoral vehicle. In this context, political education must be designed not only for party elites, but also for grassroots, including women, youth, disability groups, and indigenous communities-so that democracy is not only procedurally inclusive, but also substantive in its leadership qualities. Without a commitment to sustainable political education, democracy risks being dominated by empty rhetoric, not by visionary leaders who are able to answer the needs of the people.

Reforms and Recommendations to Strengthen the Role of Political Parties. Improving Financial Transparency and Accountability

Financial reform is a priority step in restoring public trust and reducing corruption. The government should require parties to publish funding sources, campaign spending, and financial relationships with donors. As per the OGP's recommendation, party financial data should be integrated with other public databases, such as government contracts, lobbyist lists, and registered companies

³⁷ A. Wulandari and H. Mulyanto, *Kepemimpinan* (Bekasi: PT Kimshafi Alung Cipta, 2024).

to uncover possible conflicts of interest³⁸. This transparency increases public trust, reduces the influence of large donors, and supports underrepresented groups.

In addition to reporting, the party needs to implement donation limits and a ban on receiving funds from companies involved in government contracts. Independent audits and public access to party financial statements should be mandatory. Parliament should periodically review political funding laws to close any new loopholes that may arise, such as political loans or anonymous donations through foreign entities³⁹. This assertiveness will reduce negative perceptions and encourage parties to fund their activities through member support and small donations.

Strengthening Internal Democracy

To overcome elitism and patronage, the party must carry out internal reforms that increase member participation. As for things that can be done, such as:

1. Democratic internal elections: The party must conduct transparent primaries to elect legislative leaders and candidates. The process must be overseen by an internal election commission and provide equal opportunities for all candidates without financial discrimination;
2. Term limits: Party leadership should be limited in terms of term to prevent concentration of power. Leadership rotation encourages the renewal of ideas and allows new generations to rise up;
3. Member engagement: Members should be involved in the preparation of the party platform, selection of priority issues, and performance evaluation. This engagement can be done through party conventions, online consultations, and thematic committees;
4. Internal financial regulation: To prevent godfatherism, parties must implement internal campaign spending ceilings, prohibit the use of money to buy votes, and limit internal donors⁴⁰. The internal audit commission can oversee expenditures and sanction violations.

³⁸ OGP (Open Government Partnership), "Political Finance," 2023, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/anti-corruption-political-finance/>

³⁹ Y. Hamada and K. Agrawal, *Combatting Corruption in Political Finance: Global Trends, Challenges and Solutions* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2025).

⁴⁰ A. U. Usuanlele and A. S. Ajisebiyawo, "Internal Democracy among Political Parties and the Quest for Democratic Deepening in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of APC and PDP," *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* (2025): 574–586.

Government regulations can strengthen these reforms by setting minimum standards for internal democracy, as well as providing financial incentives or media access for parties that adhere to those standards. Training for members on the value of internal democracy is important for these reforms to be accepted by the party base.

Encouraging Inclusive Participation and Engagement of the Younger Generation

The resilience of democracy depends on inclusivity for groups that have been marginalized. To achieve this, the party can implement the following strategies:

1. Political education programs: Organize workshops and training for youth, women, and minorities to help them understand the political process and their rights. Programs that provide multi-partisan leadership training can be models for local programs;
2. Building youth and women's wings: An internal structure that provides space for youth and women to lead party programs, be involved in policy formulation, and sit in decision-making structures. The NDI report highlights the importance of building internal structures that enable youth to play meaningful roles;⁴¹
3. Affirmative policy: Implement quotas or representation targets for women, youth, and minorities in legislative candidacy. This system forces parties to seek candidates from these groups and provide logistical support for them;
4. Inclusive digital and offline platforms: Using technology to reach youth through social media, online discussions, and online consultations. The party must provide a safe offline space for marginalized groups to discuss and organize; and
5. Collaboration with civil society organizations: Working with advocacy groups to understand the needs of youth and minorities. This partnership enriches the party's program and makes it easier for the public to accept policies.

This strategy is in line with the principle Connect, Build, Serve, Guide of the NDI, which emphasizes the need for the party to meet the youth where they are, build structures that include them, serve their interests in policy platforms, and guide their political careers⁴². By implementing the strategy, the party is not only expanding its support base but also preparing a pluralist and responsive

⁴¹ National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Principles and Practices of Youth Engagement for Political Parties* (Washington, DC: The National Democratic Institute, 2023).

⁴² *ibid*

generation of future leaders.

Building Dialogue and Reducing Polarization

To reduce polarization, parties need to proactively create spaces for dialogue and collaboration. Strategies that can be implemented include:

1. Cross-party forums: Organize public dialogues and debates involving various parties at the local and national levels. This dialogue allows parties to understand each other's perspectives, identify common points and design policies together;
2. Joint training programs: Parties can develop leadership training involving participants from various parties from different spectrums. The training builds cross-party networks and reduces stereotypes;
3. Media and communication: The party should work closely with the media to promote a discourse that respects diversity and rejects hate speech. Fact-checking and media literacy should be encouraged to counter disinformation that can exacerbate polarization; and
4. The role of religious and customary organizations: In a society that is bound by religious values or traditions, religious and traditional leaders can be invited to work together to facilitate dialogue between party supporters. They can help prevent violence and promote reconciliation.

These initiatives will help create a political culture that respects differences and respects the opposition. When parties engage in dialogue, they show a commitment to peaceful solutions and reduce polarizing rhetoric.

Investing in Leadership and Political Education

Political parties should pay attention to the capacity development of their members and leaders. Intensive training can help a new generation of leaders understand democratic ethics, multilateral, technology, citizen engagement, and cross-difference leadership. Party involvement in programs like this is important to build ethical, competent, and visionary leaders.

Parties can invest in internal programs, such as: (1) seminars on the constitution and law, (2) workshops on public communication and conflict management, (3) ethical campaign training, and (4) mentoring from senior politicians. Collaboration with political education organizations and universities can improve the quality of training. As a result, the party will produce cadres who are ready to face complex challenges and reject corrupt practices or populism.

Integration with Institutional Reform

All of the above efforts must be integrated with broader institutional reforms.

The government should strengthen the judiciary, independent electoral commissions, and anti-corruption bodies to ensure that political parties operate within a fair legal framework. The application of clear rules of the game, consistent law enforcement, and protection of civil rights will create an environment where parties can focus on the competition of ideas rather than violence or manipulation.

In electoral systems, reforms such as mixed proportionality, independent redistricting, or an open list system can increase representation and motivate parties to be more inclusive. In addition, regular election scheduling, election supervision by domestic and international institutions, and settlement of election disputes through courts or mediation are also important. Without systemic reforms, internal party efforts may not be enough to prevent conflict.

Discussion: Bringing Findings Together and Drawing Lessons

This analysis shows that political parties have the potential to be architects of peace and pillars of democratic resilience. On the one hand, parties can mediate conflicts, design reconciliation policies, and encourage inclusive participation. Kenya's case study shows that parties can suppress violence through power-sharing and reform agendas⁴³. Zimbabwe's experience illustrates how power-sharing agreements can dampen long-standing rivalries, even if they require close oversight to ensure reforms work. A party committed to pluralism, dialogue, and non-violence strengthens the resilience of democracy⁴⁴. In addition, the party can mobilize the younger generation, women, and marginalized groups through inclusive strategies as advocated by the NDI⁴⁵.

On the other hand, serious challenges hinder the positive role of the party. Deep polarization makes politics a zero-sum contest, eroding legitimacy and hampering compromise⁴⁶. Corruption and non-transparent political financing lower public trust⁴⁷. Weak internal democracy hinders leadership regeneration and

⁴³ Eminent African Personalities, *Back from the Brink: The 2008 Mediation Process and Reforms in Kenya* (Africa: The African Union Commission, 2013).

⁴⁴ A. Croissant and L. Lott, *Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century: Search for an Analytical Framework and Explorative Analysis* (Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, 2024).

⁴⁵ National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Principles and Practices of Youth Engagement for Political Parties* (Washington, DC: The National Democratic Institute, 2023).

⁴⁶ C. George, "How to Fight Polarization," *Journal of Democracy* (online), August 2025, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-to-fight-polarization/>

⁴⁷ Y. Hamada and K. Agrawal, *Combating Corruption in Political Finance: Global Trends, Challenges and Solutions* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2025).

leaves the party vulnerable to patronage⁴⁸. The lack of political education makes many leaders unprepared for complex demands. Without comprehensive reforms, the party can become a source of instability rather than a source of stability.

An important lesson from this analysis is the need for a link between internal party reform and institutional reform. Financial and accountability reforms increase public trust, but must be complemented by election regulation and independent oversight. Internal democracy strengthens representation, but it must be underpinned by a fair electoral system that encourages parties to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds. Education and training programs produce quality leaders, but they must be accompanied by opportunities for them to compete in elections. The integration of these reforms will create an environment in which the party can promote democratic reconciliation and resilience.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that political parties are not only electoral vehicles but also potentially decisive institutions for conflict management and democratic resilience. Using a conceptual synthesis of democratization, peacebuilding, and institutional stability, it identified three party functions that are especially consequential in crisis contexts: (1) mediation that channels disputes into negotiation and power-sharing rather than violence, (2) reconciliation-oriented policy design that embeds fair rules after crisis (including constitutional and electoral reforms), and (3) inclusive participation that widens representation and reduces incentives for extra-institutional mobilization. The experiences of Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election crisis and Zimbabwe's 2008 Global Political Agreement show that when parties accept compromise under credible mediation, they can help halt violence and create openings, however imperfect for institutional repair and longer-term reforms.

At the same time, parties often undermine these roles through extreme polarization, corruption and opaque political finance, elite capture that weakens internal democracy, and insufficient political education that leaves leaders and supporters vulnerable to demagoguery. Strengthening parties as agents of peace therefore requires reforms that align incentives with pluralism and accountability: transparent disclosure and independent auditing of party finance, enforceable

⁴⁸ A. U. Usuanlele and A. S. Ajisebiyawo, "Internal Democracy among Political Parties and the Quest for Democratic Deepening in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of APC and PDP," *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* (2025): 574–586.

internal rules for candidate selection and leadership rotation that broaden member participation, and structured inclusion of youth, women, and marginalized groups through recruitment pipelines and political education programs. Finally, institutionalized cross-party dialogue and joint training can reduce zero-sum polarization and normalize negotiated solutions. When such reforms are pursued alongside broader rule-of-law safeguards, political parties are more likely to evolve from sources of division into architects of sustainable peace and long-term democratic stability.

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