

**POLITICAL DEFECTION AND THE EMERGING RISK OF A ONE-PARTY
DOMINANCE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTI PARTY
DEMOCRACY (2023-2026)**

BY

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**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY, ENUGU STATE**

JULY, 2026.

TITLE PAGE

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**A PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, GODFREY OKOYE
UNIVERSITY, ENUGU STATE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.Sc.), DEGREE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

SUPERVISOR: DR. AMADI C. O.

JULY, 2026.

DECLARATION

I, **Obiallor PraiseGod**, a bona fide student in the department of Political Science under the faculty of management and social sciences in Godfrey Okoye University. I hereby declare

that “**Political Defection and the Emerging Risk of a One-Party Dominance in Nigeria: Implications for Multi-Party Democracy (2023-2026)**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Political Science is my original work and has not been submitted either in part or full for any other degree or diploma either in this or any other tertiary institution.

.....
Obiallor PraiseGod
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.....
Date

APPROVAL

This project has been examined and approved by the Department of Political Science, Godfrey Okoye University for the award of Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.) in Political Science.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty for His protection in my academic life

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Political Defection and the Emerging Risk of a One-Party Dominance in Nigeria: Implications for Multi-Party Democracy (2023–2026). The study sought to examine the factors driving political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026, assess the impact of mass political defections on the emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria, and evaluate the implications of mass political defections for multi-party democracy in Nigeria. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a qualitative research design and employed thematic analysis as the method of data analysis. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including official government publications, National Assembly reports, newspaper reports, policy documents, and publications from reputable domestic and international organisations. The study was anchored on Institutional Theory. Findings revealed that mass political defections to the APC were driven by weak ideological commitment, political survival instincts, internal party crises, patronage politics, and legal loopholes in Nigeria's constitutional framework. The study also found that these defections significantly weakened opposition parties, concentrated political power within the APC, and undermined electoral competitiveness, thereby accelerating the risk of one-party dominance. The study concluded that Nigeria's multi-party democracy is under serious threat as frequent defections erode democratic accountability, fuel voter apathy, and encourage authoritarian tendencies. The study recommended that government should strengthen legal frameworks regulating political defections, promote internal party democracy, and reduce the monetisation of politics to safeguard Nigeria's multi-party democratic system.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

As democracy has grown in popularity and gained widespread acceptance as a legitimate form of government, there has been a greater attempt to define it universally. In order to reflect global realities, scholars have continued to analyse the idea of democracy. Despite their efforts, there is currently no widely recognised definition of democracy. According to Okogbuo (2025), this might be explained by structural inadequacies, cultural, environmental, and sociological imperatives that are inherent in recipient countries and affect how democracy operates and is practiced. Conversely, defection may be viewed as a political bargaining tool. Consequently, moving from one party to another is known as party defection. Party defection happens in every political system, according to Ceron and Volpi (2022). It is one of the integral parts of the political process and is a global phenomenon. Party switching is rationalized by the understanding that it is more common during times when significant political events take place, such as changes in the partisan dominance of government agencies, changes in key economic indices, and times of warfare. The members experiencing ideological tension are more prone to switching parties.

In Africa, the occurrence of party switching seems to be caused by a series of rather usual features that are associated with the specificities of party politics in the region rather than being motivated ideologically. In most of the post-colonial republics, the parties arose and were active in the framework conditioned by such aspects as religious and ethnic interests and the economic power of the elites. According to Godwin and Leke (2024), politicians are mainly driven by such considerations as political survival, economic interests, elite influence, and lack of ideology. As a result, they seem to be inconsistent ideologically, very personality-driven, and based on ethnic support. A political party's ideology is crucial to its longevity. It

acts as a binding force by neutralising or lessening internal strife. According to Ulu and Okogbuo (2025), ideology is a very important part of politics because it can be used as a powerful tool for conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilisation, and legitimisation in addition to acting as a cognitive framework for viewing society as a whole and offering a prescriptive formula, or a guide to individual action and judgement.

In Nigeria, the rising rate of party defections is driven by intra-party conflicts. Major political parties, including the All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), are characterized by leadership struggles, factionalism, and disputes over party control. The political system is impacted by these crises, which occasionally lead to members switching to other parties. These parties have lost their ideological substance (Okocha 2020). Internal party democracy is essentially a prerequisite for resolving long-standing hostility among members and reviving these parties' fortunes. This would allow parties to choose competent and appealing candidates for elections (Diepreye & Oputa 2025). Internal party democracy would provide a real forum for party loyalists to resolve disputes and mediate disputes.

Defection is a common feature of multiparty democracy, but the unusually high levels of defection in Nigeria present a threat to the process of democratic consolidation, stability, and the potential dominance of one party (Nwanneka, 2019). Defections of party members have been quite common in Nigeria since the beginning of the 1950s. The defection of some NCNC members to the AG in 1951 was an important event that impacted the political atmosphere of that time (Edet, 2017). However, the nature and means of conducting defectors have recently changed; these events usually occur on the eve of or just after elections. For example, in December 2023, twenty-seven (27) members of the Rivers State House of Assembly defected from the PDP to the APC as part of a serious political crisis in the state due to the battle for party control and the distribution of state resources between the

incumbent governor and his former office holder. As a result of this massive defection, the Labour Party asked to declare the defections invalid as per the constitution (Arise News, 2024). The Federal High Court of Abuja, in September 2024, threw out the case on statute barred basis (Punch, 2024). Party politics in Nigeria is notorious for its unpredictability, which is evident from several cases of Senate defection. After a carefully thought-out discussion with the Senators, Senator Ifeanyi Ubah of Anambra South State defected from the Young Progressives Party (YPP) to the dominant APC in October 2023 (NASS, 2023). Similarly, Senator Ezenwa Francis Onyewuchi of Imo East also defected in 2022, stating his intention to defect to the "New Nigeria" agenda through merger with the Labour Party (NASS, 2022). These defections have led to a major shift in the political arena of the National Assembly, leading to increased majority of the APC (Ojo, 2023). Another instance of defection of the erstwhile PDP member and gubernatorial aspirant Yusuf Abba Kabir from the PDP to the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) was yet another incident that altered the political landscape (Audu, 2024; Nwanneka, 2019).

Defections lead to loss of faith in the democratic institutions and intensify political instability (Okocha, 2020). This problem is made worse by Nigerian political parties' lack of clear policy ideas and strong ideological convictions, since defections are often driven more by self-interest than by philosophical differences (Edet, 2017; Vanguard, 2023). Supporting the expansion of ideologically motivated political parties is also crucial in order to give voters a range of policy alternatives and lessen the incentives for political opportunism (NASS, 2022). This study examines the impact of major political defections to the APC and the increasing likelihood of one-party dominance on Nigeria's multi-party democracy (2023–2026).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Defection from one political party to another is a significant threat to democratic stability and administration in Nigeria. Increasing defection has led to poor political institutions,

contradictory policies, and disgruntled citizens. Defection by Nigerian politicians has generated concerns regarding the absence of political responsibility and ideology on their part since political parties need to be strong in order to promote democracy. In Nigeria, there are significant negative impacts of defection on the legitimacy of the electoral process. Defection by politicians who do so mainly out of self-interest rather than political ideology reduces the legitimacy of the democratic process. Moreover, through generating factionalism and internal strife, defection can pose a threat to governance structure due to political party crisis caused by it.

The other problem associated with defection is the issue of legal ambiguity related to it. Application of constitutional provision according to which MPs resign from office in case of defection unless they create dissension in their political party has been inconsistent. Interpretations of defection laws have been affected by political influences.

Nigeria's monetisation of politics has also made defections worse since politicians frequently join parties that offer more cash rewards. As a result, political allegiance has become a commodity and financial incentives are increasingly driving governance decisions rather than the general benefit. This issue is made worse by the absence of robust institutional safeguards against defections, which leaves Nigeria's democracy open to manipulation by the ruling class. In addition to examining potential legal and legislative measures to lessen the detrimental effects of defections, this study aims to analyse mass political defections to the APC, the growing threat of one-party dominance in Nigeria, and its consequences for multi-party democracy from 2023 to 2026.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the factors that drive mass political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026?

- ii. What is the impact of mass political defections on the emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the implications of mass political defections for multi-party democracy in Nigeria?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study is to examine mass political defections to the APC and the emerging risk of one party dominance in Nigeria and its implications for multi-party democracy (2023-2026) . The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the factors driving mass defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.
- ii. Assess the impact of mass defections on the emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria.

Evaluate the implications of mass political defections for multi-party democracy in Nigeria

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study's importance is examined from both a theoretical and practical standpoint.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This study adds to the amount of information already available on Nigerian party system institutionalisation, democratic consolidation, and political party defections. The study broadens theoretical discussions on multi-party democracy and political rivalry in emerging democracies by looking at large-scale political defections to the APC and the growing threat of one-party domination.

The study would also be helpful to academics and political analysts who are interested in Nigeria's democratic progress because it provides evidence-based insights into the reasons

behind and effects of political defections. The study offers suggestions that could lessen the negative consequences of defections and support Nigeria's multi-party democracy's viability.

1.5.2 Empirical Significance

The study will help political parties by providing insights on methods for enhancing ideological cohesion, internal democracy, and party discipline. the study is relevant as it offers an empirical knowledge to existing studies.

By supplying data that can bolster advocacy for democratic accountability and election integrity, the study will also benefit electoral bodies and civil society organisations.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The principal elements of focus in this study include political defections to the APC and the emerging threat of one party dominance system in Nigeria. During the period between 2023 to 2026, this study focuses on the causes of mass political defections to the APC, effects of mass political defections to the one-party dominance and the effects of mass political defections to the multi-party democracy in Nigeria.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations were encountered in this study which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The use of secondary sources of data, such as journals, newspapers, policy papers and governmental publications, constituted the most significant limitation. The ability of the researcher to gather primary data from political actors and other stakeholders in the mass political defections has been affected by this limitation.

Another limitation was the dynamic nature of political changes in Nigeria, particularly within the period of 2023 and 2026. Since political alliance and defection is an ongoing process, there is the possibility that new information will arise after this analysis has been completed.

Access to some of the official documents and decisions made within political parties posed another challenge to this analysis. There are political deliberations and the reasons for defection which are done in secrecy and do not reach the general public.

Despite these limitations, efforts have been made to ensure that credible and reliable sources were used to make the results more valid and credible.

1.8 Definition of Terms

To make sure there is clear understanding of this research, the following terms need to be defined:

Mass Political Defection: Mass political defection is largely influenced by the need to survive politically, have access to power or gain advantage.

Dominance of a Political Party: Political competition is made difficult if there is always a dominant political party that possesses a lot of power within the government bodies.

Multiparty democracy: A political structure that involves many political parties competing for control of government through free and fair elections is called multiparty democracy.

Political Party: A well-organised group of individuals that have same political ideologies and objectives to acquire power in politics through elections is called a political party.

Democratic consolidation: Democratic consolidation refers to the process in which the political structures, practices, and ideas become stable and institutionalized.

Political Defection: A situation where a politician moves from one political party to another on certain grounds, like political, ideological or tactical, is called political defection.

APC (All Progressives Congress): A few important opposition groups combined to form APC (All Progressives Congress) in 2013 in Nigeria.

Election Competition: Elections involving competition among political parties and candidates contesting for political positions.

Opposition Parties: Political parties that are not ruling, but seek to counter the prevailing political party using democracy.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Political Defection: Meaning and Context

Political defection, otherwise referred to as decamping, party flipping, party switching, party hopping, cross-carpeting, canoe-jumping or floor crossing, refers to the activity involving politicians who leave the political parties under which they contested to join other parties (Olisah & Nwokah, 2020). While political defection may be allowed legally at times, it is usually considered a threat to political accountability and democracy (Nwankwo, 2021). According to Amadu (2019, p. 56), political defection can be described as "a shift of active political support or membership either by politicians, ordinary party members or voters from one political party to another in search of political power, public office or material gain without regard to political ideologies or principles."

The major characteristics of political defection, according to Amadu (2019, p. 57) are "change of political allegiance" and "effects of such a change." This means that for political defection to occur, there must be a change of political allegiance from one political party to another and its effect on the political parties concerned. Voting against the party line by parliamentarians, defections by the electorate and by members of the party are all encompassed in the term political defection. Furthermore, since mergers and alliances involve a switch in political affiliation to another political party, this falls under the term political defection.

Political defection is seen as an act of political independence in democratic systems of governance. In fact, defection has grown from being a sign of changing political ideologies to become a tactic for political survival in a country like Nigeria, where elite bargaining is the nature of politics as opposed to ideology (Oni & Joshua, 2020). While the Nigerian constitution recognizes multiparty democracy, it severely restricts defection.

For one to leave a particular political party without being stripped off his or her seat, he or she must do so under Section 68(1)(g) of the Constitution of Nigeria (1999), which requires that the defector should be leaving the previous political party after a split or merger (Ojo, 2022). Defection has continued to happen because of lack of strict institutional control, where legislators and governors defect into the major political party for some political gains or even security reasons.

For instance, the power struggle between the governor and his immediate past governor in Rivers State resulted in the defection of twenty seven people of the Rivers State House of Assembly from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in December 2023 (Arise News, 2024). In April 2024, the defection of the former Imo state governor, Emeka Ihedioha, from the PDP became yet another clear example.

Perils of Democratic Consolidation and One-Party Dominance Democratic consolidation is essential if democratic governance is to be legitimate and sustainable in the long run. This requires promotion of democratic ideals, adherence to laws, and building robust institutions that will facilitate free, fair, and competitive electoral processes. In a politically dynamic situation arising from a consolidated democracy, opposition parties are able to challenge incumbent governments, demand accountability, and offer citizens viable options (Adebanjo, 2022; Ojo, 2022).

According to Orji-Obasi (2023), while there are legal sanctions for defectors to the legislature, holders of executive offices are not subject to the same sanctions, making defection easy and

profitable. The law on defection does not penalize defection since defection is a loophole in both politics and law. Party defection and political defection by voters are the two broad types of political defection. Voters engage in political defection. Party defection can take many different forms, such as principal or subsidiary, formal or informal. When a legally registered member of a political party formally resigns from the party, usually by submitting a resignation letter to the appropriate authorities, this is known as a formal party defection. For example, the 11 senators who switched from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013 wrote the following in their letter of defection to Senate President David Mark: "We the undersigned senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria elected under the People's Democratic Party (PDP) wish to notify you that we have severally and jointly joined the All Progressives Congress (APC)..." (Daily Post Editorial, 2014). In contrast, an informal party defection occurs when a defector does not formally leave his party. He switches his political allegiance to another political party while staying in the party and even claiming to be a legitimate member.

To put it another way, a hostile party member who switches his political allegiance to another party is known as an informal party defector. According to Terwase, Yerima, Abdul-Talib, and Ibrahim (2016), he can attempt to damage his party for the benefit of another political party by causing divisions, disputes, and misunderstandings inside it. He might give members of another political party crucial information about his party. He might even run an anti-party campaign or cast an anti-party ballot in an election. Voting against party directions by members of a legislative body, such as a national assembly or parliament, is a good example of an informal party defection. Between 2015 and 2019, former Senate President Bukola Saraki's activities in the Senate, which were consistently in direct contravention to his party's (APC) guidelines, constituted an unofficial party defection. Similarly, the behaviour of the so-called "5G governors" of the PDP—Samuel Ortom of Benue State, Nyesom Wike of

Rivers State, Okezie Ikpeazu of Abia State, Seyi Makinde of Oyo State, and Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi of Enugu State—who act against the party's interests after the 2023 Presidential Primaries may also be considered an unofficial party defection. An unofficial party defection occurred in 2013 when a group of PDP party leaders, known as the "Abubakar Kawu Baraje-led new-PDP," resigned their political allegiance from the Bamanga Tukur-led National Working Committee leadership (Ibrahim 2023).

One could refer to a politician's political defection as an elite party defection. There are two types of elite party defections: major and small. A political actor's defection that is significant enough to trigger or result in other minor or subsidiary defections within or outside of his political party is known as a primary elite party defection. Therefore, a lot of smaller party defections may follow a significant defection by a politician or group of politicians. While the subsequent lesser series of defections may be referred to as minor or subsidiary party defections, the primary defection may be referred to as a principal elite party defection. For example, a key party defection occurred in 2013 when five Nigerian governors defected from the PDP to the APC. The defections of the five governors and the 11 senators and 37 members of the National Assembly that either preceded or followed them were minor or subsidiary party defections.

Former Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso's defection from the PDP to the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) in 2022 was a major elite party defection; however, the defections of five MPs elected on the platform of the ruling APC on May 13, 2022, were subsidiary party defections.

Nine PDP-elected members of the Kano State House of Assembly defected to the NNPP earlier in 2022; these defections were also subsidiary party defections that stemmed from Kwankwaso's primary elite party defection. Subsidiary defections may occasionally coincide with a primary elite party defection. Some Nigerian state governors, such as Saminu Turaki

of Jigawa State, Isa Yuguda Yuguda of Bauch State, Samuel Ortom of Benue State, and Bello Matawalle of Zamfara State, defected to other political parties in 2006, 2007, 2018, and 2019. While the defections by parliamentarians, government officials, and party operatives were subsidiary party defections, these good defections by the governors were also primary elite party defections (Ibrahim 2023).

A defector's political support base, which could be either elite or voter, or even both, is a major factor in an elite party defection. When several well-known politicians from a specific political or electoral constituency endorse a certain person or party, this is known as an elite political support base. Conversely, a voter political support base is the political backing that members of a political or electoral district provide to a candidate or political party. A politician may benefit from both voter and elite backing inside his constituency. Therefore, a defector's base of political support serves as the basis for his defection. "Well, I want to consult with my supporters first before reaching a decision for defection; or I consulted with my supporters before decamping" is a common statement made by a Nigerian politician who is suspected of planning to defect to another political party. He is alluding to his political base of supporters. The political support that defector politicians receive from their political and electoral districts determines whether a major elite party defection can lead to a number of smaller defections or have some impact on the democratic system.

Voter political defection is the term used to describe a portion of voters in an electoral constituency switching from one political party to another. Elite defections are typically followed by voter political defections. In other words, in a given electoral constituency, voters frequently support a political party that is dominated by the big class.

This occurs as a result of long-term, reciprocal interactions between voters and the political elite, such as the elite's monitoring and coordination of votes in a certain constituency. A

portion of voters may vote for the new party or defect with the elite when they join another political party.

Nonetheless, a sizable portion of voters in a given electoral constituency could decline to support or vote for the main elite. This could be referred to as a political desertion by hostile voters. Voters from a specific constituency frequently defect to support a presidential candidate from a different political party after supporting the ruling party in a governorship race.

In the 2015 General Elections, for example, a large number of people cast ballots for the PDP candidates for governorship in their respective states, but many later defected to support General Muhammadu Buhari, the APC's presidential candidate (Ibrahim 2023).

Table 1, which highlights the major political players involved, their new and old political affiliations, the reasons given for their defections, and pertinent sources, provides a better understanding of this trend by presenting a selection of defection occurrences in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.

Table 1: Defection Events in Nigeria (2023–2026)

Date / Period	Legislator(s) / Officials / Governors	From → To (Parties)	Reason(s) Cited	Source
April 2025	Sheriff Oborevwo (Delta State Governor) and PDP structure	PDP → APC	Internal party crisis and alignment with federal government	ICIR Nigeria (2025); The Papers Nigeria (2025)
June 2025	Umo Eno (Akwa Ibom State Governor)	PDP → APC	Political consultations and alignment with federal government	BusinessDay (2025)
October 2025	Peter Mbah (Enugu State Governor)	PDP → APC	Development collaboration and political alignment	Punch (2025)
October 2025	Douye Diri (Bayelsa State Governor)	PDP → APC	Decline of PDP and political realignment	The Papers Nigeria (2025)
October 30, 2025	Five House of Representatives Members (Enugu State)	PDP → APC	Internal party crisis and alignment with ruling party	Nigeria Stories (2025)
December 2025	Siminalayi Fubara (Rivers State Governor)	PDP → APC	Political cooperation with federal government	The Papers Nigeria (2025)
May 2025	Three Senators from Kebbi State (Adamu Aliero, Yahaya Abdullahi, Garba Maidoki)	PDP → APC	Political realignment and support for ruling party	ICIR Nigeria (2025)
March 2026	Nine Senators including Aminu Tambuwal, Ireti Kingibe, Enyinnaya Abaribe	PDP/LP/ APGA → ADC	Formation of new opposition coalition	Channels TV (2026)

Source: Compiled by the researcher from BusinessDay (2025), ICIR (2025), Premium Times (2025), The Punch (2025), TheCable (2025), Channels Television (2026), and The Guardian (2025).

Given the various ways that political analysts around the world have conceptualised party defection, this study operationalised party defection as an intentional act by elected and non-elected public office holders, party members, or party stalwarts to leave their respective political party or their support for a new party (at will), regardless of the reason or purpose of their action for personal gain.

2.1.2 Causes of Political Party Defection

Numerous reasons have been found by scholars to be responsible for political defections in Nigeria. The desire for appointment and power is the main cause of defections. Politicians frequently switch to parties that provide greater chances of winning elections or gaining access to positions of authority. Another reason for political desertion is a lack of ideology. Nigerian political parties frequently lack strong ideological underpinnings (Ikechukwu, 2015). As a result, party membership is viewed as a means of achieving individual success rather than communal government, and allegiance to party objectives is weak. Due to poorly run party primaries, the imposition of candidates, and a lack of openness in decision-making procedures, the absence of internal democracy also contributes to party defection (Mbah, 2011). Defection to ruling parties is encouraged by fear of prosecution since it is frequently driven by a desire to avoid being charged with corruption or other wrongdoing (Daily Trust, 2023). Similar to this, patronage politics and godfatherism have a big impact on party structures and frequently cause disgruntled godsons to leave (Mustapha & Yakaka, 2019). Additionally, defections to stronger parties are encouraged by opposition parties' inability to rally support and challenge incumbents.

2.1.3 Effects of mass political defections

1. Decline in electoral competition

Defections have negative effects on the election process. Political patronage, control of the media, and increased availability of state resources give the dominating political party an unfair advantage. It becomes difficult for the opposition parties to mobilize people and provide viable alternative when the best people of the opposition political parties defect (Audu, Aam, & Gana, 2022).

This denies voters any chance of choice and makes it impossible to establish a competitive multiparty system.

2. Decline in accountability

The absence of accountability is another effect that comes with one-party domination because of the reduced strength of the checks and balances system. The political party in control will not hesitate to be corrupt and authoritarian without the opposition to question its policies and actions (Dode, 2018).

3. Disillusionment and Voter Apathy

Leaders who regularly switch parties for self-serving rather than moral motives lose the trust of the people. Because many Nigerians think the political elite is self-serving and opportunistic, there is a widespread lack of interest in elections and a fall in voter turnout (Audu *et al.*, 2022). Voter turnout fell sharply in the 2023 general elections compared to previous elections, demonstrating this tendency (INEC, 2023).

4. State Resource Monopolisation

Public resources are typically monopolised for the benefit of the ruling party and its supporters under a one-party system. This strategy solidifies the influence of the ruling party by marginalising opposition parties and impeding their ability to run effective campaigns (Ojo, 2022). Such monopolisation leads to political inequality and undermines democracy.

5. A higher chance of authoritarianism

With less opposition, the ruling party might be more likely to restrict civil society, restrict press freedom, and rig elections in order to further solidify its hold on power. In several African countries, such as Zimbabwe and Uganda, where ruling parties have maintained power for decades by coercion and election fraud, prolonged one-party domination has historically resulted in democratic reversals (Nwankwo, 2021).

2.1.4 Concept of One Party Dominance

One-party dominance is regarded as an abnormality, an aberration, and a departure from the norm because it is a rare achievement that has only been accomplished by a small number of political parties in the last century. One-party dominance is a topic of discussion, yet there is general agreement on what it means. One party surpassing all others in multiple consecutive elections is what defines it. According to Ostroverkhov (2017), a dominant-party system, also known as a one-party dominating system, is a political phenomenon in which one political party consistently controls election outcomes over opposing parties or groupings. A dominant party, also known as a predominant or hegemonic party, is any ruling party that holds onto power for more than one term in a row. Because of how long they had been in power, several dominating parties were referred to as the natural governing party. Chin (2022).

In contrast to states under a one-party system, which are intricately structured around a particular party, dominant parties and their dominance of a state arise from one-sided electoral and party constellations within a multi-party system (especially under presidential systems of governance). The phrase "de facto one-party state" is occasionally used to characterise dominant-party systems that, in contrast to one-party systems, permit (at least ostensibly) democratic multiparty elections; however, the balance of political power or current practices effectively prevent the opposition from winning power, making them resemble one-party states. The political dynamics of alternative major multi-party

constellations, such as consociationalism, grand coalitions, and two-party systems, which are defined and maintained by limited or balanced rivalry and cooperation, are different from those of dominant-party systems.

Instead of using repression, dominant-party governments use institutional mechanisms to sway the populace (Frantz, 2018). Through land reform, poverty alleviation, public health, housing, education, and job initiatives, coercive distribution can exert influence over citizens and economic elites. Furthermore, according to Hassan, Mattingly, and Nugent (2022), they give private goods to the winning coalition—those who are essential to its rule—in order to maintain their position of authority (2020, Newton). Civil war is also avoided by providing private goods to the victorious coalition. Additionally, they teach and enforce conformity through the educational system. Authoritarian governments can control teachers by hiring, educating, and disciplining them in order to achieve their goal of encouraging youth conformity (Weigle & Brandt 2022). Elections are another way they maintain power. Holding elections provides individuals a sense of control and a political voice, even though they wouldn't be fair. By approving and gaining the support—especially financial support—of other governments that are similar to their own, they can likewise increase power within their own state through international collaboration (Hong & Wong, 2020; von Soest, 2015).

2.1.5 Meaning of Multi-Party Democracy (System)

The majority of individuals concur that multi-party political systems are the most reliable for promoting, developing, and institutionalising democracy. The multi-party concept is the cornerstone of modern liberal democracy. Its primary advantage is that it permits divergent perspectives on how social life ought to be organised to coexist in modern capitalist society without suppressing relatively weaker constituents (Aliyu, Ibrahim & Yusuf 2021). It makes "a hundred flowers to bloom and a hundred schools of thought to contend" feasible. It is the

pinnacle of political pluralism in modern bourgeois society. Before being authorised by the government, it allows policy suggestions to compete for public support.

It takes the shape of proportional representational formulas or direct majoritarian "winner-take-all" arrangements. African governing factions have typically favoured this latter type. Despite its obvious shortcomings, the multi-party system has more advantages overall than any other system in use today. When paired with the institution of the rule of law, it provides a typically effective basis for monitoring respect for human rights. It is seen as a useful instrument for political growth and national integration through political parties. A multi-party system is one in which the government is controlled by one or more parties (Aliyu 2018).

According to Mato and Jacob (2011), a multi-party system is "a network of relationships through which many political parties interact and influence the political process." Political interests and past experiences must be paramount for a multi-party system to be sustainable. The true goal of a multi-party system in a pluralistic and developing society is national integration. Sadly, the system's mechanism for promoting political stability and development has repeatedly failed, especially in Nigeria, due to blatant signs of a lack of shared values and ideologies.

2.2 Review of Theme of Research Questions

2.2.1 Factors Driving Mass Political Defections to the APC in Nigeria.

Defection politics in Nigeria are influenced by a number of deeply rooted institutional, cultural, and structural factors. These factors not only show how unpredictable the country's political climate is, but they also highlight more significant issues that jeopardise democratic consolidation and political stability.

1. A lacklustre commitment to ideology

Nigerian political parties are different from those in developed democracies in that they frequently lack distinctive ideologies (Oni & Joshua, 2020; Omodia & Udo, 2022). Rather from being based on particular policy concepts or ideological viewpoints, Nigerian parties function as massive coalitions of convenience aimed at gaining political power and controlling state resources. Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to civilian rule, the majority of political parties have continuously lacked clear manifestos or policy objectives. This weakness makes it easy for people to switch parties for opportunistic reasons because politicians join parties for political reasons rather than because they share similar beliefs. Politicians frequently switch parties without significantly altering their political views or positions on issues, undermining the public's trust in the democratic system.

2. Career Advancement and Political Survival

Defections are mostly caused by personal ambitions and the desire to remain in politics, particularly in a highly competitive political environment where power struggles are common. Defection is a useful strategy for politicians to protect their political careers and gain access to networks of sponsors.

To improve their chances of winning reelection, obtaining political office, or avoiding punishment, politicians often switch to the ruling party. For instance, following the APC's 2015 victory, a large number of opposition lawmakers joined the ruling party in order to benefit from the new power structure (Edet, 2017; Yusuf & Eze, 2023). Some politicians run away to avoid legal issues or being investigated for misconduct. Ajayi (2021) asserts that political allegiance can alter the outcome of legal processes, therefore associating with the winning party frequently provides security.

3. Leadership Crises and Internal Party Conflicts

Factionalism and leadership disputes inside political parties are also frequent causes of defections. Conflicts over leadership responsibilities, candidate selections, and resource

distribution are common since many Nigerian parties lack internal democracy (Ojo, 2022). One such is the PDP. Due to unresolved leadership disputes, the party has experienced numerous waves of defections. Disagreements over the party's zoning policy and presidential candidate caused a number of prominent MPs to defect to rival parties in 2022. Most parties lack effective conflict resolution procedures, which makes it challenging to settle internal conflicts and pushes irate members to look for other solutions.

. Strategic Positioning and Electoral Calculations

When elections are approaching, politicians usually defect to parties they believe have a better chance of winning. The goals of this intentional action are to stay relevant and improve electoral opportunities.

Case Studies: Before the 2019 national elections, a number of MPs left the APC and PDP in search of better environments. In order to get parliamentary and gubernatorial tickets, politicians switched parties during the 2023 elections, resulting in significant defections (Umar & Ibrahim, 2023). Because politicians want to be associated with the leading party because they think it has a better chance of winning and controlling resources, the electoral bandwagon effect encourages defections.

5. Lack of Strict Institutional and Legal Limitations

Nigeria's legal system penalises desertion lightly, especially for executive positions like governors. The 1999 Constitution's Section 68(1)(g) prohibits MPs from defecting until there is a rift within their party, however executives are exempt from this rule, which is rarely followed (Audu *et al.*, 2022).

6. Resource Control and Patronage Politics

Patronage politics is typically the cause of defections. Nigerian politicians frequently desert in order to get or maintain control over state resources, which are usually associated with political power (Omodia, 2022; Uche & Okeke, 2022).

7. Regional and Ethno-Religious Aspects

Ethnic, religious, and regional ties have a significant impact on Nigeria's political environment. These worries frequently lead to defections when politicians wish to join parties that better promote their regional or ethnic interests (Abubakar, 2023).

8. Politics' Monetisation

Defections are influenced by the monetisation of politics in Nigeria, where elections are characterised by high levels of financial inducement and vote-buying. To support their campaigns and maintain political power, politicians switch to parties with greater financial resources (Ajayi, 2021).

2.2.2 Effects of Mass Political Defection on the Rise of One-Party Domination in Nigeria

The development of democracy in Nigeria is greatly influenced by mass political defection and at the same time helps foster one-party domination. Some of the main concerns include:

- i. **Worsening of Political Opposition Organizations and Political Institutions:** Through weakening of organizational capacity and weakening of membership, mass political defections help to weaken political opposition organizations and political institutions. Political defection of major political figures to the dominant political party leads to disorganization of opposition political parties making them ineffective while enhancing the dominant political party leading to likelihood of one-party domination. Eventually, political parties will no longer be institutions of democracy but will be used as a platform of contesting (Karimi, 2014).
- ii. **Political Power is Centralized:** Political power may centralize within the single dominant political party due to political defections. This dominant political party manages the legislative and executive branch as many politicians defect to the political party to gain

access to state resources and political survival. In Nigeria, centralization of political power fosters one-party domination and reduces political competition.

iii. Erosion of Ideological Commitment: Nigerian political parties frequently lack distinct ideological underpinnings, which makes it simpler for politicians to leave without disagreeing on policy. Mass defections to the ruling party are encouraged and party allegiance is weakened by this lack of ideological commitment. Nigerian political parties function mostly as coalitions of convenience, in contrast to developed democracies like the US and the UK, where political parties uphold ideological coherence (Awopeju, 2011, Chukwuma, 2018). One dominant political party gets consolidated as a result of this process.

iv. Decrease in Electoral competitiveness: By undermining opposition parties and bolstering the dominant party, mass political defections decrease electoral competitiveness. Opposition parties are less able to oppose the ruling party in elections when they lose important members. This raises the possibility of one-party dominance and produces an unfair political playing field.

v. Promotion of Political Apathy: Voter discontent and a decline in public confidence in the political system are frequently caused by political defections. Voters may stop participating in politics if they believe that politicians are self-serving and opportunistic. One-party rule is encouraged by this drop in voting turnout, which erodes opposition support and tangentially enhances the ruling party (Mohammed 1999).

2.2.3 Impact of Political Defections on Multi-Party Democracy in Nigeria

Some of the important impacts include the following:

1. Reduction in Democratic Checks and Balances and Effectiveness of the Opposition

The frequent nature of political defections greatly hinders the capability of opposition parties to act as formidable checks on the government. The government can maintain its power due to lower standards in the scrutiny of legislature. In case there is less opposition, voters have

limited options to choose from. This impacts democracy adversely and limits the options of alternatives (Oni & Joshua, 2020; Omodia, 2022).

2. Loss of faith of the citizens in democratic system and elections

If defection is not properly explained to the constituents, then this negatively impacts the trust of voters in the democratic process of governance. The public has lost trust in political system when politicians give preference to their political survival than party loyalty and political promises made during election (Audu *et al.*, 2022).

Voter turnout in past elections has decreased because many Nigerians no longer believe that their ballots can make a difference. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports that voter turnout in Nigeria has gradually declined, from 44% in 2015 to 29% in 2023 (INEC Report, 2024).

3. Promotion of One-Party Domination and Authoritarian Attitudes

Defections provide ruling parties a resounding majority, opening the door to autocratic actions. Long-term one-party dominance may lead to the erosion of democratic norms, the repression of dissent, and the manipulation of state institutions for the advantage of the ruling elite (Dode, 2018).

Historical examples from African countries like Zimbabwe and Uganda demonstrate how weak opposition may promote tyranny and obstruct the development of democracy. In Nigeria, one-party rule is becoming likely, particularly at the state level where defections have deliberately decreased the number of opposition parties (Nwankwo, 2021).

Defections may also result in rivalry among factions, internal conflict within political parties, and political crisis. Most of such conflicts end up becoming lengthy lawsuits that further destabilize the government and limit the proper implementation of policies (Ojo, 2020).

For instance, political rivalries and defection in state legislatures within Bayelsa State and Zamfara State have caused serious delays in budgeting and development (Umar & Ibrahim,

2023). At both the provincial and federal levels, this sort of instability will limit socioeconomic development.

4. Inducing Governance and Political Instability

Mass desertions have at times been accompanied by internal conflict within the political parties and even political instability. The conflict normally escalates into lengthy legal battles, thus making the situation unstable for the government to implement policies effectively (Ojo, 2020).

In Bayelsa and Zamfara States, political wrangling and mass desertion of state legislators led to huge delays in passing budgets and executing development plans (Umar & Ibrahim, 2023). At the provincial and national levels, such volatility affects socioeconomic development and service delivery.

5. Undermining Party Democracy Within

Defections are another sign of Nigeria's weak internal party democracy. Due to feelings of exclusion or unjust treatment during party primaries or decision-making procedures, a large number of MPs defect. Ajayi (2021) asserts that members turn to other parties in search of better opportunities due to opaque candidate selection procedures, the imposition of candidates, and the lack of inclusive party structures. MPs would have more faith in fair competition and open procedures within their parties if internal party democracy were strengthened, which would reduce the incentives for defection.

6. The Financial and Economic Impact of By-Elections

Defections could result in the designation of seats as vacant and the need for by-elections, which would put additional financial strain on Nigeria's electoral authority and taxpayers. By-elections for defective seats require funding that could be better used for civic education and modernising election infrastructure (INEC, 2024).

2.3 Theoretical Review

Several ideas have been produced by political scientists, political analysts, and pundits to explain the causes or reasons for party defection in Nigeria, according to an examination of the literature on the subject. Ideological deficit, internal party democracy deficit, and conflict theories are among the deficit theories. Political, instrumentalist, and post-colonial theories are examples of power-based theories.

2.3.1 Ideological Deficit Theory

Among those who support this view are Mbah (2011), and Mubita (2014). According to the notion, political parties' stated ideologies serve as both the compass that guides their activities, objectives, manifestos, and motivations as well as the glue that holds their members together. Therefore, when a political party's ideology is weak, nonexistent, or thin, political desertion occurs. In other words, the primary reason for political defections in Nigeria is the absence or lack of ideology among political parties. This idea is significant because it shows a lack of ideology as a major characteristic of the majority of political parties in Nigeria today and as a reason for political defections. The argument states that there were fewer party defections between 1960 and 1966 because the First Republic's political parties, such as the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU), the AG, and the NCNC, had distinct ideologies. Party defections were not more common since the Second Republic's political parties, such as the NPN, NPP, UPN, and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), were ideologically straight reincarnations of the First Republic's political parties. Since the military intervention ended the Third Republic, political defections were not anticipated.

However, everyone agrees that the Fourth Republic's political parties lack distinct political philosophies, which explains why party defections are so common. The hypothesis provides

historical and general insights on the causes of Nigerian party defection. But it doesn't describe how political defections happen, what they look like, or how they affect Nigeria's democratic system.

2.3.2 Internal Party Democracy-Deficit Theory

This argument merely connects Nigerian political parties' lack of internal democracy to political desertion. According to this theory, some party members may defect to another or other political parties where they expect internal party democracy to be upheld when party constitutional provisions are broken, party primaries are not free and fair, or some powerful party members control the party's operations. Additionally, the various forms of political defection, their relationships, and their particular impacts on the components of the nation's democratic system are not explained by this theory.

2.3.3 Conflict-Based Theory

According to this view, intra-party disputes or conflicts are the root cause of political defections because they create factions and divisions within the party, which leads some party members to become dissatisfied and even defect to other political parties where there is more harmony. Conflicts within the party may arise from competition for leadership roles or nominations. In certain instances, a mole inserted into the party by a rival political party may persist in causing disputes within the party to maintain its disarray and division.

Misunderstandings among the party's stakeholders may lead to intra-party disputes. General Muhammadu Buhari's 2007 defection from the now-defunct All People's Party (ANPP) to the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) after some of his party's leaders agreed to join the proposed Unity Government of former President Umaru Musa Yar'adua is a prime example of a political defection brought on by an intra-party conflict of interest.

Nevertheless, this view ignores the true reasons behind party desertion and instead focuses primarily on dissatisfaction and disputes, which are signs of power struggles within political

parties. The real causes of political defection are nominations for contests for political power and the struggle for control of a political party.

2.3.4 Political Power-Based Theory

The political power-based theory sees the elite's pursuit of political power and appointments as the ultimate force that destroys political parties and causes defections in Nigeria, in contrast to the ideological deficit theory, which sees ideology as the glue that holds or ties members of a political party together and prevents them from defecting and whose absence or lack produces party defections. However, it should be noted that the power-based hypothesis does not completely rule out political parties' lack of ideology as a reason for party defections; rather, it views the Nigerian elite's intense competition for power as the primary explanation. In actuality, political parties are merely tools for the fight for political power in Nigeria, at least in the Fourth Republic, rather than being established to further any ideological goal. Consequently, the pursuit of political power in the nation is intrinsically linked to political defections.

Due to military takeovers, Nigeria's First and Second Republics were extremely brief. Between the two periods, there were fewer elections. Therefore, it would be premature to attribute the lower number of political defections in the First and Second Republics solely to the prevalence of ideology in the political parties. Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, the former governor of Kano State, Alhaji Sule Lamido, a member of the House of Representatives, and other individuals elected on the party's platform defected to the NPP, making the PRP one of the most ideologically charged political parties of the Second Republic. From 1999 to the present, the Fourth Republic has seen multiple elections and extended party politics in order to provide us a sufficient understanding of the incidence and prevalence of political defections and to identify their primary causes and real mechanisms.

The political power-based theory is significant because it not only enables us to understand the connections between political power, elections, and party defection, but it also gives us the ability to formulate certain assumptions that define our understanding of the subject and to develop some theoretical constructs about various aspects and types of political defections. In order to define our understanding of party defection in Nigeria, the current author develops some concepts related to political defections and relates them to the struggle for political power, which is primarily associated with elections in the country. To put it another way, the current theoretical effort is a step toward developing a theory that explains not only why and how political defections occur, but also their various types, their relationships to one another, and their effects on the nation's democratic system, whereas the political power-based theory only explains why party defection occurs in Nigeria. Therefore, the current theoretical endeavour is integrated into the power-based explanation as a reason for political defection in Nigeria.

2.4 Empirical Review

Olisah and Nwokah (2020) looked at how politicians' decamping affected Nigeria's democratic consolidation starting in 1999. This study makes the theoretical claim that actions of decamping tend to undermine the legitimacy of the Nigerian political process, hence impeding the consolidation of democracy, using a qualitative descriptive technique and a zero-sum game. This essay goes on to contend that Nigerian politicians' self-serving interests, the collapse of political norms and standards, and a lack of principles founded on common convictions are the causes of political decamping, which is almost becoming a culture in the country. Ibrahim (2023) investigated the causes of political desertion in Nigeria. Political defection is a common political behaviour that is greatly impacted by the defector's political support base, which includes both voter and elite support bases, according to qualitative study.

Gana and Adamu (2024) look into the democratic process and opposition party in Nigeria. Qualitative investigation revealed that political parties' inability to function as potent platforms for opposition to the governing party is caused by a range of issues, including disintegration, violence, desertion, election rule manipulation, and money politics.

With an emphasis on the phenomenon of one-party dominance in Nigeria, Diepreye and Pade (2025) provide a more thorough examination of the issue of political defection and its implications for the consolidation of democracy. The study claims that political parties' lack of a clear ideology and their insatiable cravings for self-interest rather than morals are the primary causes of this instability. Furthermore, studies found that this one-party monopoly weakens other parties, stifles political competition, and undermines crucial accountability mechanisms for a functioning democracy.

The impact of political defection on Nigeria's democratic system between 2015 and 2025 was critically examined by Dappa, Enyioko, and Henry (2025). The results, which employ a qualitative methodology, demonstrate that political defection has eroded political responsibility, encouraged opportunistic political activity, and harmed democratic institutions. Fapetu and Olateru-Olagbegi (2025) examined the underlying causes, legal frameworks, and democratic ramifications of party switching in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study, which employs a mixed-methods approach that includes interviews with sixty political stakeholders, documentary analysis of constitutional texts and court rulings, and quantitative tracking of defection events, concludes that personal ambition, patronage, and poor internal party governance are the causes of defections. Judicial loopholes and ineffective enforcement have exacerbated the issue, eroding party unity and voter faith.

Prince (2025) examined ideology, power, and party defection in Nigeria from 2014 until 2024. Only secondary data sources were employed in the study's qualitative research technique. The findings demonstrated that party defections in Nigeria were mostly caused by access to

financial wealth and political power rather than ideological disagreements. In addition to lowering political loyalty and normalising desertion as a deliberate strategy for elite survival, the lack of robust party organisations and unified ideological stances.

Megbele, Kore-Okiti, and Mrabure's (2025) study evaluated the reasons behind these defections and questioned whether they are motivated by academic commitment or political opportunism. The multidisciplinary study found that elite calculations of personal gain, survival, and access to state resources are the primary causes of defections in Nigeria. It also discovered that party loyalty is often subordinated to strategic ambition.

Namadi and Yerima (2025) carried out a longitudinal analysis of political party defections in Nigeria over a 24-year period, examining their causes, frequency, and regional dynamics. Trend analysis, qualitative content interpretation, and descriptive statistics were used. The results show that defections tend to concentrate around significant political occasions, especially party primaries and the months preceding general elections. Due to changing political cultures and alliances, the North-West and South-South regions have the greatest flipping rates.

Christopher, Manu, and Okwoli (2025) investigated the causes, patterns, and consequences of political defections in Benue State from 2015 to 2023. Both non-probability and probability sampling techniques were used. Information from surveys and in-depth interviews with political stakeholders, party leaders, and civil society members is used in this mixed-methods study. The findings indicate that a desire for political power, a lack of ideological commitment, the absence of internal party democracy, fear of prosecution, and patron-client networks are the primary causes of defections.

2.5 Gap in Literature

Most of the scholarship on political defections in Nigeria has focused on the causes, patterns, and effects of party switching during previous democratic periods, particularly between 1999

and 2023. Numerous studies have examined political defections in relation to electoral rivalry, party instability, and democratic consolidation. However, little attention has been paid to the potential for one-party rule in Nigeria and the current wave of massive political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) between 2023 and 2026.

This work examines the reasons for large political defections to the APC, assesses the increasing risk of one-party dominance, and takes into account the implications for Nigeria's multi-party democracy between 2023 and 2026 in an effort to bridge this gap.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Institutional Theory

The Institution Theory, first advanced by Thorstein Veblen (1899), developed further by Douglas North (1990), and by Paul DiMaggio & Walter Powell (1983) is one of the best theoretical tools available for analyzing Defection Politics and Its Implications for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. The notion emphasizes how various institutions - laws, customs, parties' system, elections, among others – affect political behavior. The strength or lack of strength of the mentioned institutions influence political actors' actions, including defection, thus undermining democratic governance.

Assumptions of the Theory

According to institutional theory, political actors operate depending on the opportunities and limitations offered by the institutional systems. Weak or inadequately functioning institutions create grounds for opportunistic behavior, undermine democratic practices and cause

instability. The insufficient institutional frameworks in the spheres of political parties and elections are the basis of defection politics in Nigeria. With a relatively small number of established political parties and non-enforced laws of defection, politicians can pursue their own interests without any consideration of democratic values and parties' ideology.

Application of Institutional Theory to Defection Politics in Nigeria

1. Insufficient Party Democracy

Insufficient institutionalisation makes political parties more vulnerable to internal conflict, factionalism, and leadership crises, all of which raise the risk of defections, according to institutional theory. In Nigeria, a limited number of elites often govern decision-making, and political parties lack a strong ideological foundation (Ojo, 2022). When conflicts or other chances develop, it is simpler for politicians to defect under these circumstances. For example, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) saw a large number of defections in 2014 as a result of unresolved leadership disagreements, which diminished the party's capacity to oppose the ruling party (Edet, 2017).

2. Legal loopholes and insufficient enforcement mechanisms

Institutional theory shows that inadequate legal frameworks promote opportunistic conduct. Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution limits MP defections, but expressly exempts governors and other high-ranking officials, thus defections are largely unrestricted (Audu *et al.*, 2022). Political instability has resulted from this loophole since mass defections have no repercussions. An important example of this institutional collapse was the large number of opposition MPs that defected to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) after the 2015 general elections (Nwankwo, 2021). The dominant party usually controls access to state resources, political patronage, and institutional incentives for political survival in democracies with insufficient institutionalisation. To stay politically relevant and escape punishment, politicians often switch to the ruling party (Oni & Joshua, 2020). According to

institutional theory, politicians make rational decisions based on these institutional benefits, and the Nigerian political system promotes defection as a survival strategy.

3. Inadequate Accountability and Election Systems

Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other electoral institutions have challenges in enforcing regulations meant to prevent political opportunism. Election legitimacy is damaged and democratic consolidation is threatened by institutional flaws in inspection and enforcement. Politicians can switch parties without facing consequences if there are insufficient deterrents, which lessens political competitiveness and restricts voter options (Audu, Aam, & Gana, 2022).

3.2 Hypotheses

1. There are no significant factors responsible for mass political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.
2. Mass political defections have no significant effect on the political dominance of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.
3. Mass political defections have no significant implications for electoral competition and the sustainability of multi-party democracy in Nigeria.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed an ex post facto research design and a qualitative research approach. The ex post facto design was considered sufficient since the study looked at events that had already occurred without the researcher changing any variables.

The research examined a limited number of secondary data sources, including party constitutions, official reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), policy papers, credible media sites, and peer-reviewed academic studies. These sources

provided useful information for analysing the causes, patterns, and results of mass political defections in Nigeria.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The information utilised in this study came from secondary sources. The data came from government publications, academic journal articles, media, policy papers, textbooks, and trustworthy internet sources. These sources offer crucial information on Nigeria's multi-party democracy, party dominance, and significant political defections between 2023 and 2026.

3.5 The Study Area

Nigeria was selected as the research subject for the study because of its strategic political significance in Africa and its history of political defections since the country's return to democratic governance in 1999. A growing number of Nigerian governors, lawmakers, and other political personalities have joined the governing All Progressives Congress (APC) in recent years, especially between 2023 and 2026. Concerns over the potential rise of one-party dominance and its effects on the nation's multi-party democracy have been raised by these instances.

3.6 Population of the Study

The population of the research included all political leaders, organisations, and documented cases of political defection in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026. This analysis covered governors, senators, members of the House of Representatives, political party representatives, and other notable individuals who took part in mass political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) throughout the study period.

3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample included official INEC publications, party constitutions, policy papers, media articles, peer-reviewed journal articles, and trustworthy internet sources. This approach

ensured that only papers that particularly addressed the rise of one-party rule, widespread political defections, and consequences for multiparty democracy were examined.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Authenticity and reliability of the research were assured through the application of credible and reliable secondary sources such as peer-reviewed scholarly articles, government documents, reports of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and reputable media websites. Information gathered from different sources was also compared in order to ascertain the reliability of data used for the study.

3.9 Data Analysis Method

Content analysis was employed for the analysis of data in the study. In order to identify significant political defections, one-party dominance, and multi-party democracy in Nigeria from 2023 to 2026, there is a need for a systematic analysis and categorization of trends, themes, and new challenges.

3.10 Logical Data Framework (LDF)

Logical Data Framework (LDF) for the study is provided below in Table 2.

Table 2: Logical Data Framework (LDF)

Research Question	Hypotheses	Major Variables	Empirical Indicators	Data Collection	Sources of Data	Data Analysis
What are the factors driving mass political defections to the APC in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026?	H_{0_1} : There are no significant factors driving mass political defections to the APC in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.	Independent : Factors driving defections → Dependent: Mass political defections	Political survival, access to resources, internal party crisis, alignment with ruling party, weak party ideology	Secondary data review	Academic journals, newspapers, INEC reports, party documents, policy reports	Thematic content analysis
What is the impact of mass political defections on the emergence	H_{0_2} : Mass political defections have no significant impact on the	Independent : Mass political defections →	Strengthening of APC dominance, weakening of opposition	Secondary data review	Academic journals, newspapers, political commentaries	Thematic content analysis

of one-party dominance in Nigeria?	emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria.	Dependent: Emergence of one-party dominance	parties, concentration of political power, reduced political competition		s, INEC reports	
What are the implications of mass political defections for multi-party democracy in Nigeria?	H ₀₃ : Mass political defections have no significant implications for multiparty democracy in Nigeria.	Independent : Mass political defections → Dependent: Multi-party democracy	Erosion of electoral competitiveness, low voter confidence, reduced political pluralism, political apathy	Secondary data review	Academic journals, newspapers, policy reports, political analyses	Thematic content analysis

Source: Researcher's Compilation from Secondary Sources, 2026

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings of the study based on data obtained from secondary sources such as academic journals, policy documents, credible media reports, and official publications. The analysis is carried out using thematic content analysis in line with the research objectives and questions.

The chapter is structured into three major sections:

1. Factors driving mass political defections to the APC
2. Impact of defections on one-party dominance
3. Implications for multi-party democracy in Nigeria

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data reviewed revealed consistent patterns in political behaviour, particularly between 2023 and 2026. These patterns are discussed below.

4.2.1 Factors Driving Mass Political Defections to the APC

The paper pointed out a number of factors contributing to the rising tide of defections.

(a) Politics of Survival and Calculations of the Elite

One of the key motivations behind defection is that of political survival. Most politicians make calculations taking into account the concentration of power. In the Nigerian context, the ruling party tends to have more power and influence over state structures, appointment, and election processes.

Thus, most politicians decide to defect due to necessity, and not out of ideological considerations, thus proving the fact that Nigerian politics is mostly motivated by interests, not principles.

(b) Internal Party Crisis and Fragmentation

Another major factor identified is the crisis within political parties. Problems like:

- Fights for leadership,
- Forced nominations of candidates,
- Dirty primaries

Are among the reasons that led to defections.

For instance, crises inside opposition parties can force members to join other parties where they will be appreciated.

(c) Lack of a Strong Ideological Base for Political Parties

The lack of a distinct ideological base for the political parties in Nigeria makes defection easier and more common because in advanced democracies political parties are known by their ideology while in Nigeria, political parties are alliances without ideologies and interested in attaining political power.

In this case, there is lack of ideological clarity leading to lack of party loyalty among politicians.

(d) Availability of State Resources and Patronage Politics

Availability of state resources was one of the most important factors that contributed to defections according to the findings of this study. In Nigeria, the dominant political party has:

- Financial resources
- Political appointments
- Development prospects

The politicians therefore defect to have access to these state resources.

(e) Poor Institutional and Legal Mechanisms

Nigerian laws that govern defection are either inadequate or not properly applied. Even though there are some provisions on defection in the constitution, there are loop holes that enable politicians to defect without having to face any repercussions.

This makes it possible for defections to take place with no or few consequences.

4.2.2 Consequences of Mass Political Defection on One-Party Domination

It has been established that the consequences of defections on Nigeria's political system are far-reaching.

(a) Consolidation of the Political Power of the APC

The continued defectors into the APC has led to consolidation of the power of the party. This is manifested through:

- Increased influence in the National Assembly
- Control in the state governments
- Consolidation of party powers

This implies that the consolidation of power is gradually taking place within one party.

(b) Decline in Influence of Opposition Parties

With defections taking place among influential figures, the opposition parties become weaker, not only in terms of their numbers but also in terms of their political weight. This will make them unable to:

- organize their support base
- campaign during elections
- serve as alternatives

(c) Centralization of Political Power

The transfer of politicians from different parties into one big party results in the centralization of political power. This is in contradiction to the doctrine of checks and balances.

(d) Decline in the Competitiveness of the Elections

With the decline in the number of formidable opposition candidates, the elections become less competitive. Thus, the decision-making process becomes less democratic.

(e) Formation of a Dominant-Party System

Despite the multiparty system existing in Nigeria, it can be seen that Nigeria is slowly forming a dominant party system.

4.2.3 Implications for Multi-Party Democracy in Nigeria

The research provides several implications with regards to democratic governance.

(a) Loss of Democratic Accountability

Strong opposition is critical to keeping the ruling party accountable. The more defections occur, the harder it becomes to challenge government decisions.

(b) Voter Apathy and Disenchantment with Democracy

Mass defections give an idea that politicians do not take their responsibilities seriously. Consequently, people stop taking part in voting and lose faith in the system.

(c) Loss of Political Pluralism

Political pluralism implies existence of diverse political parties. The domination of one party reduces the variety of options available.

(d) Political Instability and Challenges for Governance

Mass defections may cause political conflict, legal disputes, and other problems for the government, preventing the implementation of policies and development.

(e) Potential for Authoritarian Behavior

Continued dominance of one party in the absence of an effective opposition may entail the following behavior:

- Dissidence suppression
- Abuse of state power
- Destruction of democratic institutions

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

From the results found:

Hypothesis One

There are no significant factors causing mass political defections to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.

The findings shown in Section 4.2.1 revealed numerous significant factors causing mass political defections to the APC which include political survival and elite calculation, internal party crisis and factionalism, weak ideological foundation, availability of state resources and patronage politics, and weak institutional and legal framework. These results give enough evidence for rejecting H_0 . As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is proven that there are significant factors causing mass political defections to the APC in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026.

Hypothesis Two

Mass political defections have no significant effect on the emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria.

The findings found in Section 4.2.2 showed that mass political defections have significantly contributed to the strengthening of APC dominance, weakening of opposition parties, centralization of political power, loss of electoral competitiveness, and creation of dominant-party system. These results give enough evidence for rejecting H_{0_2} . Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is proven that mass political defections have a significant effect on the emergence of one-party dominance in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three

Mass political defections have no significant implications for multi-party democracy in Nigeria.

The data presented in Section 4.2.3 established that mass political defections have serious implications for democratic governance in Nigeria, including a decline in democratic accountability, voter apathy and erosion of public trust, erosion of political pluralism, political instability and governance challenges, and a risk of authoritarian tendencies. These findings provide sufficient evidence to reject H_{0_3} . Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is established that mass political defections have significant implications for multi-party democracy in Nigeria.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings strongly support **Institutional Theory**, which argues that weak institutions encourage opportunistic political behaviour.

The study also confirms that:

- Nigerian politics is largely driven by **power and personal interest**
- Weak party structures contribute to instability

- Defections are both a **symptom and a cause** of democratic weakness

Overall, the results show that unless institutional reforms are implemented, political defections will continue to undermine democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study sought to analyze the impact of mass political defections to the APC on Nigeria's democratic process from 2023 to 2026. The findings from the study indicate that mass political defections during this period are motivated by the urge to survive politically and by political elites, as they try to align themselves with the ruling political party in order to safeguard their career prospects.

It was further found that internal party conflicts as well as weak ideological commitments are some of the contributing factors to mass defections. Political rivalry and imposition of candidates in the process of party primaries, as well as the lack of policy-driven ideologies within Nigerian political parties, have enabled politicians to change political parties easily without having any ideology to contend with.

Mass political defections to the APC have considerably improved the position of the ruling political party while at the same time undermining opposition political parties, limiting electoral competition and concentrating political power within a single political entity. There is an observable trend of moving from a multi-party system to a dominant party system.

Furthermore, the study showed that mass political defections negatively affect democratic governance by reducing governmental accountability, increasing voter apathy — as evidenced by the decline in voter turnout from 44 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2023 — and weakening political pluralism, thereby eroding the foundations of a healthy and functional multi-party democracy.

Finally, the study found that the existing legal framework, particularly Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution, has proven inadequate in curbing political defections, as it applies only to members of the legislature and excludes executive officeholders such as governors and deputy governors, thereby creating a significant constitutional loophole that politicians have continued to exploit freely.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that political defections in Nigeria are not merely individual decisions but reflect deeper structural problems within the political system. The increasing movement of politicians into the ruling party poses a serious threat to the balance required in a democratic system. While Nigeria still operates a multi-party system in theory, the reality suggests a gradual shift towards one-party dominance.

If this trend continues unchecked, it may weaken democratic institutions, reduce political competition, and limit citizens' ability to hold leaders accountable. The findings of this study therefore underscore the urgent need for institutional reforms that address the root causes of political defections and strengthen the foundations of democratic governance in Nigeria.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, in line with the finding that mass political defections to the APC are driven by political survival instincts, weak ideological commitment, internal party crises, patronage politics, and legal loopholes, the government should strengthen the legal framework governing political defections. The 1999 Constitution should be amended to extend anti-defection clauses to cover executive officeholders such as governors and deputy governors, not just members of the legislature. Political parties should equally commit to improving internal party democracy by ensuring transparent primaries, inclusive decision-making processes, and clear ideological orientations that foster genuine party loyalty and reduce opportunistic defections.

Secondly, in light of the observation that mass political defections have contributed immensely to the increasing dominance of APC, the weakening of opposition political parties, and increased political power concentration, there is a need to strengthen democratic institutions so as to increase the competitiveness of elections in Nigeria. The INEC and other democratic institutions such as the judiciary ought to be allowed to work independently without any political intervention. These institutions will be necessary in enforcing the anti-defection laws, minimizing political power concentration in one party, and promoting the effectiveness of opposition political parties.

Thirdly, in light of the observation that mass political defections have adverse effects on multi-party democracy in Nigeria such as lack of democratic accountability, voter apathy, destruction of political pluralism, and the emergence of authoritarian tendencies, civic education ought to be fostered and strong opposition politics ought to be encouraged. The citizens need to demand for accountability from the elected representatives and to ensure that politicians are voted out if they defect from office to pursue personal gains. The civil

societies, the media, and other external partners need to play an active role in fostering viable and credible opposition to challenge the dominant party.

Suggestions for Future Research

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APPENDICES

POLITICAL DEFECTION AND THE EMERGING RISK OF A ONE-PARTY DOMINANCE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTI PARTY DEMOCRACY (2023-2026)

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APPENDIX A

Notable Political Defection Events in Nigeria (2023–2026)

This table documents major political defection incidents recorded in Nigeria between 2023 and 2026, including the key actors involved, parties abandoned and joined, reasons cited, and relevant sources consulted in this study.

Date/Period	Legislator(s)/Official(s)	From → To	Reason(s) Cited	Source
April 2025	Sheriff Oborevwori (Delta State Governor) + PDP structure	PDP → APC	Internal party crisis; alignment with federal government	ICIR Nigeria (2025); The Papers Nigeria (2025)
June 2025	Umo Eno (Akwa Ibom State Governor)	PDP → APC	Political consultations; alignment with federal government	BusinessDay (2025)
October 2025	Peter Mbah (Enugu State Governor)	PDP → APC	Development collaboration; political alignment	Punch (2025)
October 2025	Douye Diri (Bayelsa State Governor)	PDP → APC	Decline of PDP; political realignment	The Papers Nigeria (2025)
October 2025	Five House of Representatives Members (Enugu State)	PDP → APC	Internal party crisis; alignment with ruling party	Nigeria Stories (2025)
December 2025	Siminalayi Fubara (Rivers State Governor)	PDP → APC	Political cooperation with federal government	The Papers Nigeria (2025)
October 2023	Senator Ifeanyi Ubah (Anambra South)	YPP → APC	Strategic consultation with Senate leaders	NASS (2023)
2022	Senator Ezenwa Onyewuchi (Imo East)	PDP → LP	Joining New Nigeria movement	NASS (2022)
December 2023	27 Rivers State House of Assembly Members	PDP → APC	Power struggle between Governor Fubara and predecessor Wike	Arise News (2024)
April 2024	Emeka Ihedioha (Former Imo State Governor)	PDP → (exit)	Unresolved internal party conflicts	Multiple sources
2022	Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (Former Kano Governor)	PDP → NNPP	Elite calculations; political ambition	Ibrahim (2023)
2013	5 PDP Governors + 11 Senators + 37 NASS Members	PDP → APC (merger)	Leadership crisis; formation of APC opposition coalition	Daily Post (2014)

Source: Researcher's Compilation from Secondary Sources, 2026. See References for full citations.

APPENDIX B

Secondary Data Source Analysis Framework

The table below outlines the data analysis approach used for each research question in this study. This framework guided the systematic collection, categorisation, and thematic analysis of secondary data obtained from academic journals, policy documents, media reports, and official publications.

RQ#	Research Question Focus	Key Indicators Examined	Data Sources	Analysis Method
RQ1	Factors driving mass defections to APC	Political survival, internal crisis, weak ideology, patronage, legal loopholes	Academic journals, INEC reports, policy documents	Thematic content analysis
RQ2	Impact on one-party dominance	APC strengthening, opposition weakening, power concentration, electoral decline	Newspapers, academic journals, political commentaries	Thematic content analysis
RQ3	Implications for multi-party democracy	Accountability erosion, voter apathy, reduced pluralism, instability risk	Policy reports, journals, media analyses	Thematic content analysis

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026.

APPENDIX C

Relevant Constitutional and Legal Provisions on Political Defection in Nigeria

Nigeria's legal framework on political defection is primarily contained in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). The table below summarises the key provisions relevant to this study, their scope, limitations, and practical impact on defection behaviour.

Legal Provision	Who It Covers	What It Stipulates	Limitation/Gap	Practical Impact
Section 68(1)(g)	Members of National Assembly (Senators and Reps)	MP must vacate seat if defects unless party merges/splits	Does not cover executive officeholders	Selective enforcement; legal loopholes exploited
Section 109(1)(g)	Members of State Houses of Assembly	Same provisions as Section 68 at state level	Same exclusion of governors and deputy governors	State legislators still defect freely in practice
Section 221	Political parties generally	Prohibits sponsorship of candidates by non-registered entities	Limited scope on individual defections	Rarely enforced in defection contexts
Electoral Act 2022	All political actors	Provides framework for party registration and candidate conduct	No specific anti-defection penalty for executives	Gaps in enforcement leave room for abuse

Source: Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended); Electoral Act (2022); Researcher's Compilation, 2026.

Note: Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution is the primary anti-defection provision for members of the National Assembly. It stipulates that a legislator shall vacate their seat if they become a member of a different political party from the one they belonged to at the time of their election, unless the defection results from a division within or merger of political parties. Critically, this provision does not apply to executive officeholders such as governors or deputy governors, a gap that has been extensively exploited.

APPENDIX D

Voter Turnout in Nigerian General Presidential Elections (2015–2023)

The table below presents voter turnout data for Nigerian general elections from 2015 to 2023, as referenced in Chapter Five of this study. The declining trend in voter participation — from 43.65% in 2015 to 26.72% in 2023 — is cited as evidence of growing voter apathy, which this study links in part to the disillusionment caused by frequent political defections.

Election Year	Total Votes Cast	Registered Voters	Turnout (%)	Key Political Context
2015	28,587,564	67,422,005	43.65%	APC defeats PDP; major opposition victory
2019	28,614,190	82,344,107	34.75%	APC incumbent Buhari re-elected; opposition weakened
2023	24,012,422	93,469,008	26.72%	APC's Tinubu wins; lowest turnout in 4th Republic

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2023; INEC Voter Turnout Trend Report, 2024; Researcher's Compilation, 2026.

The continuous decline in voter turnout between 2015 and 2023 is consistent with the study's finding that mass political defections erode public confidence in the democratic process. When politicians switch parties for personal gain rather than ideological conviction, citizens perceive elections as less meaningful, which discourages participation.

APPENDIX E

Glossary of Key Terms Used in the Study

The following glossary defines the key concepts and terms employed throughout this study. These definitions are provided to aid clarity and ensure consistent interpretation of terms that may have varied usage across different academic or policy contexts.

Term	Definition
Anti-Defection Clause	A constitutional or legislative provision designed to prevent elected officials from abandoning the party on whose platform they were elected, often including penalties such as loss of seat.
Cross-Carpeting / Floor-Crossing	The act of a legislator or politician moving from one political party to another, often used interchangeably with defection in Nigerian political discourse.
Democratic Consolidation	The process through which democratic practices, norms, and institutions become deeply entrenched and broadly accepted, making democratic reversals unlikely.
Dominant-Party System	A political system where multiple parties legally exist and compete but one party consistently wins elections and holds government power over an extended period.
Electoral Authoritarianism	A political arrangement where elections are held but the ruling party uses state resources, legal manipulation, and institutional advantages to ensure its continued dominance.
Factionalism	The fragmentation of a political party into competing internal groups or factions, often driven by leadership disputes, ideological differences, or resource competition.
Godfatherism	An informal system of political patronage in Nigeria whereby powerful political 'godfathers' sponsor and control politicians in exchange for political loyalty and access to state resources.
Intra-Party Democracy	The practice of democratic principles within a political party, including transparent primaries, inclusive decision-making, fair dispute resolution, and accountability of party leadership to members.
Mass Political Defection	The large-scale, rapid movement of politicians, typically en masse, from one political party to another, often driven by political survival, access to power, or strategic advantage.
Monetisation of Politics	The process by which financial resources come to dominate political processes, leading to vote-buying, high campaign spending, and political loyalty being determined by financial incentives.
Multi-Party Democracy	A democratic system in which multiple political parties compete for governmental power through free and fair elections, ensuring political pluralism and voter choice.
One-Party Dominance	A political condition in which a single party consistently controls governmental institutions, effectively undermining meaningful electoral competition and political pluralism.
Party Institutionalisation	The degree to which a political party has developed stable, valued, and recurring patterns of behaviour, leadership, and organizational identity.
Patronage Politics	A political system in which leaders distribute public resources, appointments, and opportunities in exchange for political support and loyalty rather than on the basis of merit or need.
Political Defection	The act of a politician leaving one political party to join another, usually motivated by political, ideological, strategic, or personal reasons.
Voter Apathy	A condition of widespread disengagement and lack of interest among eligible voters in the electoral process, often reflected in low voter turnout figures.

Source: Researcher's Compilation from Academic Literature and Constitutional Sources, 2026.

APPENDIX F

Profile of Key Nigerian Political Parties Referenced in the Study

The table below provides a brief profile of the major political parties frequently mentioned in this study. Understanding the background, ideological orientation, and current status of these parties provides essential context for analysing the patterns of political defection documented between 2023 and 2026.

Party Name	Founded	Ideological Orientation	Current Status/Role	Notes on Defection Context
All Progressives Congress (APC)	2013	Progressive/Centre-Right (nominal)	Currently ruling party at federal level; dominant party in Nigeria since 2015	Merger of ACN, CPC, ANPP, and a PDP faction
Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	1998	Centre/Social Democracy (nominal)	Ruled Nigeria 1999–2015; major opposition party; significantly weakened by defections 2023–2026	Largest opposition party; mass defections to APC
Labour Party (LP)	2002	Social Democracy/Labour	Gained significant votes in 2023 presidential election; rising opposition force	Strong performance in 2023; internal challenges thereafter
New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP)	2001 (re-launched 2022)	Centrist/Progressive	Contested 2023 elections; strong in Kano under Kwankwaso's influence	Kwankwaso's defection from PDP boosted profile
All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)	2003	Pan-Igbo/Progressive	Dominant in Anambra State; limited national presence	Niche regional appeal; relative stability
Young Progressives Party (YPP)	2017	Progressive	Held senatorial seat (Anambra South) lost to defection to APC in 2023	Senator Ubah's defection weakened the party

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); Researcher's Compilation from Secondary Sources, 2026.

APPENDIX G

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks on Political Defection

The table below summarises the major theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this study. It highlights the key arguments of each theory, their relevance to the Nigerian context, and their limitations. Institutional Theory was adopted as the primary framework for this study due to its comprehensive explanatory power in analysing how weak institutions enable political defections.

Theory	Key Proponent(s)	Core Argument	Relevance to Study	Limitation
Ideological Deficit Theory	Mbah (2011); Mubita (2014)	Party ideology serves as the glue binding members together; when absent, defections become frequent	Explains historical pattern of defections; shows lack of ideology as root cause in Nigeria's 4th Republic	Does not explain how defections occur or their specific effects on democracy
Internal Party Democracy-Deficit Theory	Ibrahim (2023)	Defections occur when internal party constitutional provisions are breached and primaries are unfair	Links institutional failure within parties to defection behaviour	Does not explain the various forms or broader democratic implications of defections
Conflict-Based Theory	Multiple scholars	Intra-party conflicts, factionalism, and leadership disputes drive disgruntled members to defect	Captures the role of internal power struggles in triggering defections	Focuses on symptoms (conflict) rather than root causes (power pursuit)
Political Power-Based Theory	Ibrahim (2023)	The elite's pursuit of political power and appointments is the primary force causing party defections	Explains the rational, strategic calculations behind defection decisions in Nigeria	Primarily explains motivation but not the mechanisms or democratic consequences
Institutional Theory (Framework Used)	North (1990); DiMaggio & Powell (1983)	Political actors operate within institutional constraints; weak institutions foster opportunistic behaviour like defection	Applied as the study's main theoretical framework; explains how legal loopholes and weak party structures enable defections	Comprehensive but may underemphasize individual agency and cultural factors

Source: Researcher's Compilation from Literature Review, 2026. See Chapter Two (Section 2.3) for full theoretical discussion.

Note: While four pre-existing theories are presented (Ideological Deficit, Internal Party Democracy-Deficit, Conflict-Based, and Political Power-Based), this study adopted Institutional Theory as its primary analytical lens. Institutional Theory provides a more holistic framework for understanding how structural and systemic factors — rather than just individual motivations — drive political defections and undermine democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

