

An analysis of political defection in Nigeria's political parties and the 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

Political defection has become a reoccurring, frequent and increasing phenomenon which obstructs, intercepts and disrupts political and institutional stability in Nigeria's democratic landscape. This paper investigates the phenomenon of political defection with emphasis on the Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. The paper provides an insight on the propelling factors of party switching in Nigeria's democratic landscape particularly in the last General Elections. The research identifies the implication and consequences of the phenomenon, which includes dampening of public trust in the democratic process and weakening of democratic institutions. This study employs basically secondary sources of data collection such as books, journals, articles, newspapers and other internet materials. The paper also adopts Elite and Rationale Choice theory, which postulates that a small minority group (power brokers) in political parties tends to strategically manoeuvre and manipulate the entire members to achieve personal or group interests. The paper also discusses the cases that were propelled by lack of transparency, imposition of candidates, marginalization of other party members in party affairs, ethnic and religious sentiment. The study observed that the high-profile defections experienced in Nigeria's 2023 General elections altered the political landscape, and consequently turned PDP into a Principal victim while APC became the principal beneficiary. The paper therefore recommends Electoral reforms and Constitutional amendments to curb reoccurring defections.

Keywords: Defection, general elections, internal Nigeria, democracy, political parties.

1. Introduction

Political defections have become a recurring and increasing disruptive phenomenon in Nigeria's democratic landscape. In recent years, the frequency and scale of political cross- carpeting among politicians, particularly those in the Legislative and executive branches, have raised Critical concerns about the stability and integrity of Nigeria's political system (Anikwe et al, 2025, p 25).

Political defection which is referred to as cross – carpeting, party -switching, or decamping took off in Nigeria's Political land scape in 1951, when members of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon

(NCNC) defected to the Action Group (AG), denying Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe the chance to form a regional government. Since Nigeria's Independence, defection has been a significant factor in determining the political development of the nation, frequently resulting in instability and weak party discipline (Adejuwon, 2013).

Defection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-present) has been primarily caused by a lack of internal party democracy, elite opportunism, a weak party ideology, and lax legal deterrents. The growing trend of political defection in Nigeria poses a serious challenge to democratic

consolidation by eroding party discipline, weakening institutional structures, and undermining the very essence of representative governance.

Badejo *et al.* (2015), Edet (2017), Mbah (2011) in Omilusi (2015) have considered politicians' greed, lack of party ideology, lack of internal democracy, intra and inter-party crisis, inordinate political gains among others as factors of defection in Nigeria.

However, few studies have submitted that Political defection creates political instability (Okereka *et al.*, 2020). The increasing cases of defection and its grave implications on electoral outcome is attributed to lack of clear-cut ideology which leads to incessant intra-party conflicts which has led to the factionalisation of some political parties and the consequence of decamping from one political party to the other by party members (Arinze & Oliver, 2016).

Another study also established that the gale of defections has had significant implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It undermines party ideology, weakens political institutions, and erodes public trust in the political process. Moreover, it disrupts legislative functions, alters the balance of power, and sometimes leads to political crises at both federal and state levels (Omotola, 2010).

Scholars in previous studies argued that the spate of party defection has not only threatened the country's fledgling democracy, but has also rubbished its underlying philosophies (Nwandu and ogunleye 2022).

Literature also established it that the way and manner politicians in Nigeria defect from one party to the other has not only constituted democratic nuisance, but has continued to raise serious concern among political observers and participants in Nigeria which is manifested through lack of clear ideology (Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018).

What is common in the existing literature is defection masterminded because of crisis within or between parties. Of course, lack of ideology, intra and inter-party crisis, greed, corruption, imposition during primaries among others are known factors of party defection in Nigerian politics (Okolie, 2021).

Okolie (2021) observed that political parties in Nigeria portend a vehicle of political utility bereaved of ideology and deficit in both ideas and principle. The political class seems to always remained bereft of viable political ideology on which Nigeria political future could be anchored and because of this, all the parties seem to be experiencing cracks, and mass movement and defection from one party to the other because parties have been known to exist on sustained ideological base, not just a platform for ascending to political power.

Nandi and Ibrahim (2021) posit that some political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, lack clear cut ideology which has accounted for incessant internal party crises which usually lead to defections.

The culture of political defection has been institutionalized as a recurrent tactic used by political elites to a competitive edge or avoid political obsolescence. Political defection became a rampant phenomenon in the 2023 General election, where high-profile political elites and Presidential aspirants in pursuit of Presidential ticket, and as a result of strategic political calculation decamped to another party in order to accomplish their personal ambitions, a good example is the defection of the Former Anambra state Governor, Mr. Peter Obi and the former Kano state Governor, Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso from the opposition party PDP to Labour Party(LP) and New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP) to accomplish their personal ambitions, the party switching weakened not only the opposition party, it also weakens the

political institution. Political defection creates a semblance of a one-party system in many states in Nigeria. It makes the ruling party stronger and dominant while rendering opposition political parties weaker, nominal and ineffective. It erodes membership and financial bases of opposition political parties to contribute in parliamentary debates as well as their capability to challenge unpopular public policies (Amadu 2023).

The current debate on political defection is centered on institutional framework and constitutional amendment, Nigeria's 1999 Constitution provides measures to deter defections, yet weak enforcement, legal ambiguities, and lenient judicial rulings have rendered them ineffective. This has allowed defections to persist with minimal repercussions, fracturing party unity and voter trust.

The Constitutional provision of Section 68(1)(g) and Section 109(1)(g), has legal ambiguities and political interference often render them toothless, allowing politicians to exploit loopholes for personal or strategic gain (Eme & Ogbochie, 2020).

The lack of legal and institutional deterrents to frequent defections has also contributed to a culture of political opportunism, where loyalty to the electorate is often sacrificed for personal gain. Understanding the motivations behind political defections and their broader consequences is vital for shaping a more stable and accountable democratic system. Unlike in mature democracies where party allegiance is often ideologically motivated, defections in Nigeria are largely driven by personal ambition and short-term gains (Ojo, 2019). While several studies have investigated the effects of defection on democratic engagement (Awofeso and Irabor, 2017), democratic consolidation (Aleyomi, 2013) and political instability (Badejo *et al.*, 2015) in Nigeria, little is known on Political defections driven by ethnic and

religious sentiment which altered the Nigeria's political land scape at the 2023 general elections, resulting to the emergence of the same faith presidential ticket, which is the first of its kind in this fourth republic.

2. Literature Review

Party defection occurs when politicians leave their political party to join another, often for strategic reasons. This phenomenon has become a defining characteristic of Nigeria's multi-party democracy, raising about the absence of strong ideological foundations within political parties. Scholars have identified multiple factors driving defection. Including lack of internal democracy, absence of party ideology, economic motivations, and personal ambition (Nokken & Poole, 2002; Malhotra, 2015).

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of Political defection has been defined by various scholars of political science, Philosophers Analysts, Authors in different in different perspectives based on the depth of their understanding. Jiddere (2015) defines political defection as leaving a political party to another by a politician as a result of discontent in his or her existing party. Eme et al.(2014), political defection refers to one's abandonment of his/ her previous (sic) position or association, offers to join an opposition or ruling group or party over the issue of political ideology, manifesto or programme and party management.

Malthora (2005) uses different terms in reference to political defection including party defection, cross carpeting, party-switching, floor- crossing, party hoping, canoe- jumping, party- jumping, etc

Amadu (2019) defines political defection 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 gains

without recourse to political ideology or principles.

It is the practice whereby elected officials switch allegiance from the political party on whose platform they were elected to another, often without relinquishing their seat. (Ajayi & Mohammed 2025)

Anikwe et al. (2025) opines that Political defection is the abandonment of allegiance, duty, or a cause. This can involve party members, voters, or even parliamentarian going against their party's directives. It signifies a shift away from a previously held commitment or alignment, encompassing actions like desertion or forsaking a person or a doctrine.

The Concept of Political Party

Political party has been given a wide range of definitions by scholars in field of political science. Ajayi (2025) defines A Political party as a group of people who have banded together with the ultimate objective of running for office through elections.

Momoh (2013) famously defines a political party as a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed. According to scholars, the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) reflects a political environment in which political parties serve more as platforms for ideological governance than as means of acquiring power (Omotola, 2019).

The Propelling Factors of Political Defection in 2023 General Elections.

The fragility of political ideologies

Nigerian political parties, for the most part, operate without clear ideological foundations or consistent policy frameworks. Rather than being driven by enduring values, principles, or issue-based agendas, many parties are organized around influential personalities, elite coalitions, and short-term electoral calculations. This personalization of

political parties significantly weakens institutional cohesion and blurs the ideological lines that should distinguish one party from another (Oluwaseun & Mohammed 2025) Olayiwola (2014) submitted that the dominance of personality politics and the absence of structured party identities make it remarkably easy for politicians to defect from one party to another without facing any meaningful ideological contradiction or political consequences.

Legal Loopholes and Constitutional Ambiguities

Oluwaseun & Mohammed (2025) Section 68(1)(g) and 109(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria were designed to discourage indiscriminate political defections by setting conditions under which elected legislators may forfeit their seats. However, these provisions include a notably vague clause that allows defection if there is a "division" within the political party under which the legislators was elected, this ambiguous language has become one of the most exploited loopholes in Nigeria's constitutional framework. In practice, politicians and their legal teams have routinely invoked the "division" clause, often citing internal party disagreements, leadership crises, or factional disputes as justification for defecting to other parties, especially the ruling party. Unfortunately, the Judiciary has not consistently interpreted or enforced this provision, and in many cases, it has sided with defectors, further diluting its effectiveness (Eme & Ogbochie 2015).

Lack of Internal Democracy

One of the propelling factors of party-switching within political parties is lack of internal democracy. The lack of internal democracy within parties exacerbates conflicts, as party leadership often imposes candidates rather than allowing competitive primaries (Aina 2002). Anikwe et al (2025, p 26) note that Aggrieved politicians cite a lack of

transparency, imposition of candidates, or marginalization in party affairs as reasons for leaving their parties.

Executive Dominance and Access to State Resources

Nigeria's political system is heavily centralized, with significant power and resources concentrated in the executive arm of government, particularly at the federal level. This structure creates strong incentives for politicians to align themselves with the ruling party, not necessarily out of ideological affinity, but to gain or maintain access to State resources, influence, and protection. In this context, political defection becomes a strategic tool for survival and relevance within a patronage-driven political order (Ajayi & Mohammed 2025). Aiyede (2015) observes, executive Dominance over key levers of power such as federal appointments, government contracts, security apparatus, and judicial influence makes proximity to the ruling party a critical factor in political longevity. Defection is often timed to coincide with changes in federal leadership or general elections.

Cases of Political Defection in 2023 General Elections

There are lots of cases recorded relating to party-switching, cross-carpeting, floor-crossing, party hopping, canoe-jumping, and party-jumping etc, in Nigeria political landscape in the 2023 general elections. These cases were propelled by lack of transparency, imposition of candidates, marginalization in party affairs and ethno-religious factor.

A Case of Religious Sentiment

The Nigerian historical and contemporary Political system is best captured in ethnic and religious biases. The two variables had been exploited by the Political elites for personal ambitions such as attaining political power, having access to state resources and retaining the status quo.

Nigerian Politicians tactically exploited religion during the 2023 General Elections to solicit for support through party switching and cross-carpeting from both card carrying members and voters. This variable was highly exploited by the Christians from the southern and the northern part. Prominent Nigerian politicians such as the Former Anambra state Governor Mr. Peter Obi, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Yakubu Dogara, the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria, Mr Babachir Lawal, the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria Boss Mustapha and the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) urged Nigerian Christians condemned the same faith ticket, describing it as devilish and ill-conceived with the intent of relegating the Christendom (Noah, 2023). Because the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari, is a Muslim from the North, the victory of Tinubu would culminate in a Muslim succeeding another Muslim as an elected president. This will repudiate fact 1. Tinubu's victory would also challenge fact 2 since both the president and his vice would be Muslims. On the other hand, Atiku's victory would announce the succession of an incumbent president by another from same religion and region. Atiku's victory would there challenge fact 1 and fact 3. On the contrary, Labour Party's candidates' choice seems to be the most sensitive to Nigeria's identity cleavages as they fail to challenge any of the three facts (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024, p68).

Christian religious leaders saw same faith ticket as a ploy to Islamize Nigeria. For instance, a Christian body known as Forum of Northern Christians reiterated its position on the same-faith ticket, saying it would not back; the forum was headed by the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Yakubu Dogara was

quoted to have said “ our position on same-faith stands” and vowed to meet with all the Presidential candidates, across party line and come up with its preferred choice (Olaiye, 2023). Dogara met behind closed doors with Christian leaders from the 19 Northern states and the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, in Abuja in continuation of their consultations ahead of the 2023 general elections (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024 p 68).. Yakubu Dogara, Babachir Lawal and Boss Mustapha defected from APC to PDP, and was able to convince alots of the Northern Christians’ voter political support base to reject and kick against Muslim-Muslim presidency and decamp to PDP.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) made a derogatory remark about the same faith ticket of the APC according to CAN Chairman in Kaduna State, Rev. John Hayab the same faith ticket of the ruling party is an attack on the Christian faith and the sensibility of Nigerians especially Christians. The Chairman reiterated the stance of the body in Kaduna state. According to him, we are saying we are not going back down on our stance against the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the APC (Ibrahim 2023).

A Case of Ethnic Bias

Ethnic coloration and configuration has been influencing elections in Nigeria right from inception. The shock and sudden incident which occurred at the PDP Primary Election in Abuja, in 2022 where Aminu Waziri Tambuwal the former Governor of Sokoto, dumped his ally and friend Nyesom Wike and pitched his tent with Atiku had been justified as a ploy and tactics by the Northerner power-brokers to secure victory for Atiku and to automatically retain power to the North.

The Igbos from the Southeastern part of Nigeria defected from whichever party they belong to join Peter Obi, -and form a third force- whom they perceived as the long- awaited instrument to end their

political exile. Ever since the conclusion of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. Based on this reason the Igbos wholeheartedly embraced Obi’s candidacy.

Enjoyed vociferous support in the heavily Igbos southern region, was perceived as an answer to their longstanding yearning to have their own in the seat of power, perhaps correctly, perceive that exclusion from the presidency was the penalty imposed for the “ wrong” of a failed secessionist attempt, Obi was the long-awaited instrument to end their political exile.

Lack of Internal Democracy

The lack of internal democracy within parties exacerbates conflicts, as party leadership often imposes candidates rather than allowing competitive primaries (Aina 2002). The PDP Presidential primary Election which took place at Abuja Saturday 28th May 2022, mirrored the lack of internal democracy within a political party. PDP employed ploy and tactics to disenfranchise the Former Anambra State Governor, Mr Peter Obi, which propelled his support groups to warn him not join and flex muscle with politicians who are doling out hundreds of millions of dollars to buy the delegates that will vote at the forthcoming PDP presidential primary. They, therefore, advised Peter Obi to move to another political party to be at peace with his conscience and not to entangle himself in possible political negotiations or manoeuvring that will stain him and hamper his ability to serve Nigerians.

The PDP also revealed the lack of internal democracy by ensuring that the PDP presidential Ticket goes to a candidate from the North, and systematically kicked out the Rivers State governor and presidential aspirant, Mr. Nyesom Wike, who later disclosed that he almost scuttled the PDP primaries at a stage when the rule was breached but had to maintain his calmness. He further said he was tempted to obstruct the process when an aspirant

(Aminu Tambuwal) who had spoken previously was allowed to return to the podium to pronounce his withdrawal, in contravention of the guidelines of the election.

“I have never seen how people can violate procedures and guidelines. Somebody had spoken; it was at that point he was speaking that he would have said I am withdrawing. You don’t call him back,” Wike said. (Vanguard 2022)

Implication of Political Defection

Political and Institutional Instability

The occurrence of mass defections often leads to factional warfare, intra-party conflict, and political crises. Ojo (2020) submitted that these disagreements frequently turn into protracted legal battles that further unstable the government and impede the efficient implementation of policies. Defections have led to changes in leadership across different state Assemblies, delay in budget passing, and power tussles between the legislators and the governor in the case of River state (Ajayi & Mohammed 2025).

River state has been a focal point of political instability due to high-profile defections. Between 2019 and 2025, the state experienced multiple party crossovers, particularly among key political figures. The rivalry between former Governor Nyesom Wike and his successor has led to widespread defections, with elected officials switching between PDP and APC to align with the dominant power bloc (Okon, 2024). These defections have heightened political tension in the state, undermining governance and policy continuity. Additionally, local government officials have been pressured into defecting, reflecting the broader culture of political opportunism in Nigeria.

Undermine the strength of opposition and democratic pluralism.

Political defection weakens the strength of opposition parties and diminishes the essence of competitive democracy, which

is against the principles of democracy. When the majority of the opposition parties defect to the ruling party, it creates a lopsided political structure, which is against democratic checks. For example, the defection of well-known opposition leaders in states like Rivers and Kano following the general elections in 2023 further weakened opposition parties, reducing their ability to bring people together and stop presidential overreach (Omoida,2022).

Erosion of Party Ideology

Political parties are ideally expected to be guided by specific philosophies and manifestos, but the frequency with which politicians switch allegiances suggests a lack of ideological commitment. As Aleyomi (2013) observed, Nigerian politics is largely driven by personal interest and survival instincts rather than well-defined ideological leanings.

Dampening of Public trust in the democratic process

Voters expect elected officials to remain loyal to the party under which they were elected. When politicians defect- especially without consulting their constituencies- it leads to feelings of betrayal and disenfranchisement among the electorate. This scenario undermines the principle of representative democracy and contributes to voter apathy.

Theoretical Framework

There are alots of theories that can guide studies in explaining party politics, allegiance-switching and cross-carpeting in the field of political science, the theories include Rationale choice theory, Elite Theory, Party system Institutionalization theory and Political Opportunism. However, this research adopts two theories:

- ❖ The Elite theory
- ❖ The Rational Choice Theory

Elite Theory

Elite Theory which is also known as (Iron law of Oligarchy), Elite theory posits that

power in the state or any organization is exercised by a limited number of individuals or groups referred to as elites. The theory was propounded by Robert Michel in 1911 through his work the “Political parties”. In the view of Michel & Pareto (1915, p32) Michel established that the ultimate fate of all organization is to be run by a small minority or plural elites. Elite theory therefore view society as closed, pyramidal, and unresponsive and composed of the few who rule and the many who are ruled.

Eze & Karibi-Botoye (2024) submitted that The dominant argument is that the large mass of the people are ignoble, not cohesive and not organized and so are not competent or capable to exercise political power. Thus, political power is entrusted to elite who are cohesive, organized and so competent or capable to exercise political power.

Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1969) also explain that Elite theory also suggests that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic and political elite, holds the most power in society and makes decision that serve their interests. The elites wield disproportionate power and influence over the political, economic, and social institutions, often making decisions that serve their interests rather than the collective goods.

Rational Choice Theory (RCT)

Rational Choice theory (RCT) was propounded by Anthony Downs in 1957, the theory postulates that political actors are rational individuals who make decisions based on the costs and benefits associated with their actions (Downs 1957). The theory posits that individuals, including politicians, make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits, ultimately acting in ways that serve their personal or strategic interests. (Ajayi and Ibrahim 2025)

Scott (200), posits that individuals make decisions by evaluating available

alternatives and selecting the one that maximizes their benefits while minimizing costs.

The Relevance of the two Theories on Nigeria Political landscape

In the Nigerian context, Elite Theory explains how political defections are less about ideological shifts and more about strategic manoeuvres by the political elite to maintain power, control state resources, and advance personal or group interests. Political parties become platforms for elite bargaining and reposition rather than ideological or developmental vehicles (Dye, 2001, cited in Azubuike et al).

Rational Choice Theory is central to understanding why politicians defect from one party to another (Dappa et al, 2025)

Anikwe et al (2025) submitted that in the context of Nigerian politics, this theoretical perspectives (Rational Choice Theory) suggests that political actors engage in defections not primarily out of ideological shifts or loyalty to constituents, but rather as a strategic calculation aimed at achieving personal or political gains such as increased access to power, resources, or protection. Political defections in Nigeria have often occurred around election seasons or significant political transitions, indicating a pattern of self-interested behavior aligned with the rational choice model. Defectors typically migrate to parties with higher probabilities of electoral success or those that offer better platforms for political survival and relevance (Joseph 2014)

The People’s Democratic Party’s (PDP) primary election which took place on Saturday May 28th 2022 at Abuja, explains succinctly how small minority group of the party decided to handover the presidential ticket of the party to the former Vice-President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, although those from southern region conceived such a move as a ploy for the northern region to dominate the southern region considering the fact that a northerner in the person of

Muhammadu Buhari was about completing his two term of office (Eze & Karibi-Botoye 2024).

One of the justifications of preferring Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was that he was perceived as the only formidable candidate favoured with region and religion, who had acquired experience, resources and capability to wrestle power with Bola Ahmed Tinubu the favorite candidate from APC.

All These factors orchestrated the strategic kick out of the Rivers State Governor and Presidential aspirant, Mr. Nyesom Wike, during the primary election. Wike disclosed that he almost scuttled the PDP primaries at a stage when the rule was breached but had to maintain his calmness. He further said he was tempted to obstruct the process when an aspirant (Aminu Tambuwal) who had spoken previously was allowed to return to the podium to pronounce his withdrawal, in contravention of the guidelines of the election.

The Rational Choice Theory in the context of Nigeria's 2023 General Election can be explained with the high-profile defection experienced during the election season, where Political actors such as The former Governor of Anambra Mr. Peter Obi, Sen Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, the present Governor of Abia Alex Oti, Senator Irete Kinjigbe amongs other whose defection from PDP and APC were although rational but not primarily out of ideological shifts or loyalty to constituents, but rather as a strategic calculation aimed at achieving personal or political gains such as increased access to power, resources, or protection. The political elites took the decisions after weighing the costs and benefits.

3. Methodology

This study employs basically secondary sources of data collection which come from government archives, articles in the academic journals, newspapers, textbooks and internet materials. However, the personal experiences of the writer, being a Nigerian and an active observer of Nigerian politics, bear on the conclusions arrived at in the research.

The Study through qualitative content analysis, examines how political defections driven by ethnic and religious sentiment altered Nigeria's political landscape in 2023 general elections threatens democratic consolidation in Nigeria

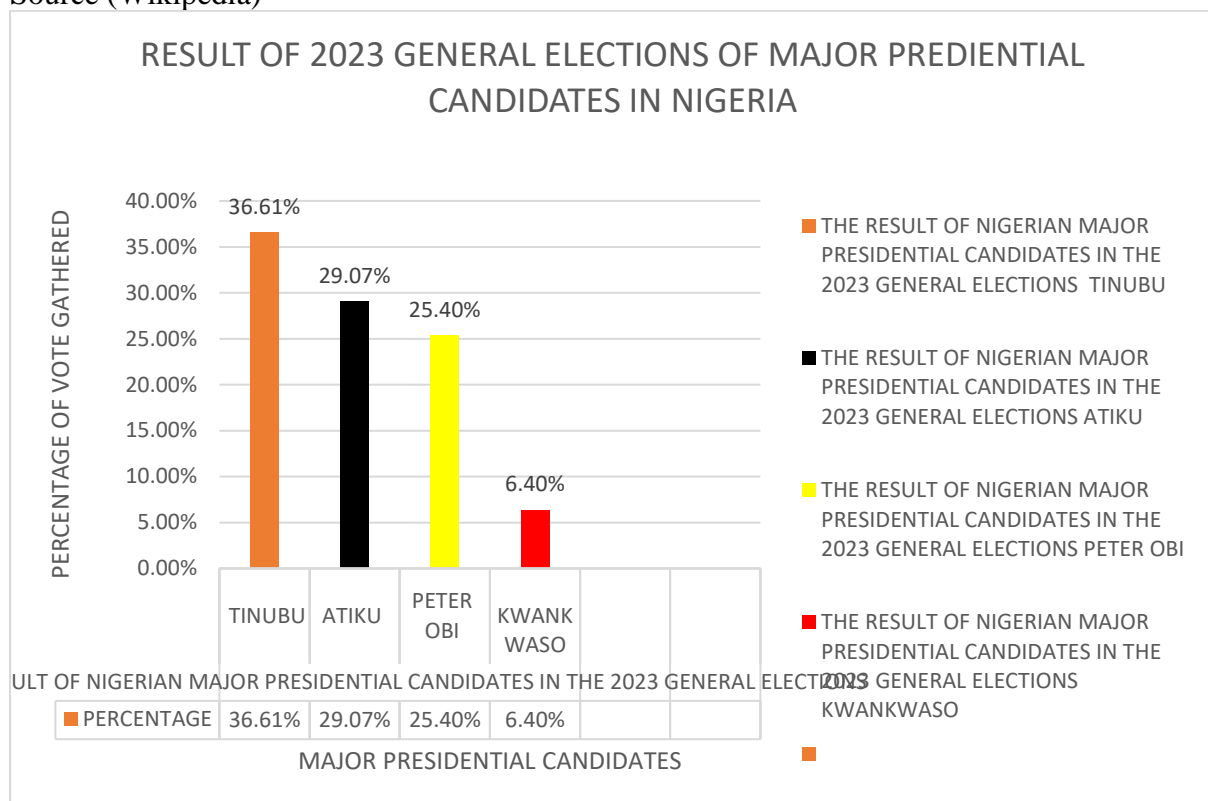
4. Results and Discussion

The Nigeria's 2023 General election experienced high-profile defections that altered the political landscape, particularly at the Federal and State level. At the presidential level, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which is the main opposition party was the principal victim while the ruling party All Progressives Congress (APC) became the principal beneficiary. The Labour Party as the third force thrived through the obedient movement, a party without a structure initially but during the election season transformed, metamorphosed and benefited where a Gubernatorial aspirant Alex Otti who switched allegiance from APC to Labour party won the gubernatorial election in Abia, simultaneously several Legislatures also defected from APC and PDP to Labour party in pursuit of power and emerged as winners.

Table 1.0 the result of the 2023 Nigerian Major Presidential Candidates in the General Elections

S/N	Name of The Candidates	Party	Number Votes	Of Percentage
1	AHMED BOLA TINUBU	APC	8,794,726.	36.61%
2	ATIKU ABUBAKAR	PDP	6,984,520.	29.07%
3	PETER OBI	LP	6,101,533.	25.40%
4	RABIU KWANKWASO	MUSA NNPP	1,496,687.	6.40%

Source (Wikipedia)



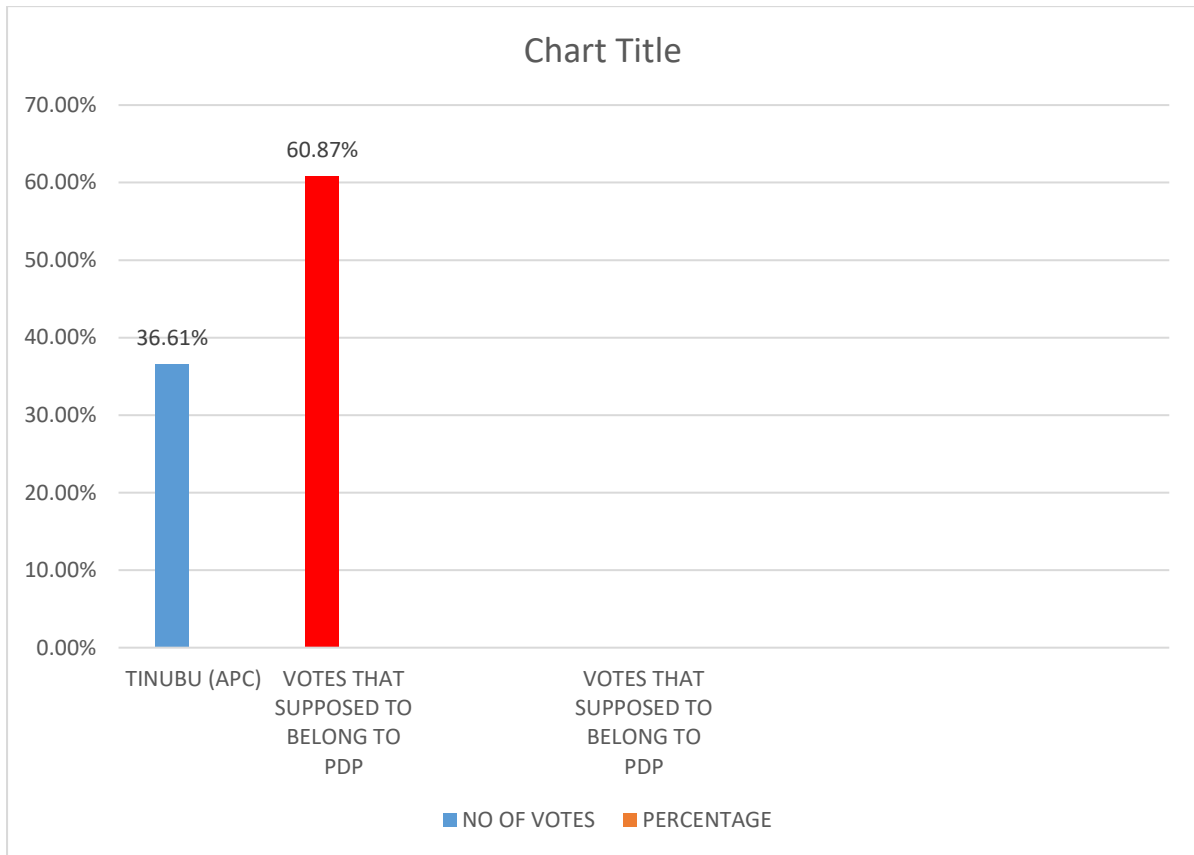
The Table above 1.0 illustrates the implication of Nigeria’s Political defection of 2023 General elections, which altered the political landscape. It shows clearly and emphatically that the sum of the vote garnered by the PDP+LP+NNPP

outnumbered that of APC. Had it been Sen. Rabiu Kwankwaso and Mr Peter Obi did not defect from the PDP, their former party would have triumphed.

Table 2.0 the total number of vote which ought to belong to PDP, if we do not experience cross-carpeting.

S/N	Name of Candidates	Party	Number Votes	of Percentage
1	ATIKU ABUBAKAR	PDP	6,984,520.	29.07%
2	PETER OBI	LP	6,101,533.	25.40%
3	RABIU KWANKWASO	MUSA NNPP	1,496,687.	6.40%
	Total		14,582,740.	60.87%

Source (Wikipedia)



The Table above 2.0 shows that PDP was the Principal victim of the high-profile defection experienced in 2023 General Elections.

Another high-profile defection experienced that influence the political landscape in Nigeria’s 2023 General elections is the cross-carpeting of the then five incumbent Southern Governors (G 5) which includes the former Governor of Rivers Nyesom Wike, the Governor of Oyo State, Seyi Makinde, the Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, the Governor of Abia state, Okezie Ikpeazu, the Governor of Enugu state ifeanyi Uhwuanyi. All these Governors collectively rejected the PDP Presidential Candidate, Ugwuanyi, Ortom and Ikpeazu switched their allegiance from PDP to LP, they campaigned, mobilized and supported the LP presidential Candidate Mr Peter Obi, while Governor Wike and Makinde

supported the APC presidential candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

Another crucial implication recorded by the Political defection of Nigeria’s 2023 general elections was that The APC Presidential candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu, was defeated in his strong hold and base (Lagos State) by the Labour Party Presidential candidate Mr Peter Obi due to religion and region factor, Christians, South- southerners and South-easterners defected from APC and PDP to LP and voted for Peter Obi.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Political defection remains a significant challenge to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study establishes that the frequency of defections in 2023 General elections season has been propelled by lack of internal democracy, fragility in party ideology, personal ambition etc. The implication of these

defections are far reaching affecting political accountability, party instability and credibility of democratic institutions. For Nigeria's democracy to mature, there should be legal reforms and stronger party structures. Strengthening Nigeria's democracy requires a deliberate effort to institutionalize ideological commitments within political parties, enforce internal democracy and implement legal reforms to discourage party defections.

Recommendations

To effectively curb the growing trend of political defection in Nigeria, the following recommendations should be put forward

- I. Electoral system and Constitutional reform which could involve adopting proportional representation systems that reduce the emphasis on individual candidates and promote party stability. Sections 68(1)(g) and 109 (1)(g) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution require urgent amendment to address the persistent abuse of the defection clause.
- II. Anti-Defection Law should be enacted to curb the executive office holders such as president, vice-president, governor and deputy governor from party switching, current constitutional provisions focus exclusively on legislators.
- III. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should ensure political parties conduct a free, fair and transparent primary elections, aggrieved party members due to manipulated primary engage in political defection.
- IV. Internal Party Democracy needs to be strengthened whereby the principle of fairness, justice, and accountability should be entrenched.

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