

## Political Defection in Nigeria: An Approach to Political Power-Based Theory

Amadu Ibrahim

Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse

Corresponding author: amaduibrahim2222@gmail.com

### Abstract

Political defections in Nigeria have become a commonplace especially in the Fourth Republic. Elected or appointed public officials find it attractive to defect from one political party to another in search of political power. The literature on political defection in the country generally emphasises on the causes of political defections, rather than on how the defection occurs or what their effects might be on the democratic system. Thus, the aim of this study is to develop a theory to explain how political defections occur. The theory, based on the available evidence, shows that defection effect syndrome has the capacity of altering the balance of power among political parties; and in order to do that, it must reach a certain critical mass. In addition, the theory indicates that the effects of a political defection or a defection effect syndrome on the various elements of the democratic system depend on the nature of political support base of the defectors which may be either an elite-supported political base or a voter-supported political base or both. In all, the effects of defection effect syndrome include altering the party system or influencing the outcomes of the elections.

**Keywords:** political defection, defection-effect-syndrome, democratic system, political-support base, balance of power

### Introduction

Political defections in Nigeria have become more frequent and prevalent especially in the Fourth Republic. Elected and appointed public officials find it attractive to defect from one political party to another in search for political power and appointments. The literature on political defection in the country generally emphasises on the causes of party defection, rather than on how it really occurs. It also says less on the effects of political defection on the individual political parties, the party system as well as the democratic system at large. Thus, various causes such as lack of clear-cut ideology among political parties, intra-party conflicts, lack of internal party democracy etc., have been adduced to be the main drivers of political defection in the country. In addition, the literature fails to give adequate attention to the different forms of political defections in the country. It only emphasises on party defections by politicians across their respective political parties. Usually, there are fewer attempts by analysts to isolate different forms of political defections engaged by politicians and voters. In fact, less attention is given to the voter political defections. In addition, the literature generally neglects the connections or relationships that

exist between the various forms of political defections. Furthermore, the relationship between political defection and the political support base of the defector politicians is virtually unexplored by the existing literature in the country.

The effects of political defection on the country's democratic system in general, and on individual political parties and party system in particular, cannot be overemphasised. 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. In this regards, political defection erodes membership and financial bases of opposition political parties. It limits the ability of opposition political parties to contribute in parliamentary debates as well as their capability to challenge unpopular public policies. It creates conflicts and fragmentations in political parties as well as amplifies monetisation of the democratic process. It also gives rise to misplacement of policy priority. Normally, in a good working democracy, governance takes over politics in terms of priority immediately after elections because the essence of the latter (politics) is to serve the

people and such a service may only be provided adequately through democratic governance. However, in Nigeria, politics very often continues to be prioritised by politicians over and above democratic governance.

This paper is an attempt to examine political power-based theory that will explain not only why a political defection occurs, but also describe how it really occurs. The paper also analyses the different forms of political defections and the relationships that exist between them in Nigeria. It identifies the political support bases of the defectors as the foundations upon which political defections are built and as the basic determinants of the effects of defections on the stability of the party system and the democratic system at large.

### **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 paper.

### **Brief History of Political Defections in Nigeria**

The first political defection that occurred in Nigeria was in 1951 when 20 members of the then National Congress of Nigeria and Cameroon, NCNC, defected to the Action Group, AG, in order to deny Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe the opportunity to and pave way for Chief Awolowo to become the Premier of the defunct Western Region. In the Second Republic, there were some political defections including those of the Adisa Oladosu, Anthony Enahoro, Richard Akinjide, S.G. Ikoku and Chief Akin Omoboriowo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who defected to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). There were also the defections of the Former Governor of Kano State, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and a Member of House of Representatives, Alhaji Sule Lamido from the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) to the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP). Nigeria's Third Republic was set up and aborted by the Babangida military junta, thus, less evidence of political defection was readily available.

The Fourth Republic, 1999 to the present, witnesses the most prevalence of political defections in the country. At the national level, a former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar has defected from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the Action Congress Nigeria (ACN), then to the All Progressives Congress (APC) and back to the PDP between 2003 and 2019. In 2013, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, 11 senators and 37 representatives defected to the APC. At the state level, several governors, former governors, deputy governors, former deputy governors, members of the State Houses of Assemblies, commissioners and important party members have defected from one political party to the other. For instance, the sitting governors of Jigawa, Bauchi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi States defected from the opposition parties to the ruling party between 2006 and 2007. In many cases, sitting governors used to defect alongside with their deputies, commissioners, members of the State Houses of Assemblies, party men and women to the other political parties. In addition, several former governors and former deputy governors defected to other political parties as well. For instance, Ikedi Ohakam, Theodore Orji, Rochas Okorocha, Achike Udenwa, Chibuike Amaechi, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa, Murtala Nyako, Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, Abdulfatah Ahmed, Aliyu Wamako, Alhaji Ibrahim Saminu Turaki, Ibrahim Shekarau, Isa Yuguda, Alhaji Mahmud Shinkafi, Ibikunle Amosun, Segun Oni, George Akume, Segun Mimiko, Yiola Omisore and Timpre Silva were all former governors that defected from their parties to other political parties in the Fourth Republic.

### **Theories of Political Defection in Nigeria**

A survey on the literature of political defections in Nigeria reveals that several theories have been developed by political scientists, political analysts and commentators to explain the causes or reasons for party defection in the country. Broadly speaking, these theories can be divided into two categories namely, the deficit theories and power-based theories. While the deficit theories envisage some lack of important features such as a clear-cut ideology, internal party democracy and adherence to the provisions of the party constitution etc., in the

political parties as the main causes or reasons for party defection; the power-based theories posit that the pursuit for political power and material resources are the major drivers of political defection in the country. The deficit theories include ideological deficit, internal party democracy deficit, and conflict theories. The power-based theories include the instrumentalist, post-colonial and political power-based theories.

### **Ideological Deficit Theory**

The proponents of this theory include Mbah (2011), Mubita (2014), Godswin (2015) and Jiddere (2015), among others. The theory views political ideology professed by political parties as the glue that holds party members together and as the compass that directs party activities, goals, manifestos and motivations. Thus, political defection arises when political ideology is thin, weak, or absent in a political party. In other words, absence or lack of ideology by parties is the main cause of political defections in Nigeria. The significance of this theory is that it depicts absence or lack of ideology as a cause of political defections and as an important feature characterising most political parties in Nigeria today. According to the theory, political parties of the First Republic e.g. the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU) as well as the AG and the NCNC had clear-cut ideologies and thus, there were fewer party defections between the periods of 1960 to 1966. The political parties of the Second Republic e.g. the NPN, NPP, UPN as well as the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), etc., were ideologically direct reincarnations of the political parties of the First Republic, and therefore, party defections were not more frequent and prevalent. The Third Republic was aborted by the military intervention, thus, no political defections were to be expected. However, the political parties of the Fourth Republic are unanimously believed to be lacking of clear-cut political ideologies, hence the prevalence of party defections. The theory gives general and historical insights about the reason of party defection in Nigeria. However, it does not explain how political defections occur and what forms they take or what effects they have on the Nigerian democratic system.

### **Internal Party Democracy-Deficit Theory**

This theory simply links political defection to lack of internal democracy in political parties in Nigeria. According to this theory, when the provisions of the party constitution are violated, or party primaries are not free and fair or some powerful party members dominate the activities of the party, the result is that a portion of members of the party may defect to another or other political parties where they expect internal party democracy to be upheld. This theory also does not explain the different types of political defection, the connections between them and their specific effects on the elements of the democratic system of the country.

### **Conflict-Based Theory**

This theory traces the sources of political defections to intra-party squabbles or conflicts which produce fragmentations and factions in the party and which make some party members to develop discontent and even defect to another or other political parties where there is a relative peace. Intra-party conflicts may be as a result of struggle for nominations, or leadership positions within the party. In some cases, a mole implanted in the party by another political party may continue to create conflicts in the party in order to keep the party fragmented and divided. Intra-party conflicts may be a result of misunderstanding among the stakeholders of the party. A good example of political defection caused by an intra-party conflict of interest was the defection of General Muhammadu Buhari from the defunct All People's Party, ANPP, to the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, in 2007 when some leaders of his party accepted to join the proposed Unity Government of the former President Umaru Musa Yar'adua.

However, this theory only stresses discontent and conflicts which are the symptoms of the struggle for power within a political party, but not the real causes of the party defection. The struggle for the control of a political party and nominations for contest for political power are the actual reasons for political defection.

### **Political Power-Based Theory**

In contrast to the ideological deficit theory which sees ideology as the glue that holds or ties members of a political party together and which

prevents them from defecting and the absence or lack of which produces party defections, the political power-based theory views the search for political power and appointments by the elite as the ultimate force that breaks down political parties and triggers defections in Nigeria. It should, however, be noted that the power-based theory does not totally rule out lack of ideology by political parties as a cause of party defection, rather, it considers the fact of sheer struggle for power by the Nigerian elite as the main cause of the defections. In fact, political parties in Nigeria, at least, in the Fourth Republic are not formed in order to pursue or promote any ideological cause, but are mere instruments for the struggle for political power. Therefore, political defections are inherently connected to a search for political power in the country.

The First and Second Republics of Nigeria were very short because they were truncated by military coups. There were fewer elections in the two periods. Therefore, it would be too premature to ascribe presence of ideology in the political parties as the only important factor that explains fewer political defections in the First and Second Republics. The PRP was one of the most ideologically imbued political parties in the Second Republic, but the party was not immune to political defections as the former governor of Kano State, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and a Member of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Sule Lamido and others whom were elected under the platform of the party defected to the NPP. The Fourth Republic witnesses several elections and longer practice of party politics from 1999 to the present so as to allow us to have adequate experiences of the prevalence and frequency of political defections and to be able to isolate their main causes and how they actually occur.

The significance of the political power-based theory is that, it does not only allow us to see the relationships between political power, elections and party defection, but also empowers us to develop some theoretical constructs about different aspects and types of political defections as well as to formulate certain assumptions that define our understanding of the subject. Thus, what the present author does, is to develop some concepts related to political defections and

relate them with the struggle for political power which is chiefly connected with elections in Nigeria and to formulate certain assumptions that may define our understanding of the party defection in the country. In other words, while the political power-based theory is only an explanation of why party defection occurs in Nigeria, the current theoretical attempt is a step forward to formulate a theory that elucidates on not only why and how political defections occur, but also accounts for their various types, their relationships to one another as well as their effects on the country's democratic system. Thus, the present theoretical attempt is embedded in the power-based explanation as a cause of political defection in Nigeria.

### **Political Power**

Political scientists are not agreed on the precise definition of power. However, power may be defined as the ability of A to change the behaviour of B to act in such a way that B may not otherwise act. Then, political power is the power exercised by political actors and institutions within a state or a political system. To some scholars, the struggle for power in Nigeria is aimed at controlling the country's vast resources (Terwase, Abdul-Talib, & Zengeni, 2014). In most constitutional democracies, political power is usually derived from the constitution. Sections 4,5, and 6 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have provided for the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Federal Government, respectively. For instance, Section 4(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides that: "The legislative powers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be vested in a National Assembly for the Federation which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives." Similar Sections of the Constitution made provisions for executive and judicial powers. In fact, Section 130(2) of the Constitution confers on the President the office of Head of State, Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation.

Political actors acquire political power through elections. In Nigeria, the most important platforms by which political actors are elected are the political parties. Thus, the subjective political power provided by the constitution is translated into objective power

that is exercised by the elected public officials acting under political parties. Political defections, therefore, occur as a result of the struggles by political parties to capture political power. Since political power emerges out of elections, defections come to be deeply and inherently connected with elections. Whether political defections occur during, before or after elections, they are inherently connected with the struggle for political power and elections. Some theories of political defections argue that defections occur either because of the lack of ideology by the political parties in Nigeria, or lack of internal democracy in the parties, or intra-party conflicts, or even as a result of Nigeria being a Post-colonial state. All these theories may be right to some extent and in some respects, but when political power is removed from the equation, none of their arguments can stand.

### Political Defections

Political defection has been defined variously by different analysts, authors and commentators. For instance, Jiddere (2015, p.173) defines it as "...leaving a political party to another by a politician as a result of discontent in his or her existing party." For Eme et al. (2014, p. 22), 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, p.9) uses different terms in reference to political defection including "party defection, cross-carpeting, party switching, floor-crossing, party hoping, canoe-jumping, party-jumping, etc." However, Amadu (2019, p.56) 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." Amadu (2019, p.57) went further to state that 'change of political allegiance' and 'the effects of such a change' are the essential attributes of a political defection. Thus, for a political defection to occur there must be a change in political allegiance from one political party to another and that change must produce

some effects on the parties involved. Thus, the definition of political defection includes defections by party members, voters, voting against party directives by the members of parliament etc. Furthermore, political defection includes mergers and political alliances because they involve a change and a shift of political allegiance to a new political party or between parties.

### Types of Political Defection

In this study, political defection is, broadly, divided into two categories namely, party defection and voter political defection. Party defection is a defection by members of a political party especially the political leaders. Voter political defection is engaged by the voters. Party defection may take different forms e.g. it may be formal or informal, principal or subsidiary. A *formal party defection* occurs when an officially registered member of a political party formally resigns his membership of the party usually by tendering his resignation letter to the relevant authorities. For instance, in their letter of defection addressed to the Senate President, David Mark, the 11 senators who defected from the PDP to the APC in 2013 wrote: "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)..." (Eme et al as cited in Daily Post Editorial, 2014). On the other hand, an *informal party defection* takes place when a defector does not formally resign from his party. He remains in the party and even claims to be a bona fide party member, but shifts his political allegiance to another political party.

He plays hostile roles in the party. In other words, an informal party defector is a hostile member of his party who shifts his political allegiance to another political party. He may try to create fragmentations, factions, conflicts and misunderstanding within his party in order to weaken it in the interest of another political party (Terwase, Yerima, Abdul-Talib, & Ibrahim, 2016). He may disseminate important information about his party to members of another political party. In fact, he may campaign against his party or even vote against it at an election. A good example of an informal party defection is voting against party directives by

members of a legislative body, e.g. a parliament or a national assembly. The actions of the former Senate President (Senator Bukola Saraki) in the Senate which had always been in direct opposition to the directives of his party (APC) between 2015 and 2019 constituted an informal party defection. Likewise, the attitude of the so-called 5G governors of the PDP namely, 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 work against the interest of their party, PDP, following the 2023 Presidential Primaries, may also amount to an informal party defection. The actions of the so-called Abubakar Kawu Baraje-led new-PDP, a faction of the PDP party leaders who withdrew their political allegiance from the Bamanga Tukur-led leadership of the party's National Working Committee in 2013 was an informal party defection.

A political defection by a politician may be termed as an *elite party defection*. An elite party defection may be either principal or minor. A *principal elite party defection* is a defection by a political actor that is so profound to cause or produce other minor or subsidiary defections within or outside his political party. Thus, where a major defection by a politician or a number of politicians may result in series of other minor party defections. The major defection may be termed as a *principal elite party defection*, while the resulting smaller series of defections may be called *minor* or *subsidiary party defections*. For instance, the defection of the 5 Governors in Nigeria from the PDP to APC in 2013 was a principal party defection. While defection of the 11 senators and 37 members of the National Assembly that followed or preceded the defection of the 5 governors and the series of defections resulting from them were minor or subsidiary party defections.

In 2022, the defection of former Governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso from the PDP to the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) was a principal elite party defection, but the defections of 5 lawmakers on the 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, who were elected on the platform of the ruling APC were subsidiary party defections. Earlier in 2022, 9 lawmakers in the Kano State House of Assembly elected under the PDP

defected to the NNPP; those defections were also subsidiary party defections having their roots in the principal elite party defection by Kwankwaso. In some cases, a principal elite party defection may occur simultaneously with the subsidiary defections. In 2006, 2007, 2018 and 2019, some state governors in Nigeria e.g., Saminu Turaki of Jigawa State, Isa Yuguda Yuguda of Bauch State, Samuel Ortom of Benue State, and Bello Matawalle of Zamfara State, respectively, defected along with most lawmakers, government officials and members of their respective parties to other political parties. These wholesome defections by the governors were also principal elite party defections, but the defections by the lawmakers and the government officials as well as the party operatives were subsidiary party defections.

A principal elite party defection largely depends on a *political support base* of a defector, which may be either elite or a voter political support base, or even both. An *elite political support base* exists where a number of prominent politicians from a particular political or electoral constituency give their political support to a particular politician or party. A *voter political support base*, on the other hands, is the political support given to a politician or a political party by voters of his political/electoral constituency. A politician may enjoy both elite and voter political support base from his constituency. Thus, the political support base of a defector is the foundation upon which his defection depends. It is very common to hear a Nigerian politician who is suspected of intending to defect to another political party, being interviewed by a journalist saying, "well, I want to consult with my supporters first before reaching a decision for defection; or I consulted with my supporters before decamping" His supporters that he is referring to, are his political support base. The ability of a principal elite party defection to result in a series of subsidiary defections or to produce some effects on the democratic system depends on the political support base defector politicians enjoy from their *political/electoral constituencies*.

The defection by a section of voters in an electoral constituency from one political party to another may be called a *voter political defection*. Voter political defections usually

follow elite defections. In other words, voters often vote for a political party controlled by the major elite in a particular electoral constituency. This happens because of the mutual and long-term interactions that take place between voters and political elite in form of monitoring and coordination of votes by the elite in a particular constituency. When the elite defect to another political party, a section of voters may defect with them or vote for them in the new party. However, a large section of voters in a particular electoral constituency may refuse to defect with or vote for the principal elite. This may be called a *hostile voter political defection*. It is common to see a situation where voters of a particular constituency vote for the ruling party for a governorship election, but defect to vote for a Presidential candidate of another political party. For instance, many voters voted for the PDP governorship candidates in their respective states during the 2015 General Elections, but defected to vote for the APC presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari.

#### **Defection Effect Syndrome and Critical Mass of Political Defections**

The concept of *defection-effect-syndrome* denotes a series of defections of politicians within a particular party or from different political parties. The series of defections can be rapid where many defections occur within a short space of time; or may be slow where the series of defections continue relatively slowly for a longer period of time. It may precede or succeed the subsidiary party defections. It is usually triggered by a principal party defection. A principal defection together with the minor defections it produces can affect the elements of a democratic system when they reach a certain critical mass.

A *critical mass of party defections* is the peak point at which defections occurring within a political party become too many that they affect the strength or ability of the party in dealing with opponent political parties. A critical mass denotes a situation when the number of political defections in a political party becomes large enough to decrease the dominance of a party in a party system. For instance, in 2012, the PDP was more powerful than the opposition parties in Nigeria. However, with the defections of 5 governors, 37 members of the House of

Representatives and 11 senators from PDP to APC in 2013, the defections within the PDP reached a critical mass that it reduced the ability of the party to deal effectively with the APC. The critical mass reached by the defection effect syndrome within the PDP affected the outcome of the 2015 General Elections in which the party lost Presidential election to the APC.

An important question is: how do we determine when a defection effect syndrome reaches a critical mass? It is, of course, not easy to determine exactly when a defection effect syndrome reaches a certain critical mass, but we can consider a point at which a political party experiences a loss of dominance as a result of defections to be a point when a defection effect syndrome reaches a certain critical mass in the party concerned. For instance, before the defections from the PDP to the APC in 2013, the PDP had 208 representatives out of a total of 360 in House of Representatives, but with the defections, the PDP's representatives were reduced to 171 and the APC's representatives increased to 172. That means that the PDP had lost dominance in the House of Representatives and the defections in PDP in the House of Representatives reached a certain critical mass to affect the activities in the House.

#### **Balance of Power and Political Parties**

The concept of balance of power denotes the power relation that exists between and among political parties. It is the distribution of political power among political parties in a particular democratic system. In this study, balance of power simply means which political party controls or dominates the major political power of the state. For instance, the PDP had been the ruling party and, therefore, dominated the political space in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015. However, the balance of power has shifted towards the APC since 2015 when the party defeated the PDP in a Presidential election. This means that balance of power shifts between political parties. A party that wields more power today may become less powerful tomorrow. In the United States, the balance of power shifts between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. In the United Kingdom, the balance of power shifts between the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Labour Party. In Nigeria since 1999, the balance

of power has shifted between PDP and APC. From 1999 to 2015, the PDP dominated the National Assembly, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, it dominated

the Presidential elections by being the ruling party and it has more state governors than the opposition parties. Table 1 below displays the number of senators across political parties:

**Table 1: Number of Senators Across Political Parties (1999-2023)**

Senate (1999-2023)	Political Parties	Number of Senator	Percentage	Ruling Party	Main Opposition Parties
5 <sup>th</sup> Senate (1999-2003)	PDP	62	57	PDP	APP
	Opposition Parties	47	43		
	Total	109	100		
6 <sup>th</sup> Senate (2003-2011)	PDP	76	70	PDP	ANPP
	Opposition Parties	33	30		
	Total	109	100		
7 <sup>th</sup> Senate (2011-2015)	PDP	70	69	PDP	APC
	Opposition Parties	32	31		
	Total	102	100		
8 <sup>th</sup> Senate (2015-2019)	APC	67	61	APC	PDP
	Opposition Parties (PDP)	40	37		
	Vacant	2	2		
	Total	109	100		
9 <sup>th</sup> Senate (2019-2023)	APC	66	62	APC	PDP
	Opposition Parties	41	38		
	Vacant	2	2		
	Total	107	100		

**Source: Independent National Electoral Commission, Report of Activities (January 2006 - December 2003).**

Table 1 above presents the number of senators political parties have in the Nigerian Senate from 1999 to 2023. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Senate (1999-2003), the PDP had 62 senators out of a total of 109, representing 57 percent. The opposition political parties (Alliance for Democracy and All Peoples Party), had 47 senators representing 43 percent. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Senate, the PDP had 76 senators out of a total of 109, representing 70 percent. All the opposition parties had 33 senators representing 30 percent. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Senate, the PDP had 70 senators, amounting to 69 percent, and all the opposition parties had 32 senators amounting to 31 percent. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Senate, the PDP had 67 senators out of a total of 109, equivalent to 61 percent, and the opposition parties had 40 senators, equivalent to

37. There were two vacant senate seat, which were equivalent to 2 percent. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Senate (2019-2023), the APC had 66 senators out of a total of 109, representing 62 percent, while all the opposition parties, including the PDP, had 41 senators representing 38 percent. There were two vacant seats, representing 2 percent.

The implication of Table 1 above is that the balance of power lied with PDP from 1999 to 2015 and the party dominated the political power in the Senate within the period. However, the balance of power had shifted from the PDP to APC under the 9<sup>th</sup> Senate. Thus, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Senate, the balance of power lied with APC and the party has dominated the Senate between 2015 and 2023.

It should, however, be noted that the figures



in Table 1 represent the number of senator political parties had following the general elections, but there were minor changes as a result of political defections. For instance, some senators of an opposition political party, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), had defected to the ruling party, PDP, between 1999 and 2003. Also in 2013, 11 PDP senators defected to the

APC, and that resulted in the PDP having slightly over 60 senators and 43 for the APC.

The same scenario is obtainable in the House of Representatives. Table 2 below shows the number of Members of House of Representatives across political parties between 1999 and 2023.

**Table 2: Number of Members of House of Representatives Across Political Parties (1999-2023)**

House of Representatives (1999-2023)	Political Parties	Number of Representatives	Percentage	Ruling Party	Main Opposition Parties
5 <sup>th</sup> House of Representatives (1999-2003)	PDP	214	60	PDP	APP
	Opposition Parties	145	40		
	Total	359	100		
6 <sup>th</sup> House of Representatives (2003-2011)	PDP	222	62	PDP	ANPP
	Opposition Parties	138	38		
	Total	360	100		
7 <sup>th</sup> House of Representatives (2011-2015)	PDP	208	58	PDP	APC
	Opposition Parties	152	42		
	Total				
8 <sup>th</sup> House of Representatives (2015-2019)	APC	212	60	APC	PDP
	Opposition Parties	143	40		
	Total	355	100		
9 <sup>th</sup> House of Representatives (2019-2023)	APC	214	59	APC	PDP
	Opposition Parties	146	41		
	Total	360	100		

**Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).**

Table 2 above presents the number of legislators political parties have in the Nigerian House of Representatives from 1999 to 2023. In the 5th House of Representatives (1999-2003), the PDP had 214 representatives out of a total of 359, representing 60 percent. The opposition political parties (Alliance for Democracy and APP), had 145 representatives representing 40 percent. In the 6th Senate, the PDP had 222 out of a total of 360, representing 62 percent. All the opposition parties had 138 representatives representing 38 percent. In the 7th House of Representatives, the PDP had 208 representatives, amounting to 58 percent, and all the opposition parties had 152 representatives amounting to 42 percent. In the 8th House of Representatives, the PDP had 212 representatives out of a total of 355, equivalent to 60 percent, and the opposition parties had 143 representatives, equivalent to 40. In the 9th House of Representatives (2019-2023), the APC had 214 representatives out of a total of 360, representing 59 percent, while all the

opposition parties, including the PDP, had 146 representatives representing 41 percent.

The implication of Table 2 above is that the balance of power lied with PDP from 1999 to 2013 and the party dominated the political power in the House of Representatives within the same period. However, the balance of power had shifted from the PDP to APC in 2013 as a result of the defection of 37 PDP representatives to the APC. Thus, from 2013, through the 9th House of Representatives, the balance of power lied with APC and the party has dominated the Senate between 2013 and 2023.

Thus, it should be noted that the figures in Table 2 represented the number of representatives by political parties following the general elections. The figures changed as a result of political defections especially in 2013.

Shifts in the balance of power between political parties can also be noticed in the number of votes political parties won in the general elections from 1999 to 2023; or in the number of state governments controlled by

political parties. For instance, in the 2003 Presidential Election, the PDP won 24,456,140 votes, representing 62 percent of the 39,480,489 total valid votes. All the 19 opposition parties that participated in the election won 15,024,349 votes, representing 38 percent.

### **When and How Do Political Defections Occur in Nigeria?**

In Nigeria, political defections take place either before, during or after the general elections. However, defections tend to be more frequent and propound before and at the eve of the general elections. This is because defections are strongly connected to the search for political power and the authoritative allocations of elective offices which are made through elections. The potential defectors negotiate for the nomination forms and political appointments with the stakeholders of the new party they wish to defect to before the elections. For instance, the defection of the former Governor Ibrahim Saminu Turaki along with most officials of his government from the ANPP to PDP in 2006 took place before the 2007 general elections. Likewise, the defections of the five PDP governors to the APC in 2013 were before the 2015 general elections. In addition, the defection of the three APC governors namely Samuel Ortom, Abdulfah Ahmed and Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso (then a former governor) to the PDP in 2018 was in anticipation of the 2019 general elections. Nevertheless, there are few occasions when defections occur after elections. This usually happens when a defector wins an election under an opposition party or loses in the election. In the first instance, the defector often defects to a ruling party in order to keep his office away from interference by the party in power at the national or state levels; in the latter case, the defector decamps to a party that wins in the elections in order to share in the office spoils. A good example where a defector defects to another political party after the election was the defection of many members of the PDP to APC in Jigawa State after the 2015 General elections. As it has been mentioned above, political defections can occur during the time of the elections. In 2015, the former Deputy Governor of Jigawa State, Alhaji Ahmed Mahmud, defected from the PDP to the APC after the

Presidential election, but before the Governorship election.

Thus, whether political defections occur before, during or after elections in Nigeria, the major arguments of this theory are that, firstly, defections are intrinsically, inherently and closely connected to elections and therefore, defections occur mainly at the eve of, during or immediately after elections. Secondly, the search for political power is the major factor that causes the defections. Political power is, here, viewed to be divided into subjective and objective. *Subjective political power* specified by the constitution is translated through elections into *objective political power*, which is exercised by and which passes between political parties. Thus, the search for objective political power by political parties is what produces defections. Thirdly, political defections, especially, the defection effect syndrome, when predicated upon a strong electoral support base, can alter the elements of a democratic system which include the government itself, political parties or party system, elections and pattern of voter participation etc.

A political defection may begin in a political party when some members of that party are out rightly denied nominations for political offices or when some party members lose in the party primaries and feel that they cannot continue without contesting or without a promise of political appointments after winning the elections by the party in question. Defections may occur out of a discontent or a conflict which arises when the activities of the party are dominated by some vested interests in the party. In some cases, political defections may occur at the end of the term of office of a potential defector. A good example was the defection of the former Governor Ibrahim Saminu Turaki from the All People's Party, APP, which was the ruling party, to the opposition party, the People's Democratic Party, PDP, at the end of his second term of office in 2006; or where an elected official decides to defect from an opposition political party to a ruling in order to keep his office from interference by the incumbent party at the national or state level. A good example was the defection of the former governor of Bauchi State, Alhaji Isa Yuguda who won an election under the platform of the All Nigeria

Peoples Party (ANPP), but defected to the ruling PDP, which then was the national party. In addition, members of a political party may defect to another party that wins an election after being defeated at the polls. In Jigawa State, a large number of members of the PDP defected to the APC after they lost at the 2015 general elections.

A potential defector usually begins by mobilising his political support base and negotiating on the distribution of nomination forms or political appointments with the elite of the new political party that he and his support base intend to defect to. On completion of the political negotiations or bargains, a potential defector often defects along with his followers who agree to follow him to the new political party (Terwase, Abdul-Talib, Wahid, Puldu, Siben, Adesina, & Godwin, 2017). On certain occasions, some sections of the powerful elite in a political party may intend to defect to another or other political parties. In such cases, the political defection that occurs may be important and big enough to trigger a series of other minor defections from the political party or from other political parties. The main political defection is the *principal political defection*, while the minor defections are the *subsidiary political defections*. Where a principal political defection produces rapidly a number of minor defections, a condition known as a *defection effect syndrome* may emerge. A defection effect syndrome depicts a situation of rapid losses by a political party of its members as a result of subsidiary defections triggered by a principal elite defection. Where a defection effect syndrome is large enough, it reaches to a certain level, a peak or point known as the *critical mass of political defections* that makes it become capable of altering the balance of power among the political parties or influencing the electoral outcomes. For instance, the defection of 5 governors from the ruling PDP to the then opposition All Progressives Congress, APC, in 2013 is a principal political defection that produced the defections of 11 senators and 37 Members of the House of Representatives as the subsidiary defections culminating into a defection effect syndrome that resulted in the defeat of the PDP in the 2015 Presidential election.

However, it should be noted that a defection

effect syndrome reaches a critical mass and makes meaningful impacts on the democratic system only when the potential defectors have and maintain large and strong political support bases. Thus, a large and strong political support base is sine qua non for the principal defection to produce subsidiary defections, for the emergence of a defection effect syndrome and for the latter to be capable of altering the elements in the democratic system. The political support of a defector derives from the elite support base and voter support base in his electoral constituency. Where a potential defector commands the support of both political bases (e.g. elite and voter support bases) his defection to a new political party may be capable of being impactful. Nevertheless, there are instances where a defector only commands either the support of the elite or voters in his constituency. In such cases, the relative effect of political defection by a defector depends on the strength of either of the two kinds of the political support base. But, there is a close relationship between both forms of political support bases. For instance, the elite support base largely derives its strength from a voter support base since where there are no voters, the elite loses its essence.

### **Effects of Political Defections on the Nigerian Democratic System**

In this study, the effects of political defection are discussed based on the following two sub-headings:

1. Effects of political defection, generally, on the Nigerian democratic system;
2. Effects of defection effect syndrome on the particular elements of the democratic system.

### **General Effects of Political Defection on the Democratic System in Nigeria**

Political defection has some general effects on the Nigerian democratic system as a whole. Firstly, political defection creates a tendency towards a one-party state where the ruling party dominates the democratic system almost completely. As it has already been shown in Tables 1 and 2 above, the ruling party which produces the President and most of the state governors, as well as dominates both Houses of the National Assembly, enjoys the privilege to

stifle opposition political parties and make them nominal and ineffective. As a result of the dominance of the ruling party, opposition political parties lack the capacity to actively oppose unpopular public policies and or even to engage the incumbent party in important parliamentary debates.

Secondly, political defection promotes corrupt practices and misplacement of policy priority in Nigeria. Corrupt politicians from opposition political parties defect to the ruling party in order to escapes legal actions against them. As a result of the defections of different political actors who only care for political power and their selfish interests to the ruling party, scarce public resources are expended on trivial issues rather than on important matters that can satisfy general needs of the people. For instance, experience has shown that more resources are spent on governance in Nigeria than on developmental projects. Thirdly, political defection breeds instability in the party system due to fragmentations and factions within political parties. From 1999 to 2003, there were three main political parties in Nigeria namely, PDP, AD, and APP. From 2003 to 2011, the major political parties in the country were the PDP, ANPP, CPC and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). By 2015, only the PDP survived as a main political party. The ACN, AD, APP, ANPP, and all died along. From 2015 to 2023, the main political parties in Nigeria are the APC, PDP, NNPP and Labour Party (LP). However, it is not certain whether the APC can survive beyond the 2023 General Elections as a national party if it loses the Presidential Election.

Finally, political defections to a ruling party may create an informal party defection in the party. Defectors from different political party to a ruling party come along with their different backgrounds and interests which may be enormous enough to work against the policies of the incumbent party. When the various interests of the defectors are large enough and disharmonious, they can act against the policies of the ruling party by producing what may be known as a *saturation effect*. A saturation effect creates conflict within a government and even makes it lose direction. For instance, since 2015, President Buhari continues to encourage and receive defectors from different political parties to the APC. Those defections into the

APC produced a saturation effect which affected the performance of the party during the second tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari (Terwase, Abdul-Talib, & Zengeni, 2015). In addition, defection effect syndrome may alter the political support base of the defectors by expanding it. For example, several party elites from the APC defected to join Kwankwaso in the NNPP and Kwankwaso's voter support base has expanded as it was reflected in the outcome of the 2023 General Elections. In Nigeria, political defections maintain a de facto two-party system although the country constitutionally operates a multi-party system.

### Conclusion

The prevalence and frequency of political defections especially in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic constitutes a source of concern. In the literature, scholars and analysts have put forward various theories as explanations of the causes of party defection in the country. However, less attention has been accorded to how the defections occur, the various form they take, the relationships between one form and another and their effects on the democratic system. Thus, the present study made an attempt at developing an alternative theory of political defection in Nigeria that describes not only how defections occur but also explains their effects on the various elements of the country's democratic system. The attempted theory argues that political defection is a mass political behaviour that largely depends on the defector's political support base which consists of both elite and voter support bases. It also develops a number of theoretical constructs such as the concepts of defection effect syndrome, balance of power, principal elite and subsidiary party defection, formal and informal party defections, electoral constituencies and elements of democratic system etc., and analyses them in connection with one another and the inherent struggle for political power by political parties which is assumed to be the major reason or cause of political defections in the country. The attempted theory concludes by a discussion of the effects of political defection on the elements of the democratic system in the country from 1999 to 2023.

## References

- Amadu, I. (2019). Political defection in Nigeria: An analysis of causes and its effects on democratic governance, *Jigawa Journal of Politics*, Vol.2, No.2, 53-76.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended).
- Daily Post Editorial (2014), Incessant defection among politicians worries lawyers, Daily Post, Monday, February 17, p.18.
- Dankasa, J. (2015), Developing a theory in academic research: A review of experts' advice, *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, September 2015: DOI: 10.1633/JISTaP.2015.3.3.4
- Eme and et al. (2015), The legal/constitution basis of political party defection in Nigeria, *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, Vol. 3, No. 11, July 2014.
- Godswin, U.L. (2015) Political nomadism and its implications on political development in Nigeria: A critical analysis, *International Journal of Asian and African Studies*,9,75-86.
- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)(1999-2023)
- Jiddere, A.J. (2015) The politics of party defection, cross-carpeting and democratic process in Nigeria: In Mohammed H. (Eds) (2015) *The patterns and dynamics of party politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, Dutse: Department of Political Science, Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa State.
- Malthora, G.C. (2005). Anti-defection law in India and the Commonwealth, New Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co. Pvt Ltd.
- Mbah, P. (2011) Party defection and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, 1999-2009, *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.2, No.2.3 Quarte.
- Mubita, C. (2014). Defections, opportunism and roller-coaster politics, Namibian Sun, December 3, Retrieved from
- Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Zengeni, K. T., (2015). Conflict resolution: The truncated zoning arrangement and the Buhari political tsunami in Nigeria. *Journal of Government and Politics*, 6(2), 248-259.
- Terwase, I. T., Yerima, H. M., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Ibrahim, M. B. (2016). The Issues behind Agitations, Conflict and War: A Case of Nigeria. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(7), 17-21.
- Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., Wahid, R., Puldu, G. S., Siben, N. E., Adesina, O. S., & Godwin, D. (2017). Conflict Resolution: Applying the Zoning Formula Model to Resolve Biafra Agitation. *Journal of Asian Review of Public Affairs and Policy*, 2(1)
- Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Zengeni, K. T. (2014). Nigeria, Africa's largest economy: International business perspective. *International Journal of Management Sciences*, 3(7), 534-543.