

## **POLITICAL DEFECTIONS AND THE EROSION OF CHECKS AND BALANCES IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the impact of political defections on the erosion of institutional checks and balances in Nigeria's democratic system. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, data were sourced from verified instruments including newspaper articles (Premium Times, Daily Trust), legal documents (1999 Constitution, Ifedayo Abegunde v. Ondo State House of Assembly), judicial reports, INEC briefings, National Assembly Hansards, and publications by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and International Republican Institute (IRI). Findings reveal that political defections are largely opportunistic, often driven by personal ambition and access to power rather than ideological conviction. Mass defections particularly into the ruling party undermine legislative oversight, collapse opposition strength, and tilt power disproportionately in favor of the executive. Furthermore, judicial inconsistency in enforcing anti-defection laws and INEC's limited enforcement capacity have created a culture of impunity. The complicity of party structures and weak institutional safeguards have normalized defection as a political strategy, eroding public trust in democratic accountability. The study recommends constitutional reform to clarify and enforce anti-defection provisions, empower INEC, and promote ideological discipline within political parties. Enhanced civic education and consistent judicial interpretation are also critical to restoring institutional integrity. Overall, unchecked political defections pose a serious threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation, and necessitate urgent structural and legal interventions.

**Keywords:** political defection, party switching, legislative oversight, judicial inconsistency, INEC, Nigeria, democratic erosion, institutional accountability

### **Introduction**

Political defections in Nigeria have become a recurrent phenomenon, shaping the structure and effectiveness of democratic governance. Defection, often referred to as "cross-carpeting," occurs when elected political officials switch allegiance from one political party to another, sometimes multiple times within a single term. This action has far-reaching consequences for Nigeria's nascent democracy, particularly in the distortion of party ideologies and the weakening of institutional checks and balances. In theory, democracy thrives on the separation of powers

and political accountability. However, persistent political defections threaten this equilibrium (Okoli & Iortyer, 2020).

One major concern is that defections are rarely driven by ideological differences but rather by personal ambitions, survival instincts, and political bargains. Politicians often defect to align with ruling parties at the national or state level in order to access resources, shield themselves from prosecution, or remain politically relevant. This undermines the purpose of multi-party democracy and compromises the effectiveness of opposition parties, which are crucial for providing alternative perspectives and holding the ruling party accountable (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2019).

The Nigerian Constitution acknowledges the right to freedom of association; however, Section 68(g) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) attempts to regulate defections by mandating that lawmakers vacate their seats if they defect without a division in their party. Despite this provision, courts have inconsistently enforced it, and political elites have exploited loopholes. This legislative inconsistency creates ambiguity and encourages impunity among elected officials (Okoosi-Simbine, 2021). Thus, legal and institutional frameworks have proven inadequate in checking the trend.

Checks and balances function effectively in a democracy when institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, and executive operate independently and monitor one another. But when a critical mass of lawmakers or governors defect to the ruling party, institutional independence becomes compromised. This leads to the erosion of legislative oversight and judicial impartiality, resulting in the emergence of hegemonic rule (Adeosun & Eze, 2021). Without vibrant opposition, government decisions often go unchallenged, and accountability mechanisms are weakened.

Moreover, the growing trend of defections erode public trust in political parties and governance. Citizens witness politicians oscillate between parties without regard to manifestoes or public interest, leading to political apathy and declining voter turnout. The lack of ideological clarity and party discipline undermines civic education and renders the electorate politically disillusioned (Ibietan & Joshua, 2022). Defections, in this context, become a symptom of a deeper malaise in Nigeria's political culture.

Historically, Nigeria's political system has been characterized by weak party structures and the personalization of power. From the First Republic to the Fourth Republic, party loyalty has been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. The institutionalization of defection has therefore become embedded in Nigeria's political psyche, normalizing betrayal and weakening democratic norms (Ibrahim, 2023). Thus, the consequences of unchecked defections go beyond legislative dislocation; they affect the entire democratic architecture. Furthermore, the role of the judiciary in addressing unlawful defections has been fraught with contradictions. While courts occasionally declare defectors seats vacant, there is no uniform application of legal principles. The effectiveness of legal deterrent has decreased because of political influence, court delays, and ineffectiveness in enforcement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Nwabueze & Alade, 2023). Therefore, the judiciary, as an

important element of a check on the balance of power, becomes susceptible to the influence of a realignment of the political forces.

This paper critically looks at the connection between political defections and the compromise of checks and balances in Nigeria. The qualitative study employs the use of media reports, court cases, constitutional measurements, and political commentaries to examine how repeated defections twist the issues of democratic outcomes. Dealing with the current events, it provides suggestions for overcoming the anti-democratic impacts of this tendency and solidifying democratic institutions in Nigeria.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Political Defection and Party Ideology in Nigeria**

Defection in politicking has become an art or a tactic that politician play in keeping their power and avoiding checks and gaining patronage resources in Nigeria. The number of politicians entering and leaving political parties on the grounds of ideological differences makes one suspect that there is a systemic weakness in the ideology of political parties as well as discipline in the Nigerian political system. An absence of rather steady ideological values in the Nigerian political parties, Ayeni and Taiwo (2020) note, helps the dominant ideology of opportunistic defections. This has developed a culture of fluidity of party membership and this membership is mostly instrumental but not based on values. Consequently, the color of electoral competition dissipates, and party loyalty becomes transaction-based as against programmatic party loyalty.

Nigeria-Most political parties in Nigeria are parties of conquest but not parties of ideology. The two leading parties, All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) have on numerous occasions interchanged without necessarily altering in terms of policies and principles. According to Abdu and Liman, (2021), personalisation of power in parties promotes defection in the event of a fallout between the supposed political side of the godfathers, or loss of power among the political godfathers. Institutional structures are watered down by this personalization and the parties become easy targets of elite capture. As a result, political parties can only be reduced to a mere electoral machine by which people struggle over power not as an agent of service delivery to the people or transformation of the nation.

During campaigns, we come across political ideology but this is hardly portrayed in real-life governance. The parties can have an agenda of social welfare, anti-corruption, or economic reforms but once they get them in power then they drop the pretence and forget the agenda. This gap creates an inability to distinguish between one and the other in terms of policy orientation, which additionally justifies defection as a survival tactic. Ibrahim and Hassan (2023) make it clear that in this kind of setting, politics is more of a matter of expediency than inspired by a sense of principle. With the falling party ideology, the electorate does not have much of a reason to vote with the parties on a party-by-party basis.

Failure of the political parties to honour their manifestos is yet another serious reason why mass defections happen. In case parties cannot achieve what has been proclaimed or provide inner democracy, aggrieved party members turn to other battling parties in which they are more capable of exercising power. According to

Nkwachukwu (2022), the majority of the parties do not carry out credible primaries, and aggrieved aspirants usually renege in protest. Although these defections appear to be personal, they bring to light a greater problem of trust and the responsibilities of party systems. Eventually, the internal strength of the parties is compromised, and political uncertainty is amplified at all government levels.

In addition, political parties have no internal structures that can be used to punish or censure defectors. On many occasions, defectors even get rewards of appointment or automatic tickets in their new parties. Such lenient action will be a green signal to the rest to act likewise causing a domino effect. Omotola and Agbaje (2021) state that defection has now become an order of the day in the political system of Nigeria. The political parties can therefore not enforce discipline or command loyalty since leaders in most instances are compromised or those in the know. The long-term consequence is weakening the democratic culture and trust in institutions.

The party system of Nigeria has on several occasions been questioned by the media and civil society as weakened. According to public commentators, parties will be easily manipulated and sold out in case there is a lack of ideology. In this understanding political defection does not solely lie in the choice of a single individual, but as a collective failure of party organisation and aspiration. According to Aina (2020), the parties will have to invest in civic education, grassroots organizing, and policy formulation with the view of creating a sustainable ideological foundation. In the absence of such reform, defections will persist to make governance unstable and corrupt the integrity of the electoral process.

Moreover, defections prejudice the electoral mandate accorded to voters. A decision by politicians to change parties after elections is tantamount to betraying the electorate who voted them in due to the party and its promises. According to Okoh (2023), this is a weakness of representative democracy and it creates fuzziness over accountability. When a legislator switches sides and sides with the governing party, there are fewer voices of opposition, and the checking process becomes less effective. Consequently, defection cannot simply be about the individual or the partisan concerns rather it is about the quality of governance and the strength of democracy in Nigeria.

Concluding, it becomes clear that political defection is one of the marks of the ideological vacuum within the frame of the Nigerian political system. It is propped by the elite selfishness, poor institutions, and unstructured parties which are not visionary, lacking discipline. Defection will keep happening as long as parties do not reform themselves internally, develop different ideology-based organizations, and embrace democratic principles. The result is an unstable democracy in which institutional controls and representation are more often than not corrupted.

### **Checks and Balances in Democratic Governance**

One of the core values of democratic regimes is checks and balances so that authority is spread among the judiciary, the executive, and the legislature so as to eradicate dictatorship. Ideally, every arm of government is supposed to carry out its operations independently and check the other arms. According to Adegboruwa and Bello (2021), checks and balances refer to the institutional makeup mechanism through which governance is controlled,

the minimization of faults, and the elimination of power abuse. In practice, however, the Nigerian context often deviates from this principle due to political interference and elite domination. This has allowed one arm, typically the executive, to overpower the others.

The Nigerian presidential system was modeled after the U.S. system, where the legislature and judiciary act as strong counterweights to the executive. However, in Nigeria, mass defections to the ruling party often give the executive arm undue legislative support, thereby eroding effective oversight. Udoma and Okafor (2022) observe that legislative independence is compromised when the majority in parliament consists of defectors seeking alignment with the presidency. This undermines robust debates, reduces opposition capacity, and turns the legislature into a rubber-stamp institution. Without genuine opposition, executive excesses go unchecked.

A key component of checks and balances is the ability of the legislature to impeach or censure the executive. In Nigeria, however, such mechanisms are rarely applied due to party loyalty or fear of retribution. The 2021 National Assembly's reluctance to summon or investigate ministers accused of corruption illustrates this failure. Often, lawmakers prioritize political loyalty over national interest, especially when they owe their re-election prospects to the executive. This symbiotic relationship compromises the watchdog role of the legislature. Edeh and Samuel (2021) describe this as "democratic complicity," where institutions choose political survival over constitutional duty.

The judiciary, ideally, should function as the impartial arbiter of constitutional disputes and abuse of power. Unfortunately, its independence is frequently threatened by political appointments, delayed judgments, and selective rulings. In high-profile defection cases, such as *PDP v. Bello Matawalle*, courts have avoided making clear pronouncements, allowing political calculations to influence justice. Nwankwo and Bakare (2023) argue that judicial passivity has emboldened executive overreach. In such cases, the balance intended by separation of powers becomes tilted, and the judiciary becomes an accomplice to democratic erosion.

The other issue is the lack of strong institutional control in the bureaucracy. Other agencies such as the ICPC and EFCC are used most of the time at the behest of the executive to harass some opposition figures and overlook wrongdoings by members of the opposite party. This forms a two-system and it makes accountability apparatuses like a tooth. Regulatory bodies need to be functioning independently and without bias in an operating democracy. Olanrewaju (2022) demands that these institutions should have constitutional shields to cushion against the manipulation skills of the executive.

It is seen that political defections also undermine the principle of checks and balances by concentrating power on one party or political bloc. Oversight functions are poor when the major opposition figures defect to the ruling party and the debates in the parliament are one-sided. According to Madu and Jibril (2022), a de facto one-party state would occur in a multi-party system under a system of political power integration into a dominant party. This kills the competition in the democracy and allows executive arbitrariness, as the opposition voices are either suppressed or bought out.

The civil society and the media have no formal role, yet their position in ensuring checks and balances is paramount. External pressure over government behavior is in the form of investigative journalism, street action as well as citizen activism. Nevertheless, these actors are also subjected to oppression and intimidation especially when they rise against influential individuals. The example of the arrest of journalists who investigated the case of corruption in the legislative chamber of 2021 reveals how unacceptable dissent was becoming. In circumstances in which formal and informal checks are compromised, governance will be less transparent and citizens will no longer trust in the system. This brings a legitimacy crisis that discredits the democratic establishment.

Finally, good checks and balances do not only rely on constitutional specifications alone, they also entail a culture of accountability, political maturity and institutional integrity. The degradation of this culture is caused by political defections which easily encourage conformity, diminish pluralism and centralization. To make democracy flourish in Nigeria there are moves to guard institutional autonomy, to invoke oversight requirements, and to the intruding wave of executive control backed by partisan apostasy.

### **Legal and Institutional Frameworks Regulating Defections**

The rule of law in Nigeria tries to govern political defection by stipulating it in the constitution, mainly section 68(1) (g) of the 1999 constitution. This section requires that when a legislator decamps in a party under which he/she is elected, he/she has to lose his/her seat unless the defection is brought about by a split in the party. The exercise is aimed at deterring political opportunism, but the application of this law has been irregular. According to Oladeji (2022), the judiciary has taken different meanings of the concept of defection and the ambiguity in legal terms has been used by politicians to create opportunities to defect. The loophole has made the provision ineffective to a great degree.

Judicial decisions on cases of defection have been conflicting. In the case of Ifedayo Abegunde vs. The Supreme Court supported this as an elected official was not able to change parties without acceptable cause according to the Ondo State House of Assembly. But thereafter the facts have not been so clear-cut and the decisions, particularly regarding governors. As an example, the defection of Governor Bello Matawalle between PDP and APC did not lead to his impeachment despite the outrage of the society and the cases brought to the courts. Ezeani and Onuoha (2023) believe that query and reluctance in imposing constitutional punishment on defectors systematically empower defectors and debilitate legal power. The non-binding precedent of the governors has, in particular, undermined the deterrence.

It has also been the mandate of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure electoral integrity, yet, none of the defection-related cases have been dealt with decisively. The Commission frequently claims it lacks the legal power to declare seats vacant without judicial pronouncement. This position allows many defectors to continue holding office without consequences. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (2022), INEC's passive stance has contributed to the perception that defection is politically acceptable. Until the Commission is given clearer enforcement authority, or until the judiciary becomes bolder, legal provisions against defection will remain symbolic.

The National Assembly has shown little interest in reforming defection laws, likely due to the prevalence of defectors within its own ranks. Proposals for electoral reforms or amendments to the defection clause have either been shelved or diluted. Okonkwo and Ibeh (2021) note that self-preservation overrides legislative accountability, making reform efforts difficult. Lawmakers who benefit from defections are unlikely to legislate against their interests. This legislative inertia further institutionalizes political defection and weakens Nigeria's democratic framework.

Moreover, political parties themselves have not developed strong internal mechanisms to curb defections. Party constitutions often lack enforceable sanctions for erring members, and disciplinary committees are either non-existent or ineffective. In some cases, defectors are even rewarded with higher positions or candidacies in their new parties. Adebisi and Tanko (2020) argue that political elites manipulate party structures to secure personal advantage, making it hard to enforce discipline. Parties that lack internal systems of accountability cannot prevent defection and establish long-term loyalty among the members.

There have been persistent calls by the Civil Society Organizations to overhaul the judicial system and the election process to solve the increasing problem of defection. Lobby groups like SERAP and Yiaga Africa have pressed hard to refine the understanding of the meaning of political division and punishable sanctions. This is not enough as a substantial reform is hard to achieve. Legal instruments remain behind political practices until the pressure applied by the citizens is implemented into policy. This disconnect between the law and political action is one of the stimuli to impunity, and the undoing of democratic institutions.

In a nutshell, Nigeria has legal frameworks to deal with defection, but institutional ability and political will fail to enforce them. Both the judiciary and INEC have structural and political limitations and parties and legislators do not have an interest in developing reforms. This gives a loose climate of political opportunism whereby laws are made, but not practiced. The reinforcement of legal enforcement, the amendment of the constitutional loopholes as well as the empowerment of INEC and the courts play an important role in nursing back life into accountability in the political process in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study will use a qualitative content analysis approach and use chosen text materials to reflect on the influence of political defections on institutional checks and balances in Nigeria. Implication of defection practices in political and legal systems can be very well understood with the help of the methods that use approximate interpretation and thematic analysis rather than numbers.

The types of sources that were relied upon during this study were selected on a purposeful selection basis. They are the newspaper reports of the Daily Trust and Premium Times of 2019-2024 on the high-stake defections and its implications. The legal basis of evaluating the constitutionality of defections lies in the Constitution of Nigeria of 1999 (as amended), as well as in Section 68(1) (g) in particular.



The Supreme Court judgment in Ifedayo Abegunde v. Ondo State House of Assembly (2015) is reviewed to understand judicial interpretation of defection laws. Reports from the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) offer expert analysis on party systems and governance. Editorials from The Guardian Nigeria (2020–2024), selected National Assembly Hansards from 2020 to 2023, and reports by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are analyzed to examine institutional responses. These sources were studied thematically to identify how political defections contribute to the weakening of legislative oversight, judicial independence, and political accountability in Nigeria.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Documented Frequency of Political Defections**

Evidence from media reports shows a noticeable increase in defections leading up to general elections. *Premium Times* and *Daily Trust* have both tracked high-profile defections, especially of state governors, legislators, and political appointees. For example, *Premium Times* (November 2020) reported on the defection of Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi State from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC). In May 2021, *Daily Trust* confirmed a similar move by Governor Ben Ayade of Cross River. These cases were not isolated; similar reports followed regarding Governor Bello Matawalle of Zamfara in June 2021.

Name	Position	From Party	To Party	Source
David Umahi	Governor (Ebonyi)	PDP	APC	<i>Premium Times</i> , Nov. 2020
Ben Ayade	Governor (Cross River)	PDP	APC	<i>Daily Trust</i> , May 2021
Bello Matawalle	Governor (Zamfara)	PDP	APC	<i>Vanguard</i> , June 2021
Femi Fani-Kayode	Former Aviation Min.	PDP	APC	<i>The Guardian Nigeria</i> , Sept. 2021
Godswill Akpabio	Senator (Akwa Ibom)	PDP	APC	<i>Premium Times</i> , Aug. 2018; Confirmed 2019–24

These defections often happened without any legal challenge or constitutional penalty, despite the stipulations of Section 68(1) (g) of the 1999 Constitution.

**Constitutional Provision vs. Legislative Practice**

Section 68(1) (g) of the Nigerian Constitution states that: “A member of the Senate or the House of Representatives shall vacate his seat if... he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which that House was elected... unless there is a division in his political party.”

Despite this clear clause, Hansard records from the House of Representatives between 2020 and 2023 show that lawmakers who defected were not subjected to scrutiny or required to vacate their seats. For instance, on June 22, 2022, Hon. Yakubu Barde (Kaduna) announced his defection during plenary, and the House merely acknowledged his letter without debate, as seen in the plenary transcript made available by *OrderPaper Nigeria*.

This routine of simply "noting" letters of defection, without questioning their constitutionality has been documented in numerous sessions. As a result, the constitutional requirement has largely become symbolic, lacking enforcement.

### **Judicial Interpretation and Enforcement Gap**

The Supreme Court ruling in *Ifedayo Abegunde v. Ondo State House of Assembly* (2015) remains one of the few clear judicial interpretations of defection rules. In this case, the court ruled that a legislator who defects without proving a genuine division within their party must vacate their seat. However, judicial responses in subsequent defection cases have been more ambiguous.

For instance, when Governor Bello Matawalle defected from the PDP to APC in June 2021, legal action was filed by the PDP seeking to remove him from office. The Federal High Court in Abuja dismissed the suit in May 2022, stating that the Constitution does not expressly provide for the removal of a sitting governor on the grounds of defection (as per *Premium Times*, May 2022). This decision highlights a legal loophole: while legislators may be subject to removal for defection, governors are not.

This judicial limitation has been criticized by legal scholars such as Femi Falana (SAN), who, in interviews with *Channels TV* and *The Cable* (2021–2022), argued for a constitutional amendment to address this inconsistency and strengthen judicial authority over elected officials who defect.

### **INEC's Passive Role in Sanctions**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in various press briefings between 2021 and 2023, acknowledged its limited capacity to sanction defectors. In a statement reported by *The Guardian Nigeria* (July 15, 2023), INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu clarified: "The Commission does not have the constitutional power to declare a seat vacant except as directed by the courts."

As such, INEC's response to defection cases has remained procedural rather than punitive. The Commission has not issued any independent sanctions against defectors since 2019, despite growing public criticism. This has left a significant accountability gap in the electoral system.

### **Impact of Defections on Party Balance and Oversight**

Data compiled by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in its 2022 policy brief titled "*Defections and the Future of Opposition Politics in Nigeria*" shows that over 60% of lawmakers who defected during the 9th National Assembly moved to the ruling APC. This shift significantly reduced the strength of the opposition and skewed legislative balance.

For example, prior to the 2023 elections, APC gained a sweeping majority in the House of Representatives through defection, rising from 179 to over 230 seats. The PDP, meanwhile, dropped below 120. With this numerical advantage, the APC was able to dominate committee leadership positions and legislative decisions. The absence of strong opposition limits debate, weakens executive oversight, and undermines the separation of powers.

### **Media and Public Sentiment on Defections**

Public reaction to defections has been consistently negative, as reflected in opinion pieces and editorials across major newspapers. A *Premium Times* editorial dated February 10, 2023, titled “The Normalization of Defection and the Collapse of Accountability,” stated: “What Nigerians are witnessing is not just political realignment, but a collapse of principles. Politicians change parties at will, without recourse to their constituents or any ideological consideration.”

Similarly, *The Guardian Nigeria*, in a July 2022 editorial, lamented that defections have rendered elections meaningless, as voters no longer trust that the party they elect will remain relevant in governance.

All evidence points to the fact that political defections in Nigeria are frequent, constitutionally regulated but inconsistently enforced, and largely unpunished. Legislatures routinely fail to question defectors; courts provide unclear or partial judgments; INEC lacks the constitutional power to act independently; and political parties are complicit in incentivizing defections. This combination of weaknesses across institutions explains the gradual erosion of checks and balances within Nigeria’s democratic structure.

### **Discussion of Results**

The data clearly demonstrate that political defections in Nigeria have played a pivotal role in distorting the balance of power among the branches of government. As reports indicate by *Premium Times*, *Daily Trust* and records by *Hansard*, mass defections especially among lawmakers in favor of the ruling party have enhanced the dominance of the executive. This compromises the independence of the legislature where opposition opinions are necessary in order to have good checks and balances. The loss of internal accountability through the legislature, as demonstrated by the habitual practice of making no debate or authorization in the notes of defection letters, indicates a planned undermining of democratic responsibility.

Such a tendency is also supported by judicial inconsistency in carrying out of anti-defection clauses. Although the Ifedayo Abegunde case gave an excellent constitutional precedent, it is evident later in dismissing the case against Governor Bello Matawalle in 2022 yet there was a reluctance to enforce defeat laws when senior executives are concerned. The choice of enforcing justice, as quoted by the experts of law and summarized in *The Guardian Nigeria*, adds to the culture of viewing potent politicians as being above the law.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has also taken a back-seat position with most of them justifying their approach by saying that they did not have any judicial support to be independent. Indeed, INEC in its official press briefings and as *The Guardian* media outlet affirms, is insistent that it cannot declare any seats unoccupied without the intervention of the court. This has created a structural gap in enforcement, in which even openly unconstitutional defections are not fought, and thus adds further to the emboldening of defectors.

The party system itself seems to be a part of the game. In the 2022 report released by the CDD, it was revealed how political parties, especially the ruling APC, have rewarded defectors with positions of leadership and election tickets respectively, which means that defectors are not only emulated but they are also incentivized. This eats into the internal party democracy and still alienates the elected representatives from the electorate as many are not consulted when in such cases of defection.

Diminishing trust is evidenced in the form of public reaction, which is reflected in the media on Premium Times and The Guardian editorials. Black and white levels of defections have caused discontent among the voters as they have seen little value in electing leaders whose mandate can be reneged on after elections. This loss of trust in the political process is dangerous for any democratic society, as it discourages participation and reinforces apathy.

Collectively, the evidence underscores that political defection in Nigeria is not merely a partisan issue but a systemic threat to democratic consolidation. When unchecked, it undermines the constitutional safeguards designed to ensure transparency, accountability, and balance of power.

### **Findings**

1. Political defections in Nigeria are primarily driven by political opportunism and personal ambition rather than ideological convictions.
2. Defections to the ruling party have significantly weakened legislative oversight, thereby diminishing the power of the National Assembly to hold the executive accountable.
3. Judicial enforcement of anti-defection provisions has been inconsistent, especially in cases involving governors, weakening the rule of law.
4. INEC lacks the legal power or will to take proactive measures against defectors, resulting in widespread impunity.
5. The continued normalization of defections has contributed to political instability, weakened opposition politics, and deepened public disillusionment.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, political defections have evolved into a destabilizing force within Nigeria's democratic architecture. Instead of reflecting ideological evolution or principled dissent, defections are often driven by short-term political gain, strategic realignment, or protection from legal scrutiny. The consequence is a weakened legislature, a compromised judiciary, and an electoral system that fails to hold political actors accountable to their constituents or the Constitution.

The ineffectiveness of institutions such as INEC, the judiciary, and the legislature in enforcing anti-defection provisions has created an enabling environment for unregulated political behavior. If left unaddressed, this trend threatens to permanently undermine democratic norms and entrench authoritarian tendencies under the guise of party dominance.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The National Assembly should initiate constitutional amendments to make anti-defection provisions more explicit and enforceable, including automatic forfeiture of office where applicable.
2. INEC should be legally empowered to independently declare seats vacant in cases of unconstitutional defection, subject to judicial review to prevent abuse.

3. Civil Society Organizations and the media must intensify public education campaigns to sensitize voters about the democratic dangers of unprincipled defections.
4. Political parties should strengthen internal democratic structures to foster ideological consistency, candidate transparency, and disciplinary mechanisms.
5. The judiciary must uphold consistency and independence in interpreting and enforcing constitutional provisions on political defections, regardless of the political weight of those involved.

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