JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 3, No. 2 / June, 2025
https://www.jopd.com.ng

POLITICAL PARTY DEFECTION AND IMPLICATIONS ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA: 2015-2023

By
Solomon Oryenga Christopher
Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State
Corresponding author: christopher.s@fud.edu.ng

Yusuf Abdullahi Manu, PhD
Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse
Jigawa State

Dr. Wilson Simon Okwoli
Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State

Abstract

Political party defection has become a critical challenge to the consolidation of democratic governance in Nigeria. This study investigates the causes, patterns, and implications of political defections in Benue State from 2015-2023. A Probability and Non-Probability Sampling Techniques was used. Using a Mixed-methods approach, the research draws on data collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with political stakeholders, Party officials, civil society representatives as the findings reveal that defections are primarily motivated by a quest for political power, lack of ideological commitment, absence of internal party democracy, fear of prosecution, and patron-client networks. The study argues that these defections destabilised democratic institutions, weaken political accountability, and erode public trust in governance. It concludes by recommending reforms to Nigeria's constitutional framework, strengthening internal party democracy, and promoting political education to curb the culture of opportunistic defections. By focusing on Benue State as a microcosm of the macrocosm, the research contributes to broader debates on party systems, political stability, and democratic governance in the state and Africa at large.

Keywords: Democratic Governance, Implications, Party Defection, Search for Power,

Introduction

The phenomenon of political party defection, also refers to as "party switching," "carpet crossing," "party hopping", "frog jumping", or "party hopping," is not exclusive to Nigeria. However, its frequency, underlying motivations, and consequences within the Nigerian political context are particularly significant. While political defection is occasionally observed in established democracies such as the United Kingdom, the United States, India, etc., it is often ideologically motivated and less disruptive to democratic governance. In Nigeria, however, party defections tend to occur for reasons largely devoid of ideological content, driven instead by personal ambition, ethnic considerations, political survival, and economic incentives.

Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an alarming rate of political defections, particularly around election periods. Benue State, located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, offers a compelling case study of this phenomenon. From the mass defections witnessed during the 2015 and 2019 electoral cycles to the strategic realignments preceding the 2023 elections, political actors in Benue State have frequently

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 3, No. 2 / June, 2025
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abandoned their parties for perceived greener pastures. These defections have profound implications for democratic consolidation, governance stability, and public confidence in political institutions.

Globally, political defections are governed by clear normative and legal frameworks. For instance, in India, the Anti-Defection Law enacted in 1985 under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution seeks to curb opportunistic party switching by elected officials. Similarly, the British parliamentary tradition tolerates defections but expects defectors to seek a fresh mandate from the electorate. In Nigeria, however, despite constitutional provisions such as Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the enforcement mechanisms remain weak, leading to widespread and largely unpunished defections.

For instance, the Governor of Ebonyi State, David Umahi and his Deputy, Kelechi Igwe, alongside 15 lawmakers who defected from the PDP to the APC were dismissed by the Federal High Court, Abuja on March 8th, 2022, in a judgement which declared that votes during any elections in Nigeria belonged to political parties, and not the candidates. Similarly, it should also be recalled that, when the member of the Labour Party representing Akure North/Akure South Federal Constituency defected to another party in 2012, the case lingered until the Supreme Court ordered him in 2022 to immediately vacate his seat. In a unanimous judgement, the Supreme Court held that the lawmaker who decamped from LP to another party was constitutionally unfit to retain his seat as a federal lawmaker in the House of Representative (*Vanguard*, 2023).

Despite the exemplified court case mentioned above in other to bring much decorum to party politics, many politicians such as the former Speaker of the House of Representative, Hon. Yakubu Dogara of Bauchi State still defected from PDP to APC prior to 2023 general election. The Senate did not declare his seat vacant probably because he was moving from the opposition to the ruling party where they have the majority seat.

In Benue State, notable defections include the movement of Governor Samuel Ortom from the All Progressives Congress (APC) back to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2018 and the multiple shifts of political loyalties among state and federal legislators. These movements have often been justified on the grounds of "irreconcilable differences" within parties, marginalization, or ideological disagreement. However, a closer analysis reveals that personal political ambitions and survival strategies remain the dominant factors.

The study, therefore, investigated the causes, patterns, and consequences of political defections in Benue State between the periods of 2015-2023. It aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how intra-party dynamics, electoral competitiveness, and governance structures interact to either strengthen or weaken democratic institutions in subnational contexts.

Understanding the phenomenon of political party defection at the subnational level is critical, as it provides nuanced insights into Nigeria's broader democratic trajectory. While considerable scholarly attention has been paid to national-level defections, subnational dynamics, those in Benue State remain underexplored. Yet, it is often at the state level that the consequences of defections are most acutely felt, in terms of governance breakdown, policy inconsistency, and voter disillusionment.

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to capture both the broad trends and the nuanced motivations behind political defections. By situating Benue State within the national and global context of political

party switching, the research also contributes to comparative studies on party systems, political behavior, and democratic consolidation.

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to inform policymakers, political actors, civil society organizations, and scholars interested in strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria and other emerging democracies.

Conceptualizing Political Party Defection

Political party defection involves actors abandoning their original political party to join another, often without resigning from the elected office (Eme et al., 2014; Jiddere, 2018). Defections are a common phenomenon in multi-party democracies; however, their patterns and impacts vary widely across different political contexts.

In established democracies such as the United Kingdom, party switching typically arises from ideological disillusionment or profound policy disagreements. For instance, the 1981 formation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in the UK by defectors from the Labour Party was rooted in ideological differences rather than personal ambition (Bogdanor, 2011). Similarly, defections in the U.S. Congress are rare and often entail significant political costs (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2009).

In contrast, defections in emerging democracies, particularly in Africa and Asia, are frequently opportunistic, driven by the desire for political survival, access to state resources, and personal advancement (Kuenzi & Lambright, 2001; Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005). Nigerian political defections, as documented by Edet (2017) and Agan et al. (2019), are less about ideological disagreements and more about personal calculations related to electoral advantage, economic opportunities, and political patronage.

Amadu (2023) contends that political defections in Nigeria should be understood within the framework of the quest for political power, often at the expense of institutional stability and democratic governance. Defectors are typically motivated by the need to align with ruling parties to secure nominations, appointments, or protection from political retribution.

In view of the above numerous conceptions of party defection by political analysts across the globe, this research operationalised party defection to mean a deliberate act by both elected and non-elected public office holder or a party member or its stalwarts to abandon their respective political party or their support for a new party (at will) regardless of the reason or purpose of their action for personal gain.

Typologies of Political Defection

Political defections can be classified into various categories based on timing, motivation, and impact:

i. **Pre-Election Defections:** This type of defection occurs when politicians switch allegiance prior to elections, usually to secure nomination tickets or to improve electoral prospects (Olorunmola, 2016).
ii. **Post-Election Defections:** This happen after elections, often as a strategy to align with ruling parties and access government patronage (Ezeibe & Iwuamadi, 2018).
iii. **Legislative Defections:** Characterized by mass movement of legislators across party lines, which can alter the balance of power in legislative houses (Jega, 2014).
iv. **Elite vs Mass Defections:** While elite defections involve prominent political actors such as governors and senators, mass defections involve rank-and-file party members (Amadu, 2023).

In Benue State, all these types of defections have been practiced between 2015-2023, reflecting broader national trends.

Causes of Political Party Defection

Scholars have identified multiple factors driving political defections in Nigeria. Quest for Political Power as posited by Amadu (2023). The primary driver of defections is the quest for power and appointment. Politicians often defect to parties that offer better prospects for electoral success or access to appointive offices. Lack of ideological is another cause of political defection. Political parties in Nigeria often lack coherent ideological foundations (Olarenwaju, 2019; Ikechukwu, 2015). As a result, loyalty to party ideals is weak, and party membership is seen as a vehicle for personal advancement rather than collective governance. Absence of internal democracy also causes party defection as poorly conducted party primaries, imposition of candidates, and lack of transparency in decision-making processes fuel defections (Mbah, 2011; Genyi, 2009). Fear of prosecution breeds defection to ruling parties as it is often motivated by the desire to evade prosecution for corruption or misconduct (Daily Trust, 2023). Similarly, godfatherism and patronage politics exert significant influence over party structures, often leading disenchanted godsons to defect (Adeoye, 2009; Mustapha & Yakaka, 2019). Also, the weakness of opposition parties in mobilizing electoral support and challenging incumbents incentivizes defections to stronger parties (Okonkwo & Unaji, 2016).

Consequences of Political Defection on Democratic Governance

Defections have profound implications for democratic governance which include:

i. **Institutional Instability:** Frequent defections destabilise legislative and executive institutions, leading to policy inconsistency and governance paralysis (Simbine, 2013).
ii. **Weakening of Political Parties:** Parties become vulnerable to fragmentation, weakening their ability to aggregate interests, mobilize voters, and hold elected officials accountable (Omotola, 2009).
iii. **Erosion of Public Trust:** Voters become cynical and disengaged from political processes when politicians switch allegiances opportunistically (Agbaje, 1999).
iv. **Electoral Manipulation:** Defections can manipulate electoral outcomes by undermining the legitimacy of party platforms and confusing voters (Jega, 2014).

Global Comparisons of Defections in other Democracies

Political defections are not unique to Nigeria. However, the nature and impact vary:

i. United Kingdom: Party switching is rare; defectors often face immediate electoral consequences (Bogdanor, 2011).
ii. United States: Party loyalty remains strong, and crossing the floor is often career-ending without significant justification (McCarty et al., 2009).
iii. India: The Anti-Defection Law of 1985 curtails opportunistic defections by mandating the loss of legislative seats upon defection unless supported by two-thirds of party members (Chopra, 1990).
iv. Kenya: The 2010 Constitution introduced laws prohibiting party hopping within six months of an election, aimed at stabilizing the political party system (Cheeseman et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Political scientists, analysts and writers have developed several theories to explain the causes and reasons for party defection in Nigeria. However, this paper adopts Amadu's Power-Based Theory (2023). The theory was developed and used in his work "Political Defection in Nigeria: An Approach to Political Power-Based Theory, 2023. He broadly categorized the theory into two, namely, the Deficit Theories and Power-Based Theories of party defections. The deficit theories assume that party defections occur because political parties in Nigeria lack some important features such as a clear-cut party ideology, internal party democracy and adherence to the spirit and letters of the party constitutions.

On the other hand, the power-based theories argue that party defections occur among the Nigerian political parties as a result of the struggle for material resources, political power and appointment. The theory did not only explain the causes of party defections, but also how the phenomena occur, their types and relationships with other elements of democratic system such as elections, political power, the electorate and political support bases of the potential party defectors.

The major assumptions of this theory include:

i. Party politics is a set of interactions which forms a sort of a system known as a *democratic system* which consists of various elements such as political parties, elections, political power, the civil society organizations, rule of law and the formal institutions of the state such as the legislature, executive and the judiciary, etc.
ii. Political power is the most important element of a democratic system around which other elements revolve. Political power is divided into two: subjective and objective political power. A subjective political power is one enshrined in the constitution of a state while an objective political power is the actual power exercised by political parties especially when they win elections and control the apparatuses of the state.
iii. Political defection is a form of political interaction among political parties which arises out of the struggle for power. Political actors as bona-fide members of particular political parties' defect to other parties in their attempt to acquire political power or appointment.
iv. Party defection is a mass political behaviour, meaning that, a political actor defecting from one political party to another, often defects in company of his political support-base which may be either a voter support base or an elite support base or both.
v. The ability or capacity of a party defection to produce effects on all or some of the elements of the democratic system depends largely on the size and cohesion of the political support base of a defector. Thus, a party defection in which the political defector has a large and cohesive political support base may likely make more impact on the elements of a democratic system than a party defection in which the political support base is relatively small and divided.
vi. A series of party defections by the party elite may produce minor and subsidiary defections by other less strong party members, which form a condition known as a *defection-effect syndrome* which denotes a series of defections of politicians within a particular party or from different political parties" (Amadu, 2023, p. 84).

This theory of party defection conceives defection as a product of a struggle for political power by parties in a democratic system. While the election management body organizes periodic elections in which political parties participate, the constitution of a state sets out the subjective political power which political parties struggle to acquire. The political parties translate the subjective political power into an objective one after winning the election thereby controlling

the scarce resources of the state. The formal institutions of the state especially the legislature prescribes the rules according to which political power will be acquired by parties participating in the elections. Thus, the sheer search for political power through elections could be the main factor that explains the reasons behind party defections in Benue state and Nigeria at large, especially in the current Fourth Republic in which political parties are formed as mere instruments of struggle for power.

By application, Benue State which is the area of study, is regarded as a democratic system consisting of various elements that interact with one another. The elements of the democratic system in the state are the PDP and APC as the major political parties, the voters who participated in the elections in the state, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as an election management body, the office of the governor as the Chief Executive in the state, the Benue State House of Assembly whose members contest as candidates in the elections, the judiciary which interprets laws and decides over disputes arising from the manner of the conduct of the elections and the various Civil Society Organizations (CSO) that work towards ensuring free and fair elections and holding the government democratically accountable in the state.

In 2015, 2019 and 2023, three general elections were conducted in Benue State by the INEC which produced the Executive and Legislature within the periods under study. Party defection arises out of the struggle by the political parties, mainly the PDP and APC to acquire political power in the State. Prominent political defectors such as the former governors Akume, Suwam, defected from one party to another along with their supporters among the party elites and the voters. The party defection by the defectors along with their political support bases produces negative effects on the elements of the democratic system in the state.

The lawful interactions of the elements of a democratic system produce democratic governance. The important components of a democratic governance are democratic accountability, stability in public policy making and implementation, transparency in government transactions, strong political parties, adherence to the spirit of rule of law and broad-base political participation by the citizens. Party defection affects democratic accountability in the sense that the defectors may no longer serve the mandate upon which they were elected by the electorate.

Thus, political defection tends to undermine democratic accountability. Defections also negatively affect stability in public policy making and implementation. For instance, defections from various political parties to the ruling party may produce in the latter a *saturation effect* which is a situation in which a ruling party loses policy direction as a result of participation in policy making and implementation by defectors of various party backgrounds (Amadu, 2023).

Since the motive behind party defection is hinged on the acquisition of political power in order to get access to the state scarce resources, transparency in the government transactions may be seriously affected as the defectors who illegally share in the office spoils will not like to disseminate information about their unlawful acts. Furthermore, party defections stifles and renders opposition political parties weak and ineffective thereby producing a de facto one-party state which may breeds fissures, fragmentations, factions and conflicts in the political parties that may lead to the demise of the parties. It is also contrary to the principle and spirit of rule of law. Political participation is often truncated by party defection as voters' regard seasoned defectors less serious politicians to waste their time voting them.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of political party defections and their impacts on democratic governance in Benue State. The mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation of findings, enhanced the validity of results, and offered a nuanced interpretation of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative component involved administering structured questionnaires to selected respondents, while the qualitative component entailed conducting Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with critical political stakeholders, elected representatives, civil society actors, and political analysts. Probability and Non-Probability Sampling Techniques was used in other to give a significant number of elements in the state the opportunity to create a sample that is truly representative of the population.

Results and Data Presentation

This section presents the analysis of the data collected from the 384 questionnaire respondents and 12 Key Informant Interviewees. The analysis is structured according to the research objectives:

> Causes of political party defections, Trends and patterns of defections (2015–2023), Implications for democratic governance, Possible mitigation strategies.

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were utilised, complemented by qualitative thematic insights.

Table 1: ***Copies of questionnaire distributed and returned***

Questionnaires Distributed	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Number Returned	373	97
Not Returned	11	3.0
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

From the above Table 1, a total number of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed out of which 373 copies were appropriately filled and returned. This indicates 97% return rate while 11 copies were not returned thus indicating 3% lost rate. The high return rate is due to the readiness of respondents to answer the questionnaire considering the unstable political activities in the state, and the support of research assistants to interpret some questions and wait for respondents to fill and return the questionnaires while the lost rate is due to some respondents holding unto it to be filled later and could not be found in the process.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2: ***Socio-Demographic Profile***

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		
Male	234	62.7
Female	139	37.3
Age		
18-30	140	24.0

31-50	187	45.0
51- Above	57	23.4
Educational Level		
Tertiary Education	223	30.0
Secondary Education	114	70.0
Others	36	9.7
Political Affiliation		
PDP	128	34.3
APC	202	54.2
Others	43	11.5

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The above table 2 shows that, the sample is balanced, representing diverse political affiliations, with a good spread across ages, education, and genders with 373 questionnaires retrieved out of the total 384.distributed to the respondents.

Causes of Political Party Defection

Table 3: ***Causes of Defections (Multiple Responses Allowed)***

Causes	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Quest for Political Power/Appointments	260	69.7
Lack of Internal Democracy	230	61.66
Absence of Party Ideology	210	56.3
Fear of Prosecution	150	40.2
Godfatherism and Patron-Client Networks	140	37.5
Weak Opposition Party Structures	120	32.2

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The major findings of the above table 3 shows that, majority of respondents perceive quest for political power and appointment as the primary reason for defections, followed by lack of internal democracy.

Table 4: Implications of Defection on Democratic Governance

Effects on Governance	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Destabilisation of Political Institutions	250	67.0
Weakening of Political Party Systems	220	59.0
Voter Apathy and Public Disillusionment	200	53.6
Policy Inconsistency	190	50.9
Undermining of Electoral Credibility	180	48.3
Fear of Prosecution	203	54.2

Source: Field Survey, 2024

"When politicians jump from party to party, it creates confusion among voters. It becomes hard to know who stands for what." *(KII, Civil Society Leader, Makurdi August 4, 2024)*. "Defections often mean that whatever policies were ongoing are abandoned midway. It's the masses that suffer." *(KII, Local Government Official, Gboko, August 13, 2024).* "Defections are hardly about ideology here; they are about survival - plain and simple." *(KII, Academic, Benue State*

*University, August 28, 2024). "*To be honest, power is what matters to politicians regardless of the party affiliated to, when they have the power, they will decide for the masses what is good for them." *(KII Party Chieftain, Otukpo, Sept. 7, 2024).*

Causes of Political Party Defection

The findings confirmed that quest for political power and appointments is the leading driver of political defections in Benue State. This aligns with the Power-Based Theory of Defection, which asserts that politicians act strategically to maximize political benefits. Unlike advanced democracies where ideology drives party allegiance (Downs, 1957; Bogdanor, 2011), Nigerian politicians prioritize survival and advantage, often at the cost of institutional stability.

Similarly, lack of internal party democracy spurs defections corroborates the work of Mbah (2011), who noted that undemocratic practices such as candidate imposition force members to seek alternative platforms. Olorunmola (2016) and Ikechukwu (2015) also emphasized that when party primaries are manipulated, aggrieved members often defect to rival parties. The influence of fear of prosecution as a driver of defection supports Ezeibe and Iwuamadi's (2018) argument that political immunity offered by alignment with ruling parties is a strong incentive in Nigeria's fragile judicial context.

Trends of Party Defection in Benue state

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, there have been series of defections of politicians from one political party to the other, particularly in Benue state. For instance, there was mass exodus of party members in Benue state where the Commissioner of Education, Science and Technology, Prof. Dennis Ityavyar dumped the APC alongside fifteen thousand (15,000) members of the party at Mbadede Ward of Ihugh, Vandeikya local government to the PDP in the state (*Vanguard*, 2023). Similarly, the same defection continued when Hon. William Ogenyi dumped SDP in Ado Ward and joined the Advanced Peoples Democratic Alliance (APDA) while Godday Samuel Odagboyi, a member of the House of Representative (LP) defected to the APC, citing the lingering crisis in the party as the causal factor for his action. Other glaring defections took place in Benue state two days after the former Governor, Samuel Ortom left the APC to the PDP prior to 2019 general election. This included the thirteen out of the 23 Local Government Chairmen in the state who followed the footstep of their principal - Samuel Ortom from the APC to PDP. Those thirteen members who defected include: Anthony Shawon of Guma Local Government Area (LGA), Justina Sorka (Buruku LGA), Mwuese Ubebe (Konshisha LGA), Blessing Unogwo (Ado LGA), Virginia Kpindi (Katsina-Ala LGA), George Alli (Otukpo LGA), Comfort Echeoda (Agatu LGA), Francis Ayaga (Gwer West LGA), Uaah Vitalis (Gwer East LGA), Richard Nyajo (Logo LGA), Ibellogo Tor Tyokaa (Ukum LGA), Adakole Abutu (Ohimini LGA) and Peter Onche of Obi LGA (*Channelstv*, 2018). The tables below give a better picture of the trends of defection by politicians over the years in Benue State.

Table 5: ***Some major political defections in Benue state from 1999 to 2023 General Elections.***

Defectors & position(s) held	**Initial Party**	**Party Defected to**	**Current Party**
George Akume (Former governor, Senator, and presently SGF)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)	All Progressive Congress (APC)

Barnabas A. I. Gemade (Former National Chairman of PDP and Senator)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC) and back to PDP	All Progressive Congress (APC) after 8 weeks of going back to PDP
Daniel Iyorkegh Saror (Former Senator)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	United National Peoples Party (UNPP), then to All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)	Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)
Mike O (Gubernat aspira Mku sinc al nt 1999)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	Unite Natio Peopl Part d nal e's y (UNP	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Joseph Iorshagher Akaagerger (Former Senator)	United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	Social Democratic Party (SDP)
Emmanuel Yisa OrkerJev (former Senator)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Samuel Ortom (former Governor, Benue state)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Emmanuel Udende (former member, House of Reps)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)
Hassan Saleh (Member, House of Reps)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Mark Gbillah (Membe House of Reps	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Dickson Tarkirgh (Former Member, House of Reps)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

Source*:* INEC Report of Activities (2015 – 2023)

Table 6: List of some defectors in Tarka Local Government Area, Benue State

S/N	NAMES	POSITION	PARTY MOVED TO
1	Hon. James Mvakorlumun Chia	PDP State Vice Chairman, Zone B	APC
2	Mrs. Joyce Mbakorkaa Tarka.	Former Advisor to Gov. Ortom	APC
3	Hon. Aleva Gbegbe.	Former Deputy Chairman Tarka LGC.	APC
4	Hon. Steven Tersugh Chirkpi.	Former PDP Deputy Chairman Tarka LGC	APC
5	Hon. Tayol Ander	Former SSA to Gov. Ortom and immediate past Secretary to Tarka LGC	APC
6	Mrs. Mwuese Ukurme		APC

7	Hon. John Hangeior Tarka	Former Tarka LGC and SSA to Gov Ortom	APC
8	Hon. Zungwenen Nyianaka.		APC
9	Hon. Yayough Aondoakaa	PDP Chairman, Tarka LG Chapter.	APC
10	Hon. Jeremiah Aondowase Ihungwa.	Immediate past leader, Tarka LGC	APC
11	Hon. Agba Akpiti.	Secretary, PDP Tarka LG Chapter	APC

Source: Zone B Mega Decamping Ceremony Event Brochure, 2023

Table 7: Other Defections in Buruku Local Government Area, Benue State

S/N	NAMES	POSITION	PARTY DEFECTED TO
1	Hon Sir Livinus Awu	Former State Vice Chairman Zone B PDP and former SSA to the Governor of Benue State on LG and Chieftaincy Affairs	APC
2	Hon. Ade Nguhar		APC
3	Dr Ukeyima Adugu Gbileve	Rtd. Permanent Secretary Former Aspirant for House of Representatives Buruku Fed. Constituency, former Secretary, PDP campaign team for Buruku LGA.	APC
4	Hon Terfa Chia	Former PRP State Assembly Aspirant for Buruku state Constituency	APC
5	Arc Gideon Agber	Former Council Chairman, Buruku LGC and former COS to the Speaker, Bebue State Assembly	APC
6	Hon Simon Wakwagh Adali,	Former Leader, Buruku LGC	APC
7	Hon Victor Tsegbam,	Former Youth Leader, PDP Buruku LGC	APC
8	Hon. Sesugh Atsehe	Former DG Hon Mozeh Campaign Team for State Assembly	APC
9	Paul Ukpa rtd DGSA,	Former NULGE State Publicity Secretary	APC
10	Hon. Joshua Jime	Former Director, Rhoda Ako PDP Campaign Team for House of Representative	APC
11	Hon. Beeior Ahula Mbayaka	Ward Chairman. PRP	APC
12	Elder Gargba Jov	Jemgbagh Elder PDP	APC

13	Hon lorbee Tolough	Former Youth Leader, PDP Shorov Council Ward	APC
14	Hon Terhemba Anongo	Former ward Chairman PDP and former Councillor Mbayaka	APC
15	Terna Gebe	Rtd Director of Education	APC
16	Joe Atoo lgbakula .	Former Media Aide to Hon Ukeyima Gbileve campaign team for House of Reps	APC
17	Hon Orshio Agber	Ward Secretary PD.	APC
18	Hon Swende Bee Awuhe	PDP Elder Buruku LGA	APC
19	Hon. Terngu Abagu	Buruku LGA PDP Elder	APC
20	Mr Samuel lorkav Ortese	Retred Asst Director of Education	APC

Source: Zone B Mega Decamping Ceremony Event Brochure, 2023

The spikes in defections during the pre-election periods (2018 and 2022) reflect the instrumental nature of party switching in Nigeria. Politicians view pre-election periods as critical moments to align with potentially victorious parties to safeguard political futures, as also noted by Jega (2014).

The results resonate with Cheeseman et al. (2020) on Kenya's electoral cycles, where party hopping is common as politicians seek electoral viability. Notably, defections in Benue State did not lead to the formation of new political parties (unlike the UK's SDP formation in 1981); instead, they reinforced the dominance of the two main parties - PDP and APC - mirroring the "two-party trap" scenario described by Diamond (1988).

The findings underscore serious threats to democratic consolidation in Benue State as follows:

i. **Institutional Instability:** Frequent defections destabilize governance structures and hinder long-term policy planning, validating Simbine's (2013) concerns.
ii. **Weakened Political Accountability:** With loyalty to parties and manifestoes eroded, politicians prioritize personal ambition over the public good, aligning with Agbaje's (1999) observations.
ii. **Voter Apathy:** The growing public cynicism towards political actors reflects a weakening political culture, a warning emphasized in Omotola (2009).

Thus, political defections, while lawful, have become a major obstacle to democratic governance in Benue State and Nigeria at large.

Conclusion

Political party defections in Benue State between 2015-2023 were primarily motivated by the quest for political power, personal survival, lack of party ideology, and internal party crises. These defections have had adverse impacts on democratic governance by destabilizing political institutions, weakening accountability mechanisms, and eroding public trust. The findings

reinforce broader scholarly concerns about the health of Nigeria's democracy, revealing that party switching is less about ideological repositioning and more about pragmatic survivalism. To strengthen democracy in Nigeria, the culture of opportunistic defections must be curtailed through systemic reforms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following measures are recommended:

i. Constitutional Reforms

Amend Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution to include executive officeholders (governors, deputy governors) alongside legislators, thereby making defections without legitimate cause punishable by forfeiture of office. Also, define "division" within political parties more clearly to prevent its misuse as a pretext for defection.

ii. **Strengthen Internal Party Democracy**

Political parties must entrench democratic principles in their operations, especially in candidate selection processes. The INEC should also have greater oversight over internal party processes.

iii. Foster Political Ideology and Policy-Driven Politics

Parties must develop and articulate clear ideological positions; Political education programs should be revived and emphasized to promote ideological loyalty among party members.

iv. Promote Political Accountability

Mechanisms should be established to hold defectors accountable to their constituents, including possibilities for mid-term recall elections.

v. Strengthen Civil Society and Media Oversight

Civil society organizations and the media must play more active roles in exposing opportunistic defections and demanding political accountability.

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