

Analysis of Political Defection and the Prospect of Democratic Stability in Nigeria: A Study of Oyo Metropolis

Ibraheem Adewale ADEFABI, Babatunde Olawale OGUNSOLA, Bolaji Olumuyiwa OMITOLA, Adebawale Idowu ADEYEYE, & Olumide OMODUNBI.

Corresponding Author: Ibraheem Adewale ADEFABI adefabiia@eaudoyo.edu.ng ORCID ID: [0009-0008-0446-3498](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0446-3498)
+2348051915022

1, 2, 3 Department of Political Science Education, Faculty of Social Science Education, Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Nigeria.

4 & 5 Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Osun State University, Okuku Campus, Osun State, Nigeria.

Abstract: *Political defection has emerged as one of the most corrosive and destabilising tendencies in Nigeria's democratic trajectory since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Despite its prevalence across all tiers of government, the phenomenon remains insufficiently interrogated at the sub-national and grassroots levels. This study investigates the causes, consequences, and possible mitigation of political defection in Oyo Metropolis, comprising Afijio, Atiba, Oyo East, and Oyo West Local Government Areas of Oyo State, Nigeria, with a focus on its implications for democratic stability. Adopting a descriptive survey research design and quantitative methodology, the study drew on a structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. Respondents included political party members, community leaders, and politically informed citizens. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically simple percentages and mean scores. Findings reveal that political defection in Oyo Metropolis is predominantly driven by alignment with ruling parties for political advantage (90%), party crises and internal conflicts (90%), personal ambition (85%), and lack of reward for party loyalty (85%). The study further establishes that frequent defection significantly undermines democratic stability by eroding voters' confidence and trust in democratic institutions (90%), encouraging opportunistic politics (90%), weakening party cohesion (95%), and reducing accountability among elected officials. With respect to mitigation, respondents overwhelmingly endorsed strengthening internal party democracy (95%), promoting transparency in party leadership (95%), and intensifying civic education (95%) as priority interventions. The study concludes that political defection constitutes a threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation thus, recommending a comprehensive response including legal reform, ideological reorientation of parties, and institutional strengthening at the grassroots level.*

Keywords: Political defection, democratic stability, party politics, Oyo Metropolis.

Introduction

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria's democratic journey has been defined by a complex mix of progress and persistent hurdles. A primary concern within this landscape is the frequent practice of carpet-crossing or inter-party defection and has been argued to be jeopardising the country's democratic consolidation. According to Agboga (2023), this culture of "party hopping" erodes the ideological foundations of political parties, making democratic sustainability difficult to achieve. When politicians prioritise personal or tactical shifts over party loyalty, it creates a crisis of representation and weakens the integrity of the country's political institutions.

While defection occurs globally, its frequency in Nigeria creates unique stability challenges. Osabor (2025) observes that defection has become synonymous with Nigerian politics, with politicians regularly switching parties, citing internal disputes or ideological alignment, though often motivated by personal ambition, grievances, or political survival. However, Godwin and Oluwalogbon (2024) note that party defection is less common in established democracies than developing systems. The phenomenon typically indicates institutional weakness and reveals how parties serve individual ambition rather than stable governance.

Fapetu and Olateru Olagbegi (2025) report that the surge in political defections in Nigeria is driven by personal ambition, patronage, weak internal party governance, and lax legal enforcement and has significantly eroded party cohesion, voter confidence, and democratic accountability. They argue that without stronger anti defection laws, improved party democracy, and civic education, this trend will continue to undermine Nigeria's democratic stability

Agboga (2023) traces Nigerian political defection to pre-independence, beginning in 1951 when NCNC members defected to the Action Group, driven by ethnic motives to block Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's premiership bid. This established opportunistic realignment as a power strategy, creating a pattern where personal ambition and ethnic interests override party loyalty and ideology, a trend

persisting today. Nigerian politicians often defect based on personal and ethnic interests rather than ideology. Party defection benefits democracy only when driven by genuine ideological differences; personal or ethnic motivations damage democratic processes (Olisah & Nwokah, 2020).

However, democratic sustainability depends on regime legitimacy; citizens' perception that government possesses moral authority to govern through voluntary consent rather than coercion. Oyekanmi and Rosenje (2022) argue Nigeria faces a legitimacy crisis that has weakened democratic institutions and citizen participation, fundamentally compromising democratic stability. Scholars like Przeworski (1991) and Linz and Stepan (1996) have identified political culture, economic stability, civil society strength, and institutional design as promoting democratic stability. Democratic stability requires strong institutions, effective governance, and rule of law, rights protection, and public participation. Without these elements, democracy risks instability, unrest, and authoritarianism (Diamond, 1999).

Modernisation theorists like Lipset (1959) and Huntington (1968) argued democracy is more sustainable with economic growth and a strong middle class (Carugati, 2020). Scholars like Przeworski and Limongi (1997) found that wealth does not affect democratisation probability but enhances stability. While earlier views suggested democracy had little growth impact, a study by Acemoglu et al., 2014 (2014) showed that democracy positively affects growth, though scholars like Epstein et al. (2006) and Boix and Stokes (2003) dispute this (Carugati, 2020).

Soretz et al. (2025) found that economic growth has a strong positive effect on human development, while democracy also contributes positively both directly and indirectly through growth. Their spatial econometric analysis shows that human development, democracy, and economic performance exhibit significant spillover effects, meaning countries benefit from the democratic and economic progress of neighbouring states.

Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between inter-party defection and democratic stability in Nigeria. It explores how this widespread practice weakens democratic institutions, undermines party systems, and presents a serious threat to Nigeria's democratic future. Through analysing contemporary political developments and relevant theoretical frameworks, this research seeks to clarify the consequences of party switching for the nation's democratic trajectory.

Research Questions

In conducting this study, four research questions were raised:

- i. What are the major factors responsible for political defection among politicians in Oyo Metropolis?
- ii. How does frequent political defection affect democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis?
- iii. How does political defection influence party cohesion and political loyalty at the local government level in Oyo Metropolis?
- iv. What measures can be adopted to mitigate negative consequences of political defection towards promoting democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis?

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design using a quantitative approach to examine political defection and its implications for democratic stability in Nigeria, focusing on Oyo Metropolis as a case study. The study area comprised Oyo East, Oyo West, Atiba, and Afijio Local Government Areas. The population consisted of adult residents aged 18 years and above, including political party members, civil servants, community leaders, and politically informed citizens. A total of 400 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling, with 100 respondents drawn from each local government area to ensure proportional representation. Within each stratum, respondents were purposively selected based on political awareness and familiarity with party politics. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing Likert-scale items addressing causes of political defection, effects on democratic stability and party cohesion and loyalty, and mitigation strategies. The instrument underwent expert review for validity and pilot testing for reliability. Questionnaires were administered directly by trained research assistants, achieving 100% retrieval rate. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores) to summarise respondents' views and determine agreement levels. Findings were presented in tables and interpreted according to the objectives of the study and relevant literature. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and exclusive use of data for academic purposes.

Conceptualising Political Defection

Political defection refers to the act of changing political party affiliation, involving the transfer of allegiance from one political party to another. In scholarly and political discourse, this phenomenon is described by various terms, including party hopping, party switching, party crossover, party defection, party decamping, floor crossing, canoe-jumping, political party prostitution, and political nomadism. The increasing incidence of cross-carpeting across all tiers of government in Nigeria has generated significant political tension and hostility, emerging as a source of public concern due to its destabilising implications for the nation's democratic process (Okolie, 2021).

Political parties are essential to government, ideology, and policy orientation in any democracy. They give people a platform to align with ideas and viewpoints that match their goals. However, the widespread practice of political cross-carpeting in Nigeria, when

politicians openly switch parties, frequently without any explanation, has undermined this fundamental function. This conduct not only threatens democratic stability but good governance.

In this paper, political defection refers to the act of an individual, whether an elected official or a constituent, transferring their political allegiance from one political party to another. This phenomenon is frequently observed in multi-party democratic systems and carries substantial implications for the prevailing distribution of power within the political landscape.

Defining Democratic Stability

By democratic stability, we mean the sustained and orderly functioning of a political system grounded in democratic principles, where the transfer of political authority occurs peacefully and regularly through credible electoral processes. It implies the capacity of a democracy to endure without experiencing major disruptions, authoritarian reversals, or systemic breakdowns that threaten its survival. A stable democracy is typically underpinned by adherence to the rule of law, an independent judiciary, the protection of fundamental human rights, and a participatory political culture that embraces pluralism and inclusivity. In such contexts, stability ensures governmental accountability and guarantees citizens an ongoing role in shaping public policy and political leadership.

Equally central to democratic stability is the existence of robust institutions and entrenched norms capable of withstanding political pressures and leadership transitions. These include transparent governance frameworks, impartial and credible electoral mechanisms, and effective systems of checks and balances that safeguard the autonomy and interdependence of governmental branches. Together, these institutional and normative pillars help preserve continuity, legitimacy, and public confidence in the democratic order.

Oyo Metropolis

The Oyo Metropolis consists of four Local Government Areas (LGAs): Afijio, Atiba, Oyo East, and Oyo West. These LGAs are collectively designated as the “Oyo” administrative zone by the Oyo State Government. The headquarters of Afijio is situated in Jobele, Atiba’s headquarters is located at Ofa-Meta, Oyo East’s headquarters is in Kosobo, while Oyo West has its headquarters at Ojongbodu (<https://oyostate.gov.ng>).

Data Analysis

This section presents the results of the quantitative data collected from the 400 respondents in Oyo Metropolis, using descriptive statistics. The analysis focuses on the responses to the questionnaire.

Research Question 1: What are the major factors responsible for political decamping among politicians in Oyo Metropolis?

Table 1: Analysis of responses on the major factors responsible for political defection among politicians in Oyo Metropolis

S/N	Statement	Agree Freq(%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Mean
1	Politicians decamp due to dissatisfaction with party leadership.	320 (80%)	80 (20%)	3.15
2	Lack of internal democracy in political parties encourages defection.	320 (80%)	80 (20%)	3.25
3	Personal ambition for political positions drives political decamping.	340 (85%)	60 (15%)	3.40
4	Financial incentives influence politicians to change parties.	280 (70%)	120 (30%)	3.00
5	Ethnic or regional interests contribute to political defection.	200 (50%)	200 (50%)	2.50
6	Party crises and conflicts lead politicians to seek alternative platforms.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.40
7	Lack of reward for loyalty motivates politicians to decamp.	340 (85%)	60 (15%)	3.25
8	Poor implementation of party manifesto encourages carpet crossing.	260 (65%)	140 (35%)	2.80
9	Political decamping occurs when parties lose popularity among voters.	220 (55%)	180 (45%)	2.65
10	Politicians defect to align with ruling parties for political advantage.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.50

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The evidence clearly indicates that political exits in Oyo Metropolis are largely driven by personal ambition, opportunism, and instability within political parties. Three of the four highest-rated factors recorded agreement levels of 85% or more: alignment with ruling parties for political advantage (90% agreement; Mean = 3.50), identified as the most influential factor, suggesting that the pursuit of power and access to state resources rather than ideological compatibility primarily motivates defections; party crises and internal conflicts (90% agreement; Mean = 3.40), highlighting how intra-party instability compels politicians to seek alternative,

seemingly more stable platforms; and personal ambition for political positions (85% agreement; Mean = 3.40), underscoring the dominance of self-interest and career advancement in party switching decisions. By contrast, factors such as ethnic or regional considerations (50% agreement) and poor implementation of party manifestos (65% agreement) attracted comparatively lower consensus, indicating that while they contribute to defections, they are secondary to opportunistic motivations and internal party challenges.

Research Question 2: How does frequent political defection affect democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis?

Table 2: Analysis of responses on how frequent political defection affects democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis

S/N	Statement	Agree (%)	Freq	Disagree (%)	Freq	Mean
1	Frequent party switching weakens democratic institutions.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.45
2	Political defection increases political instability in local governance.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.40
3	Political decamping undermines voters' confidence and trust in the democratic process.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.55
4	Frequent party switching disrupts policy continuity in government and results in policy reversals	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.35
5	Political decamping creates electoral uncertainty and confusion.	320 (80%)		80 (20%)		3.15
6	Political defection encourages opportunistic politics.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.50
7	Frequent party switching increases the cost of elections and governance.	320 (80%)		80 (20%)		3.25
8	Carpet crossing erodes accountability of elected officials.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.45
9	Political decamping discourages citizen participation in politics.	280 (70%)		120 (30%)		3.00
10	Political decamping contributes to democratic setbacks at the grassroots level.	360 (90%)		40 (10%)		3.40

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) agreed with eight out of the ten statements highlighting the negative effects of political defection on democratic stability. Among these, the statement that political decamping undermines voters' confidence and trust in the democratic process emerged as the most significant impact (Mean = 3.55), underscoring the erosion of the social contract between elected officials and the electorate. In addition, strong agreement that decamping encourages opportunistic politics (Mean = 3.50) and weakens democratic institutions (Mean = 3.45) reinforces public perception of decamping as a corrosive practice that prioritises selfish interests and undermines democratic health. Although the levels of agreement were slightly lower for the statements that decamping discourages citizen participation (70%) and creates electoral uncertainty (80%), these effects remain substantial and further demonstrate the destabilising consequences of political defection.

Research Question 3: How does political defection influence party cohesion and political loyalty at the local government level in Oyo Metropolis?

Table 3: Analysis of responses on how political defection influences party cohesion and political loyalty at the local government level in Oyo Metropolis

S/N	Statement	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Mean
1	Political decamping weakens party unity.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.58
2	Party defection reduces members' trust in party leadership.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.63
3	Political decamping discourages long-term party membership.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.40
4	Party loyalty declines when leaders frequently cross parties.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.68
5	Defection leads to factional crises within political parties.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.45

6	Political decamping affects party's ability to mobilise voters.	320 (80%)	80 (20%)	3.25
7	Political defection reduces commitment to party ideology.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.50
8	Carpet crossing creates instability within party structures.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.53
9	Party discipline is weakened by frequent party switching.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.58
10	Political decamping encourages opportunistic party loyalty.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.55

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

The findings presented in Table 3 demonstrate an overwhelming consensus, with 95% of respondents agreeing across four statements that political decamping seriously undermines internal party stability and loyalty. The erosion of party loyalty resulting from frequent party switching by leaders emerged as the most significant negative effect (Mean = 3.68), confirming that elite behaviour is a central driver of the loyalty crisis within parties. Furthermore, 95% of respondents agreed that defections reduce members' trust in party leadership and further weaken party cohesion, indicating that decamping erodes the trust and shared purpose essential to a functional party system. The high level of agreement that decamping encourages opportunistic party loyalty (90%) further suggests that party allegiance is increasingly viewed as transactional rather than ideologically driven.

Research Question 4: What measures can be adopted to mitigate negative consequences of political defection towards promoting democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis?

Table 3: Analysis of responses on measures that can be adopted to mitigate negative consequences of political defection towards promoting democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis

S/N	Statement	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Mean
1	Strengthening internal party democracy would help reduce political defection.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.68
2	Legal restrictions on political defection would help promote democratic stability.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.45
3	Introducing penalties for unjustified party switching would deter defectors.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.50
4	Encouraging ideology-based politics would reduce frequent party switching.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.40
5	Civic education would enhance respect for party loyalty.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.35
6	Strengthening electoral laws would discourage opportunistic political defection.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.45
7	Conflict resolution mechanisms such as dialogue with aggrieved party members would help reduce incidence political decamping.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.55
8	Rewarding loyalty within parties would discourage defection.	360 (90%)	40 (10%)	3.50
9	Promoting transparency in party leadership would reduce defections.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.63
10	Public awareness on democratic values would help mitigate negative effects of decampment.	380 (95%)	20 (5%)	3.53

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

The analysis reveals a strong consensus of 90% or more across all statements on proposed mitigation measures, with a clear emphasis on internal structural and transparency reforms. Strengthening internal party democracy emerged as the most strongly endorsed solution (95% agreement; Mean = 3.68), identified as a crucial first step in addressing the internal grievances that drive political defection. This is closely followed by strong support for promoting transparency in party leadership (95% agreement) and enhancing public awareness of democratic values (95% agreement), underscoring the importance of accountable leadership alongside an informed electorate. Similarly, measures that combine incentives to reward party loyalty (90% agreement) with deterrents such as penalties for unjustified party switching (90% agreement) received substantial backing, indicating a preference for a comprehensive approach that integrates legal sanctions with internal party reforms to strengthen democratic stability.

Discussion

The findings from this study revealed multiple interconnected factors driving political decamping amongst politicians in Oyo Metropolis. Respondents identified dissatisfaction with party leadership, weak internal democracy, personal political ambition, financial inducements, ethnic considerations, party crises, and the desire to align with ruling parties as major factors influencing party switching. This finding consistent with recent scholarly observations that leadership disputes and internal governance failures precipitate party switching in Nigerian politics (Azubike et al., 2025). Similarly, Godwin and Oluwalogbon (2024) contend that the absence of strong ideological foundations and effective internal governance has contributed to persistent political instability in the Fourth Republic.

The absence of internal democracy within political parties emerged as another critical determinant, corroborating Diepreye's (2025) assertion that authoritarian party structures and exclusionary decision-making processes compel ambitious politicians to seek alternative platforms where their political aspirations can be accommodated. This finding is further reinforced by Abdullahi Yusuf (2026), whose study of the 2023 general elections established that the imposition of candidates, lack of transparency in party processes, and marginalisation of members in internal party affairs were primary precipitants of high-profile defections in Nigeria.

The findings further revealed that personal ambition and financial incentives remain significant motivations for political defection, indicating that political competition in Nigeria is often driven by access to power and patronage rather than policy preferences. This supports Agboga's (2023) finding that politicians strategically switch parties to improve their electoral prospects. However, such behaviour undermines ideological politics and weakens public confidence in political parties as representative institutions.

The tendency of politicians to defect to ruling parties also reflects the advantages associated with incumbency and access to state resources. While this strategy may benefit individual politicians, it weakens opposition parties and reduces effective democratic competition. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that when political actors prioritise short-term political gains over institutional norms, democratic accountability and competitive politics are gradually eroded.

The findings demonstrated that political decamping has significant implications for democratic stability in Oyo Metropolis. Respondents agreed that frequent defections weaken public confidence in political parties, undermine electoral accountability, promote political instability, and reduce citizens' trust in democratic institutions. These findings suggest that political decamping goes beyond individual political choices but poses broader challenges to democratic governance. Frequent movement of politicians across party lines weakens party institutionalisation and creates uncertainty in the political system, making it difficult for voters to hold elected officials accountable for campaign promises and policy outcomes. This finding is consistent with Diamond (1999), who argues that stable and institutionalised political parties are fundamental to democratic consolidation because they promote accountability, political participation, and effective representation. Similarly, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) contend that the erosion of democratic norms by political actors gradually weakens democratic institutions and public confidence in governance.

The findings also indicated that political decamping weakens the effectiveness of opposition parties by encouraging the concentration of political power in the ruling parties. This reduces political competition and limits the ability of opposition parties to provide effective oversight of government activities. Such a trend undermines the principle of competitive democracy, which depends on the existence of credible political alternatives.

The findings demonstrated that political decamping compromises parties' voter mobilisation capacity by reducing organisational coherence and grassroots networks essential for electoral success. This finding is in sync with Azubike, Ogbuka, & Udenta (2025) which indicated that when parties experience frequent defections, their ability to maintain stable constituency relationships and mobilise supporters diminishes significantly. Extending this analysis further, Onuoha (2026) argues from a pragma-sociological perspective that political defections in Nigeria have evolved beyond mere strategic acts into discursive performances through which powerful actors legitimise power consolidation and deliberately weaken opposition structures. In his view, the normalisation of defection contributes to the erosion of democratic competition, the decay of institutional checks and balances, and the gradual emergence of a de facto one-party system, a trajectory that the overwhelming evidence from Oyo Metropolis respondents strongly corroborates, given their high levels of concern about opportunistic politics and the weakening of accountability mechanisms.

Findings also show that political decamping contributes to democratic setbacks particularly at the grassroots level. This revelation aligns with the findings of Atuonwu and Omeje (2025) who reported that party defection has become a pervasive and institutionalised feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, significantly undermining democratic governance. Amos (2026) similarly found, using Rational Choice Theory as an analytical framework, that political defections in Nigeria are primarily driven by personal ambitions and shifting political alliances rather than ideological consistency or public service commitment, and that the cumulative effect is the weakening of party ideologies and the erosion of public trust in political institutions. This convergence of findings across different methodological approaches and geographical contexts confirms that the challenges documented in Oyo Metropolis are not isolated but reflect a broader pattern of institutional decay driven by opportunistic defection behaviour across the Nigerian polity. As a result, political parties function largely as weak organisational platforms, lacking firm ideological foundations and internal cohesion.

The study further revealed that political decamping weakens party cohesion by eroding party loyalty, increasing internal conflicts, reducing members' commitment, and disrupting organisational stability. Frequent defections create uncertainty in political parties and discourage members who remain committed to party structures. Rather than strengthening democratic competition, persistent defections undermine organisational stability and limit political parties' ability to articulate coherent policy alternatives and effectively perform their representative functions. This finding is consistent with Ojenamah (2023), who argues that weak internal party dynamics and patronage-driven politics undermine democratic governance by weakening the effectiveness of political parties. Similarly, Atuonwu and Omeje (2025) contend that persistent party defections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have weakened party discipline, undermined political accountability, and constrained democratic governance. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening internal party democracy and promoting ideological commitment are essential for improving party cohesion and sustaining democratic governance in Nigeria.

The findings further showed that respondents identified the promotion of internal party democracy, ideological reorientation, transparent candidate selection, effective conflict resolution, and stronger enforcement of constitutional and electoral regulations as important strategies for reducing political defections. These findings suggest that sustainable democratic stability depends on strengthening political institutions and improving internal party governance. This finding is consistent with Ojenamah (2023), who argues that political parties can only contribute meaningfully to democratic governance when they uphold internal democracy, transparency, and accountability in their operations. Similarly, Atuonwu and Omeje (2025) contend that addressing persistent party defections requires institutional reforms that strengthen party discipline, enforce constitutional provisions, and promote ideological commitment among political actors. Therefore, strengthening internal party democracy and enforcing existing electoral regulations are essential for reducing political defections and sustaining democratic governance in Nigeria.

Policy Recommendations

Political parties should institutionalise transparent and inclusive internal democratic processes, particularly in leadership selection and candidate nomination. Strengthening internal party democracy would address leadership dissatisfaction, reduce internal conflicts, and minimise grievances that frequently trigger political decamping at the local government level.

Electoral and constitutional frameworks should be strengthened to regulate political defection, especially among elected officials. Carefully designed sanctions for unjustified party switching would discourage opportunistic behaviour while preserving legitimate political mobility, thereby promoting democratic stability and institutional predictability.

Political parties should develop coherent ideological platforms and policy-based programmes rather than operating as personality-driven electoral vehicles. Ideology-based politics would reduce defections motivated by personal ambition, financial inducements, and alignment with ruling parties, and enhance meaningful political representation.

Political parties should establish functional grievance-handling and conflict-resolution mechanisms, including mediation and dialogue platforms for aggrieved members. Early resolution of party disputes would limit factional crises and reduce the incidence of defections arising from unresolved internal conflicts.

Political parties should adopt formal incentive structures that reward loyalty, long-term membership, and organisational commitment. Recognising loyalty through leadership opportunities and political inclusion would discourage frequent party switching and strengthen party cohesion at the grassroots level.

Electoral bodies, civil society organisations, and political institutions should intensify civic education programmes highlighting the democratic costs of political decamping. Improved political literacy among voters would reduce tolerance for opportunistic politics, strengthen accountability, and encourage sustained citizen participation in democratic processes.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that political defection should not be dismissed as a mere issue but as a fundamental problem at the very core of Nigeria's democracy. Drawing on empirical evidence from Oyo Metropolis, the study establishes that inter-party defection is overwhelmingly driven by non-ideological and self-serving motivations. Its drivers include the strategic desire to align with ruling parties for access to political patronage and state resources, personal ambition for elective office, and the failure of political parties to maintain functioning internal democratic processes. These findings confirm that Nigerian political parties have largely evolved as electoral vehicles rather than ideologically grounded organisations capable of sustaining meaningful representation and party loyalty. The study found that frequent party switching significantly erodes voter confidence and institutional trust, weakens party cohesion and discipline, disrupts policy continuity, and reduces elected officials' accountability to the electorate. Findings further suggest that frequent party defection undermines citizen participation, diminishes the capacity of parties to mobilise supporters, and sustains a culture of transactional and opportunistic politics that privileges individual advancement over the public good. The study concludes that strengthening internal party democracy to ensure inclusive leadership processes, enacting and enforcing clearer constitutional and legislative restrictions on opportunistic defection, rebuilding parties along ideological rather than

personality-driven lines, institutionalising conflict resolution mechanisms within party structures, rewarding party loyalty, and scaling up civic education are not optional enhancements but necessary preconditions for democratic stability. Unless these reforms are implemented, Nigeria's democratic aspirations will remain stalled, as constant party-switching continues to undermine accountability and institutional growth. Without deliberate and sustained reforms across these dimensions, the culture of political decamping will continue to undermine Nigeria's aspirations for a consolidated, accountable, and mature democracy.

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