



## Incumbent Political Party State Capture and Party Defections in Nigeria: Implications for Democracy and Good Governance

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### ABSTRACT

State capture, a widespread and irregular practice observed across Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America, has contributed to the establishment of one-party dominant states, the politicisation of governmental institutions, and recurrent defections within political parties. In Nigeria, the incumbent state capture is perpetuated through several strategies, such as installing loyalists within opposing parties, utilising anti-corruption bodies to intimidate political adversaries, exerting considerable influence over the judiciary and electoral bodies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and invoking emergency provisions to impose emergency rule. This paper aimed to dissect the methods employed by the incumbent to exert control over the political landscape and to comprehend the consequences for governance and democratic processes. The research draws upon both rational choice theory and Marxism to provide a robust analytical framework. Employing a qualitative approach, a historical case study was conducted, relying on secondary qualitative data and thematic analysis for interpretation. This paper posited that incumbent political party state capture has eroded opposition strength, leading to frequent defections, mergers, and the formation of new parties designed to challenge and dislodge the central government. To counteract political party state capture in Nigeria, the paper recommends strengthening the judiciary and electoral authorities, diminishing the appeal of public office, and fostering political parties with distinct democratic and ideological platforms.

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### INTRODUCTION

State capture represents a significant and widespread challenge across Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Examining Poland (under the Law and Justice party from 2015 to 2023) and Hungary (under Fidesz from 2010 to the present) comparatively reveals a pattern of systematic erosion of democratic safeguards. Both administrations targeted the judiciary, media, and economic sectors to consolidate power. Specifically, both countries prioritized gaining control over their respective judiciaries. While Hungary's Fidesz effectively transformed

its Constitutional Court into a compliant body, Poland's Law and Justice Party encountered more substantial obstacles and opposition in its efforts to assert dominance over the judicial system (Karolewski & Sata, 2025). More so, Hungary established a centralised, monopolistic media environment through strategic state advertising expenditures and the promotion of pro-government media ownership which Poland adopted a similar strategy by leveraging a state-owned energy conglomerate to acquire regional media outlets, though private media entities

managed to maintain greater market influence (Kerpel, 2017).

In Nigeria, the incumbent political party state capture which is a variant of state capture, wherein the executive or incumbent endeavors to wield significant influence over nearly all state institutions, including the judiciary and electoral authority, as well as their own political party structure. This process often involves practices such as patronage and the appointment of loyalists within local, state, and national governance frameworks. In addition, it may extend to the infiltration of opposition political parties by placing individuals who align with the interests of the ruling party within their executive committees. This strategy serves to diminish the effectiveness of opposition parties, thereby reducing their potential to challenge the prevailing political dominance and the agenda of power retention and consolidation. Two instances would suffice; the first is the working of the G-5 Governors [Former Governors Seyi Makinde (Oyo), Samuel Ortom (Benue), Nyesom Wike (Rivers), Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Enugu) and Okezie Ikpeazu (Abia)] in 2023 general elections against their party the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (The World Satellite (2022). The second is the Labour Party (LP) Leadership crises (Oyedokun, 2025). Put differently, political dominance by the incumbent can be achieved through various strategies, including the infiltration of opposition parties with agents, the manipulation of political party structures, the intimidation of opposition figures by utilising anti-corruption agencies, the appointment of party loyalists to critical positions within government agencies and other state entities, as well as the suppression of dissenting voices and the further marginalisation of civil society.

The pervasive issue of state capture by entrenched interests in Nigeria has inflicted severe repercussions on the mechanisms of governance and democratic principles which has resulted to the politicisation of governmental institutions, twitting to a one-party dominant state and weakening of oppositions occasioned by frequent defections to the party at the center. Significant defections primarily from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC), as well as shifts from both the PDP and APC, along with other parties, to the African Democratic Congress (ADC). High-profile defections include those of PDP Governors, such as Sheriff Oborewori of Delta State, Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State, Ubah of Enugu State, Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State, Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State and Agbu Kefas of Taraba State, to the APC which represent the first category of party switches (Oamen, 2025 ; Bolaji, 2025). The movement of prominent political figures such as a two-time presidential aspirant Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, David Mark, Aminu Tambuwal, Sule Lamido, and Rauf Aregbesola to the ADC exemplifies the second category (Fabunmi, 2025). Scholars have adduced numerous reasons for these

defections to include relevance, access to state resources, monetisation of politics, internal conflicts/leadership crises, absent of stringent legal deterrents (Dappa, Jacinta & Yenda, 2025; Diepreye & Oputa, 2025). Another important reason is the protection of defectors from persecution by the anti-corruption agency. Oni & Joshua (2020, as cited in Diepreye & Oputa, 2025) suggest that politicians often align themselves with the governing party to maintain political relevance and mitigate potential repercussions.

However, most studies on state capture primarily focus on its manifestation through oligarchs (Marandici, 2021), economic elites, or business magnates (Kauffman, 2024), as well as bureaucrats (Falola, 2021) and populist governments (Carrion & Korman, 2023). This existing body of research tends not to examine political party state capture by the incumbent and its implications for democracy and governance. Accordingly, this study aimed to address this gap by conducting a critical investigation into political party state capture and its mechanisms of dominance in Nigeria. The second section of this paper was dedicated to the conceptual elucidation of democracy, governance, state capture, and political party state capture and party defections. The following section presented the theoretical frameworks of rational choice theory and Marxism in understanding the phenomena of political party state capture and defections in Nigeria. The methodology section employed historical case study method. An examination of the history and causes of defections in Nigeria is presented, followed by a comprehensive discussion of political party state capture and its mechanisms. The study also explored the implications of political party state capture and defections for democracy and governance, culminating in a well-informed conclusion.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### ***Democracy***

On September 15, 2025, the International Day of Democracy, UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarked that "*Democracy is powered by the will of the people -- by their voices, their choices, and their participation*" (Guterres, as cited in United Nations, 2025). However, this definition is not applicable to democracies like Nigeria, where the electoral process is compromised, citizens' voices are often unheard, and their choices are frequently disregarded, contributing significantly to voters' disillusionment in the country. While a state may be nominally democratic, its operations may, in practice, resemble authoritarianism.

Kahn (2025) posits that democracy embodies governance by the popular sovereign rather than by a transient majority. He emphasised that democracy extends beyond mere representation; it includes the rule of law, equal respect and dignity for all individuals, and the electoral

process as a means of selecting representatives. Within the Nigerian political framework, questions arise regarding the extent to which the majority truly has their voices heard. Are votes not manipulated? Do votes genuinely carry weight? Are there not individuals who operate above the law? Are citizens' voices not suppressed? Are the electoral processes not flawed? The nature of democracy practiced in Nigeria warrants further exploration.

Singh (2025) defines democracy as a principle of governance by the populace, primarily manifested in contemporary contexts through representative democracy, wherein citizens elect officials to make decisions on their behalf. He outlines key characteristics of democracy, which include universal suffrage, free and fair elections, equal treatment under the law, and the protection of fundamental rights. Additionally, he highlights the importance of checks and balances and pluralism. Singh's perspective indicates that democracy can take various forms, including direct democracy, wherein the populace is directly involved in decision-making processes, as was evident in the ancient Greek City-State and in the Pre-colonial Igbo Society of Nigeria, contrasting with the representative democracy previously discussed.

Sedaca (2024) argues that democracy is the only system that guarantees accountable leadership, protects individual rights, ensures individuals live freely and with dignity, and creates incentives for leaders to prioritise the interests of the populace over their own. This assertion does not hold true in Nigeria, where there is a notable lack of accountability among leaders, significant undermining of citizens' rights, suppression of voices, and a focus on personal accumulation and self-aggrandisement by those in power.

In summary, democracy is characterised as a system of government exercised, either directly or indirectly, by eligible citizens, incorporating principles of equality, equity, rule of law, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and civil liberties, among others. However, a distorted version of democracy, referred to as "authoritarian or pseudo democracy" (Nwozor, 2021) or "competitive authoritarianism" (Way & Levitsky, as cited in Marandici, 2021), describes a governance system that superficially exhibits democratic features, such as a multi-party system, separation of powers, and periodic elections, while fundamentally functioning as an autocratic state lacking accountability, strong party ideology, freedom of expression, and integrity in democratic processes and institutions, including elections and the judiciary. This depiction accurately captures the type of democracy practiced in Nigeria.

### **Good Governance**

Good governance is a crucial component for governments to achieve their developmental objectives and priorities. It

pertains to the formulation of policies and their effective implementation by both state and non-state actors (Okoh, 2015). State actors encompass government bureaucracies, while non-state actors include multinational corporations and civil society organisations. Good governance mitigates corruption, ensures that minority perspectives are considered, amplifies the voices of vulnerable segments of society, and responds proactively to the future needs of communities (UNESCAP, n.d.). Moreover, good governance embodies essential qualities such as participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability (UNESCAP, n.d.). Essentially, good governance is characterised by predictable, open, and enlightened policy-making, bureaucracies guided by professional ethics in pursuit of the public good, adherence to the rule of law, transparent processes, and the active involvement of a robust civil society in public matters (World Bank, 1994, as cited in Okoh, 2015).

On the contrary, poor governance represents a deficiency in most, if not all, of the criteria associated with good governance. Consequently, it is marked by ineffective policy formulation and implementation, unaccountable bureaucracies, unjust legal systems, abuse of executive authority, a weakened civil society, and pervasive corruption. The ramifications of poor governance on both party systems and political systems are significant. In the context of party systems, it may result in intra-party conflicts, leadership crises, imposition of candidates, the emergence of patronage systems, and defection, which in turn leads to political instability and undermines the legitimacy of democracy. At the political system level, poor governance reinforces corruption, widespread insecurity, multidimensional poverty, and high unemployment rates. This highlights the necessity for robust institutions, strong political will for enforcement, quality leadership, the establishment of the rule of law, and adherence to constitutional principles.

### **Defections**

*"Party defections occur when politicians leave their political party to join another, often for strategic reasons"* (Dappa, et.al, 2025). Similarly, *"party defection is a practice where by politicians abandon their political parties for new alliances often motivated by personal ambitions rather than ideological realignment"* (Nwanegbo, Odigbo and Nnorom, 2014 as cited in Dappa, et.al, 2025). More so, defection is resigning from one party to join another for personal motivations, political survival or strategic gains than ideological conflicts (Okocha, 2020, as cited in Diepreye & Oputa, 2025). In accordance with the definitions provided above, it can be inferred that politicians may defect primarily for parochial benefits rather than for ideological motivations, policy priorities, or

internal conflicts, as exemplified by the Nigerian context. In this context, politicians exploit constitutional loopholes present in Section 68(1) (g) of the amended 1999 Federal Constitution, as well as the inadequate enforcement mechanisms within the judicial system. For example, Section 68 does not extend its provisions to executives and senior politicians, focusing solely on legislators. This allows for scenarios in which an elected governor from one party may transition to another party, resulting in significant political implications.

### **State Capture**

According to Falola (2021), “*state capture implies the overtaking of available social, political and economic institutions associated with the protection of the masses for sake of bureaucratic power*”. Falola perceives state capture from the prism of bureaucrats, who are the captors of state institutions. Obasanjo (2024) sees state capture as “*a type of systemic political corruption, in which private interest significantly influence a state’s decision making process to their own advantage*”. He further contends that “*a captured state runs on the whims and caprices of the captors and not the people*” (Obasanjo, as cited in Punch Editorial Board, 2024). Obasanjo’s definition points out that state capture is a form of pervasive corruption and it involves both the captors and captured. The captors in this regard refer to the non-state actors like the economic elite. For Kauffman (2024: 6), “*state capture means shaping and manipulating of national laws, regulations, policies and institutions by the powerful for their own benefit at the expenses of the public good*” This highlights a regulatory form of state capture, where regulators and policymakers are influenced to prioritise the interests of powerful economic actors over those of the public, achieved through mechanisms such as lobbying, political donations, and bribery.

It can be inferred that state capture can involve both the capture of the state and capture by the state (Marandici, 2021). The latter signifies a scenario in which state actors exert considerable influence and dominance over state institutions and other societal spheres, which encompasses incumbent state capture or bureaucratic state capture. Conversely, capture of the state involves non-state actors, including oligarchs and economic elites. The variants of state capture are briefly outlined as follows: Corporate or economic elite state capture represents a variant of influence exerted by economic elites (non-state actors) over decision-making bodies such as the Legislature, resulting in favorable policies and the discouragement of competition. For instance, during Buhari’s administration in Nigeria (2015-2023), select firms, including Dangote, BUA, and a gas supply company, received government waivers during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate exports through closed borders to other African countries (Daily Trust, 2020). Oligarchic state

capture describes a situation in which non-state actors, namely oligarchs, exert disproportionate influence over state institutions through various networks (Marandici, 2021). An illustrative case of this is observed in Moldova post-Soviet Union dissolution, where oligarchs emerged as prominent beneficiaries of market transitions.

Regulatory state capture refers to the manipulation of regulations by non-state actors, particularly economic elites or business magnates, as previously noted. In the context of competitive state capture, both economic and political elites strive to manipulate state institutions for their own specific interests. This phenomenon was articulated by Atedo Peterside, the founder of Anap Jets Limited, during his remarks at the 4th National Leadership Colloquium held in honor of Ituah Ighodalo’s 63rd birthday. The colloquium, themed ‘Mistakes Nigeria Made,’ took place at Trinity Church in Victoria Island, Lagos. Peterside noted that:

*"Political and business actors were working to ensure that Nigeria only works for them. The common trend that I see today, 2024, is that many actors; political and business actors, are actually competing at a game called 'state capture. The Nigerian state is supposed to work for 200 million Nigerians, but I'm concerned that this set of people are making sure that it doesn't work for 200 million Nigerians, it only works for them- a handful of people"* (Atedo Peterside, as cited in Iwok, Oyedokun & Athekame, 2024)

Bureaucratic state capture denotes a scenario where bureaucrats leverage substantial influence over the social, political, and economic institutions of the state (Falola, 2021). This category aligns with Hamza Alavi’s analysis in “The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh” of 1972, which identifies the significant role of influential bureaucrats within the colonial state. Political party or incumbent capture pertains to the re-politicisation of the state by political parties seeking a monopoly on power (Innes, as cited in Marandici, 2021). Instances of party dominance are observable in Hungary, Poland, and Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Lens**

The study adopted two frameworks (rational choice theory and Marxism) to explain political party state capture and defections in Nigeria. The initial theory briefly describes the reasons (human nature) behind defections in Nigeria, while the second theory addresses the concept of political party state capture from the viewpoint of the hegemony class.

### **Rational Choice Theory**

Proponents of this concept are Adam Smith, the author of the well-known publication “The Wealth of Nations” in 1776, Gary Becker’s work “Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach” published in 1968, William Riker’s

book "In The Theory of Political Coalitions" from 1962, and James Coleman's publication named "Foundations of Social Theory" from 1990, among others. Rooted in economics, this theory has been extended to different disciplines such as sociology and political science. As noted by Howson (2021), the theory traces its beginnings to Adam Smith's well-known work "Wealth of Nations," published in 1776, where it is argued that individual decisions, driven by self-interest, ultimately contribute to the greater good. In essence, it takes an interdisciplinary approach to analysing social and political phenomena. The theory sees individuals as rational beings who make choices based on outcomes that will be beneficial to them (Watson (2022). Decisions are arrived at by weighing the cost against the expected benefits that is individuals apply the cost-benefit analysis in carrying out actions (Howson, 2021) The rationalists argue that there is the ranking of preferences that are consistently unchanging and assumes that actors possess or have access to unlimited information that informs their decisions taken or made (Eneanya, 2016).

By connecting this theory to party defections in Nigeria, it clarifies how politicians weigh perceived benefits (selection chances, protection, relevance and incentives) as against costs (losing elections, prosecution by the anti-corruption agencies and party discipline). In other words, defections are driven by parochial interests or inordinate ambitions (benefits) rather than ideological convictions or transformative ideas or internal party crisis.

### **Marxism**

Key proponents of this theory are Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) and Leon Trotsky (1879-1950). Marxists perceive the state as a tool of disparity and exploitation, managed by the ruling economic and political class known as the bourgeoisie, due to their ownership of the means of production in contrast to the dominated class referred to as the proletariat, or working class (Roy, 2025). The bourgeoisie utilise the state to advance their own interests, with state capture being a common occurrence. Evidence of state capture manifests in various forms, such as the domination of all state institutions, including the legislature, judiciary, military, police force, Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), along with opposition parties. Captors accomplish this by placing loyalists in government institutions, thereby politicising them; by offering incentives to opposition members to switch sides; by implementing emergency regulations, among other tactics.

This theory is crucial in understanding state capture in Nigeria, where in the course of furthering or consolidating power by the current APC led Federal Government, they have resulted to decimating oppositions, thus, leading to unabated defections at the Federal, State and Local

Government levels. For instance, 8 PDP governors had crossed over to the APC, with APC having twenty nine (29) state governors out of 36 states in Nigeria. More so, in the National Assembly, APC has over two-third majority of both houses. Thus, making the opposition less influential in matters of policy as they can be easily over-ridden. Further, the judiciary, INEC and other critical state apparatuses have been in the tight grip of the ruling party. Hence, this has implications for conduction credible elections, seeking justice or regulating the conducts of political actors.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was guided by the philosophical worldview of social constructivism, which seeks to understand reality from the perspectives of others. This is the orientation adopted by qualitative researchers. Thus, a multi-method qualitative approach called the historical case study method was adopted in this study. This method integrates diverse data sources to provide a robust understanding of a given phenomenon. Therefore, secondary data were collected from scholarly articles, the 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria as amended, webpages of political parties and various media outlets. The historical method facilitated the identification of the origin of defections as well as the trends and patterns associated with them, including the causes of defections in Nigeria. Additionally, the case study method which provides an in depth understanding of a phenomenon that is little is known about or not extensively examined was adopted to unravel the mechanisms of party state capture within this research. It is recognised that data derived from media outlets may incorporate inherent biases stemming from selective reporting, narrative framing, and the mirroring of ideological echo chambers within this analytical framework. Thus, the researchers undertook a rigorous process of verification and cross-checking for data accuracy across a multiplicity of sources, ensuring that all information was accompanied by attributable origins and temporal markers.

### **Historical Trajectory of Defections in Nigeria and Their Causes**

Party switches are not an unusual aspect of the democratic experience in Nigeria. This phenomenon is observed in various democracies globally, although the frequency of such switches tends to be greater in Nigeria. For instance, Ronald Reagan transitioned from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1962, asserting that "*I didn't leave the Democratic Party, the party left me*" (Reagan, as cited in Whetstone, 2020). Notable recent defections in the United States include Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who became an independent in 2024 (Moore & Sprunt, 2024), and former Governor Jim Justice, who shifted from the Democratic Party to the

Republican Party in 2017 (Nussbaum, Debenedetti, Robillard & Strauss, 2017). Similarly, the United Kingdom has witnessed several instances of defections over time; for example, Winston Churchill moved from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party in 1904 and returned to the Conservative Party in 1924 (International Churchill Society, 2025). A current defection involving the former Tory Minister Nadine Dorries, who joined the Reform UK political party in September 2025, stating that “*the Tory Party is dead*” (Whannel, 2025).

The initial instances of party defections in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period, exemplified by the defection of several members of the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroons (NCNC) to the Action Group (AG) in 1951. This maneuver represented a significant effort to undermine the majority votes required by the NCNC, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, to establish a government in the Western Region (Adejuwon, 2013, as cited in Edet, 2017). Further, a prominent defection occurred when Akintola and his supporters established the United Peoples’ Party (UPP) following internal party conflicts with Obafemi Awolowo, stemming from personal disagreements and struggles for power in the early 1960s (Amusa, 2013). Further prominent defections emerged during the Second Republic, characterised by prominent switches such as Abubakar Rimi, the former Governor of Kano State, transitioning from the People’s Redemption Party (PRP) to the Nigeria People’s Party (NPP) in 1983 (Jannamike, 2025), as well as Anthony Enahoro’s movement from the Unity

Party of Nigeria (UPN) to the National Party of Nigeria (Mrabure & Ogisi, 2022). Defections during this era were primarily motivated by aspirations for political survival and access to federal resources (Anikwe, Ogbuka & Udentia, 2025).

In contrast, the Third Republic experienced comparatively fewer defections due to the stringent control exerted by General Ibrahim Babangida, which led to the establishment of only two political parties, namely the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), alongside a brief transitional period that restricted opportunities for political movement (Amadu, 2023). However, in the Fourth Republic, defections emerged as a prominent and destabilising element within the political landscape. This period has been marked by high-profile defections, including that of former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar’s transition from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the Action Congress (AC) in 2006, due to irreconcilable differences with former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Furthermore, prior to the 2015 general elections, significant defections saw five former PDP Governors (Tukur, 2015) and eleven PDP Senators shifting to the APC (APC, 2014), alongside a continuing trend of party defections in the current political climate. Recent defections involve the eight (8) PDP governors who had transitioned from the PDP to APC within 2025 to 2026. Below are the list of the governors and the rationale for their defections:

**Table 1: PDP Governors and Reasons for Defections to APC**

<b>Names of Governors &amp; their States</b>	<b>Dates of Defection</b>	<b>Rationale for Defections</b>
Sheriff Oborewori of Delta State	23 April, 2025	Strengthening unity and development in the state (Ukanwa, 2025)
Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State	6 June, 2025	Due to the PDP’s dwindling prospects as the party is not performing as expected (Ukanwa, 2025)
Ubah of Enugu State	14 October, 2025	To better connect Enugu to the Federal Government (Ukanwa, 2025)
Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State:	9 December, 2025.	For protection against local politics crisis and neutralise Wike’s influence (Ukanwa, 2025, emphasis added).
Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State	29 December, 2025	Internal crises within the PDP as a major factor for defection (Ndoeche, 2025) and also to align the state’s development objectives with the policies and programmes of the Federal Government, thereby accelerating growth and delivering greater dividends of democracy to the people (Adama, 2026).
Agbu Kefas of Taraba State	31 January, 2026	To attract development projects and resources to Taraba State (Bolaji, 2025) and also to strengthen his mandate and accelerate sustainable development for the people of Taraba (abujapolitico, 2026)
Ahmadu Fintiri of Adamawa State	27 February, 2026	The desire to ensure the welfare and development of our people (Ahmadu Fintiri as cited in Yusuf, 2026)

Dauda Lawal of Zamafara State

9 March, 2026

Occasioned by the deepening internal crisis within the PDP and the need to build stronger unity to address Zamfara's security and development challenges (Salisu, 2026)

Source: Meida (2025-2026).

From table 1, the following can be adduced as reasons for the massive defections of PDP governors to the APC fold: most of the defectors cited the need for economic development of their states was the main rationale for their cross over to the APC so as to align with national interest. Internal crisis (lack of party cohesion) was also cited as one of the reasons for departure. Another adduced reason was for political protection and to secure their next term in office. In other words, the causes of defections of the PDP governors to the APC were for economic development, internal crises and political protection. The reasons provided are superficial, as empirical evidence has demonstrated otherwise. For example, Oni & Joshua (2020, as cited in Diepreye & Oputa, 2025) indicate that politicians frequently align with the ruling party to preserve political relevance and avoid potential consequences. Further, relevance, access to state resources, and the absence of stringent legal deterrents have also been identified as reasons for these political defections (Dappa, Jacinta & Yenda, 2025; Diepreye & Oputa, 2025).

### **Unravelling the Political Party State Capture Mechanisms in Nigeria**

This study primarily focuses on political party state capture in Nigeria, framing political state capture as a phenomenon where the state is captured by the incumbent, rather than by non-state actors, through direct or indirect control over party structures at both local and national levels, including opposition parties and essential state institutions such as the National Assembly, Judiciary, Anti-Corruption Agencies, and Electoral Authority. Political state capture is sustained by the ruling authority through various mechanisms, including the placement of loyalists in opposition parties; the use of anti-corruption agencies to intimidate political rivals; substantial influence over the judiciary and electoral authority, specifically the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); the invocation of emergency clauses to establish emergency rule and the control of political party structures, exemplified by practices such as godfatherism and client-patron relationships.

The practice of placing operatives within opposing political parties represents a strategy employed by incumbents to maintain their party's dominance or to reinforce their political influence for self-serving objectives. Of note include the actions of specific members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), particularly the G-5 Governors during the 2023 general elections (The World Satellite, 2022). This initiative was led by the Nyesom Wike, and

stemmed from grievances regarding the party's decision not to designate the presidential candidacy to the South, as well as Wike's exclusion from the position of running mate to presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar, who previously served as Vice-President. Consequently, this situation spurred actions that undermined party unity, as the former governors overtly supported the candidacy of Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the All Progressives Congress (APC) and actively campaigned to secure his victory in Rivers State through questionable tactics. Wike's collaboration with the opposition culminated in his appointment as FCT Minister in Tinubu's administration, illustrating a prioritisation of personal interests over those of the party and the public. Additionally, the sustained intra-party conflicts within the PDP, characterised by leadership disputes resulting in legal challenges and Wike's obstruction of party meetings by sealing the party's secretariat, further destabilises the already weakened organisation (Ailemen, 2025). Similar leadership crises have also been evident within the Labour Party (LP), where tensions between factions led by Lamidi Apapa and Julius Abure contribute to the party's fragility (Oyedokun, 2025). The intimidation of political opponents through anti-graft agencies represents one method of perpetuating political state capture in Nigeria. The widespread defection of political parties to the All Progressives Congress (APC) has contributed to a trend towards one-party dominance, prompting a realignment of forces through the African Democratic Congress (ADC) to contest APC's supremacy. Significant defections from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), and other parties to the ADC have raised concerns. Remarkable defections of governors from the PDP to APC, such as Sheriff Oborewori of Delta State, Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State, Ubah of Enugu State, Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State, Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State and Agbu Kefas of Taraba State (Oamen, 2025; Bolaji, 2025), as well as other prominent PDP leaders and senators from Delta State and other states, have notably strengthened APC's control over both chambers of the legislature (Adebowale, (2025). These defections have been perceived as attempts to avoid prosecution by anti-graft agencies. Oni and Joshua (2020, as cited in Diepreye & Oputa, 2025) suggest that politicians often align themselves with the governing party to maintain political relevance and mitigate potential repercussions. Another mechanism involves the appointment of individuals affiliated with the ruling party to critical positions within government institutions, like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Specially, Laretta Onochie who was nominated for the position of Resident Electoral Commissioner but had her appointment rejected by the Senate in 2020 due to widespread public disapproval (Isreal, 2021). Additionally, the judiciary has been politicised through nepotistic appointments. By way of illustration are the actions of former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Olukayode Ariwoola, who, during his tenure, appointed both his son and daughter-in-law as judges (This Day, 2024). These practices facilitate the occurrence of fraudulent elections, contribute to increased corruption, distort justice, undermine public confidence in the judiciary, diminish the emphasis on meritocracy, and foster a culture of impunity within the system.

The invocation of emergency rule serves as a mechanism for potential political state capture. As defined, “emergency rule is the suspension of normal law and order procedures and the introduction of strict controls of the population, typically involving military involvement, to contain a crisis or revolution” (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, as cited in Oniha, 2017). According to Section 305(3) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, specific conditions must be met for the President to declare a state of emergency, including:

1. the federation is at war;
2. there is imminent danger of invasion or engagement in a state of war;
3. there is an actual breakdown of public order and safety within the federation or any part requiring extraordinary measures for restoration;
4. there is a clear and present danger of a breakdown of public order and safety that necessitates extraordinary measures to prevent such danger;
5. there is an occurrence or imminent threat of disaster or calamity affecting either the community or a segment thereof;
6. any public danger that constitutes a clear threat to the federation's existence; or
7. the President receives a formal request as outlined in subsection (4) of this section.

It must be emphatically stated that state of emergency has been a doctrine of necessity and have been invoked on few occasions since the return of the fourth republic. Table 2 shows the administrations, years of the invocation of the emergency rule, states affected and the reasons for the invocation of the rule:

**Table 2: State Of Emergency Rule in Nigeria Since 1999**

Administration	Year of Emergency Rule	State	Reasons for Emergency Rule
Former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007)	18 May, 2004	Plateau	Accused former Governor Joshua Dariye of failing to act to end a cycle of bloodletting violence between the Plateau State’s Muslim and Christian communities that claimed over 2,000 lives since September 2001, which led to the suspension of a duly elected governor (Oyero, 2025)
Former President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015)	31 December, 2011	Borno, Plateau, Yobe and Niger	Declared a State of Emergency in some Local Governments in Borno, Plateau, Yobe and NigerStates in 2011 due to boko haram insurgency, Christmas day bombing of 25 December, 2010 (Onuah & Cocks, 2011)
	14 May, 2013	Borno, Yobe and Adamawa	Jonathan declared a state of emergency for the entire northeast insurgent-ridden states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Oyero, 2025)
President Bola Tinubu (2023 till date)	18 March, 2025,	Rivers	President declared a state of emergency in Rivers State following the protracted political crisis in the state leading to the suspension of Governor Siminalayi Fubara, his deputy Ngozi Odu and all the members of the House of Assembly for six months. This led to the enthronement of Ibokette Ibas (rtd) as administrator to take charge of the affairs of the state for the first six months (Oyero, 2025)

Source: Oyero (2025); Onuah & Cocks (2011)

Table 2 indicated that since the return of democracy from 1999 to current dispensation, only three Presidents had invoked the state of emergency clauses for reasons adduced as religious crisis in Plateau State, boko haram insurgency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States and the protracted political crisis in Rivers State. The suspension of Siminalayi Fubara by the President on the basis of security concerns is particularly noteworthy (Igariwey, 2025). However, the invoking of the emergency clause in Rivers State by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was reportedly executed without proper adherence to the constitutional voting requirements; the National House of Assembly approved it through an informal voice vote rather than a formal vote that necessitated a two-thirds majority (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2025). This action appears to have aimed at reducing the political influence of State Governor Siminalayi Fubara of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), who had engaged in significant political conflict with his predecessor, Nyesom Wike. During this six-month period, a state administrator, retired Vice Admiral Ibokette Ibas, was appointed, overseeing Local Government elections in which nearly all seats were won by the All Progressives Congress (Ogbologugo, 2025). More so, the House of Representatives approved a budget of ₦1.48 trillion (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2025), and Local Government funds that had been withheld were released to Rivers State (Ogbologugo, 2025). This rule has implications for the consolidation of democracy, adherence to the constitution, independence of judicature and adherence to the rule of law.

The phenomenon of godfatherism serves as a significant mechanism for the ongoing political state capture in Nigeria. Cheeseman, Bertrand & Husaini (2019), defines godfatherism as the influence exerted by wealthy and

powerful individuals behind the scenes, often while maintaining a low public profile. A quintessential 'godfather' typically accumulates wealth through government contracts or access to the nation's oil resources, utilising their financial power to create a network that can affect political outcomes. Afe Babalola (un.) articulates that a godfather is an individual who, due to considerable wealth or political goodwill, can influence not only the candidates nominated by their parties for election but also secure the electoral success of these candidates. The assurance of victory may manifest through practices such as vote buying or the intimidation of voters, rather than through legitimate means. In the context of Nigerian politics, a political godfather can even establish and finance a political party.

The aforementioned definitions suggest that godfatherism encompasses a relationship between a godfather and their godsons, establishing a client-patron dynamic that adversely impacts political parties, state institutions, and the public good. However, godfatherism has been embedded in our politics even prior to independence when we had regional leaders such as Obafemi Awolowo of Action Group (AG) representing the West who had protégés in the likes of Bola Ige, Bisi Akande, Lateef Jakande; Nnamdi Azikiwe of National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) representing the East who had Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe, Michael Okpara as political godsons and Ahmadu Bello of Northern People's Congress (NPC) representing the North had Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as his protégé. These leader wielded enormous power and influence as they determine who get what, when and how. Fast forward to the fourth republic, the activities of the god fathers have had deleterious effect on the dividends of governance as established below:

**Table 3: Activities of Godfathers in the Fourth Republic**

Names of Godfathers	Names of Godsons	States	Reasons for Godfathers	Implications of Godfatherism Activities
Dr. Olusola Saraki	1. Bukola Saraki 2. Gbemisola Saraki 3. Alhaji Fatai Ahmed 4. Alhaji Adamu Attah 5. Cornelius Adebayo	Kwara	Nepotism/Influence	Political Instability
1. Chief Tony Annenih 2. Chief Gabriel Igbinedion 3. Chief Ogbemudia 4. Adams Oshiomole	1. Barr. Osunbor Osareimen 2. Lucky Igbinedion 3. Ugbesia Odion 4. Godwin Obaseki 5. Pastor (Barr) Ize Iyamu	Edo	Nepotism/Influence	Political Violence
1. Chief Chris Uba 2. Chief Andy Uba	1. Chris Ngige 2. Peter Obi	Anambra	Financial Gain	Political Violence/ Instability
Alhaji Amodu Sheriff	1. Alhaji Malakchala 2. Alhaji Cubio 3. Alhaji Shetima Kasim	Bornu	Nepotism	Political Violence/ Instability

Late Chief Lamidi Adedibu	Senator Rashid Ladoja	Oyo	Influence/Favoritism	Political Violence/ Instability
1.Chief Olusegun Obasanjo 2. Chief Osoba	1. Olumide Osoba 2. Senator Iyabo Obasanjo 3. Daniel Gbenga	Ogun	Nepotism	Political Violence
Chief Ibrahim Idris 1. Senator (Barr) Pius Ayim 2.Senator (Barr) Sam Egwu Chimaroke Nnamani Orji Uzor Kalu	Idris Wada 1. Elechi Amadi 2. Umahi Sullivan Chime 1. Orji Theodore 2. Ekpeazu Eze	Kogi Ebonyi Enugu Abia	Nepotism Influence Financial Gain Nepotism/Influence	Underdevelopment Political Violence/ Instability Political Instability Political Instability
Senator (Barr) Godswill Akpabio Rabio Kwankwaso	1. Umana Okon Umana 2. Onofik Luke 1.Abdullahi Gaduje 2. Abba Kabiru Yusufu	Akwa Ibom Kano	Nepotism/Influence Nepotism/Influence	Political violence/Instability Political violence/Instability
Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu	1. Barr. Babatunde Raji Fashola 2. Akinwunmi Ambode 3. Babajinde Sowolu	Lagos	Nepotism/Influence	Underdevelopment
Nyesom Wike	Governor Siminalayi Fubara	Rivers	Political Control and Financial Resources	Political Violence/ Instability

Source: Falola, (2016) and Jones (2019), as cited in Odaudu & Mikhelobva, 2025; Chukwu, 2024 as modified by the researcher, modified by the researcher.

As revealed in table 3, the reasons for godfatherism are centered on nepotism, favouritism, political influence and financial gain which portends detrimental effects on the political system in the form of political violence/instability, capture of state institutions and underdevelopment.

### **Implications of Political Party State Capture and Defections for Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria**

Nwozor et al. (2021) assert that state capture allows political elites to influence the development of policies, thereby inadvertently shaping policy outcomes to their advantage, in contrary to public interest. The societal costs of state capture are significant, as it undermines the fundamental rules and institutions designed to serve the public interest, negatively impacting the rule of law, security, human rights, democracy, and accountability, which ultimately leads to greater inequality and division within society (Kauffman, 2024). Falola (2021) suggests that state capture contributes to a rise in crime perpetuation without the imposition of punitive measures. A consequence of political state capture is the formation of a new political or mergers to challenge the status quo. That is the alignment and re-alignment of forces. The grouping of aggrieved members from opposition parties in the African Democratic Congress (ADC) is instructive in this regard. In this case, defections can be argued to be reaction or consequence of executive dominance. As coalitions have shown in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections, how the APC that was birthed by merger of four (4) opposition parties (The Action Congress of Nigeria

(ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP), and a segment of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) (<https://apc.com.ng/about.php>), unseated the dominant PDP government at the centre.

Unchecked defections indicate that the consolidation of democracy is under considerable threat, rendering most opposition parties weak and ineffective. This is evident in the diminished role of the PDP, which is traditionally tasked with scrutinising government actions and holding it accountable, along with other political parties. Consequently, opposition parties should consistently ensure that the government remains responsive to public interests, while also engaging in constructive criticism and acknowledging positive governmental initiatives.

Defections further reveal that many political parties and politicians lack genuine ideological commitments, being primarily motivated by the desire to seize political power for personal gain. This phenomenon underscores the ideological emptiness of these parties (Nwozor et al., 2021). Consequently, it can be inferred that politicians function as “self-serving utility maximisers” prioritising self-interest and accumulation over the public good.

The phenomenon of political party capture reflects the entrenched mindset of those in power who seek to hold political office for extended periods, facilitating the uninterrupted tenure of politicians with minimal resistance from other political groups. This scenario suggests the emergence of a one-party dominant system within a multi-party framework, which leads to the

marginalisation of other groups, rendering them ineffective and irrelevant in influencing political outcomes.

Moreover, the existence of a one-party dominant state poses significant risks for Nigeria, as it fosters ongoing misappropriation of public funds, the entrenchment of clientelist networks, and the predominance of "godfatherism." This environment results in diminished standards of meritocracy, discipline, transparency, and accountability, thereby affecting the quality of recruitment and institutional safeguards.

Another consequence of state capture and unregulated defections in Nigeria is the erosion of democratic substance. Elections, which should serve as a mechanism for sanctioning corrupt leadership across government levels, become ineffective in the face of compromised electoral authorities like INEC which fails to ensure free, fair, transparent, and credible elections.

Lastly, state capture is denoted by the politicisation of virtually all governmental institutions, adversely affecting the provision of quality public services and hindering economic growth and development. Research indicates that state capture is fundamentally opposed to economic advancement, as it leads to entrenched corruption, a culture of impunity, and the disregard for the rule of law and constitutional principles. Examples from Poland, Moldova, and Nepal illustrate these dynamics.

## CONCLUSION

This research unravelled the strategies adopted by the ruling administration to maintain dominance over the political arena. These methods encompass the strategic appointment of allies within opposing political factions, the deployment of anti-corruption bodies to intimidate political adversaries, considerable leverage over judicial and electoral institutions, notably the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the invocation of emergency provisions to impose rule by decree, and the manipulation of political party frameworks, as evidenced by phenomena such as patronage networks and the influence of political godfathers. The findings indicated that the monopolisation of the state by the incumbent political party has weakened opposition parties, resulting in frequent party switches, alliances, and the establishment of new political parties aimed at confronting and displacing the party at the center. To address this issue of political party state capture in Nigeria, the paper advocates for the reinforcement of the judiciary and electoral bodies, a reduction in the allure of public office, and the cultivation of political parties with clearly defined democratic principles and ideological orientations. Ultimately, this trajectory poses a significant threat to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, as the nation risks devolving into a de facto one-party system. This development is particularly concerning for the upcoming 2027 general elections, given the diminished

capacity of opposition parties to effectively contend with the ruling party. Hence, this situation is likely to create an uneven playing field for political actors, potentially impacting election outcome, voter turnout and casting doubt on the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.

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