

PARTY DEFECTION AND CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA, 2011-2019

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Abstract

In the world of scholarship, the question that has kept bugging the mind of the majority of scholars is whether multiparty democracy is a blessing or curse to Nigeria's political environment with particular reference to the current 'madness' called party defection that is ravaging party politics in Nigeria. In fact, with the continuous and uncontrollable rate and manner in which Nigerian politicians jump from one political party to another without recourse to its negative implications on our democratic system is indeed quite disturbing. Against this backdrop, the study explores on the concept of party defection and its effect on democratic consolidation in Nigeria, 2011-2019. The theoretical framework of the study is premised on the Games theory of politics. Importantly, the study relied on documentary method of data collection with textual analysis technique applied as method of analyzing data. The study reveals that party defection constitutes a great challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Also, the rate at which politicians defect from one political party to another concretely demonstrates a high degree of total bereft of party ideology, political philosophy/foundation, and directionless among the political gladiators in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that the judiciary must re-spell out in clearer terms on the 'how', 'how not', and 'when' of inter party defection should be carried out in Nigeria and appropriately sanction those who recklessly indulge in it with impunity. More so, the alarming rate of carpet-crossing and its consequences in Nigeria calls for urgent amendment of both the federal constitution and electoral laws in order to checkmate and control the excessive dimension and evil trend of party defections in Nigeria polity.

Keywords: Political party, Party defection, Election, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation

Introduction

Representative democracy requires united political parties to perform its functions in line with the acceptable ethics and modalities of democratic principle. Similarly, party unity is essential for not only cabinet stability and policy bargaining, but also to ensure accountability in politics. In Nigeria, most recently, party defection has assumed an escalating monstrous dimension to the extent that it has rendered the polity a mere stadium for the game of politics and a seeming platform for political jamboree and an arena for marketing the political parties and politicians who are in search of relevance and/or convenient political accommodation and access to state power and resources. Again, some scholars affirm that that it has been the practice in Nigeria's unstable party democracy for people to defect to other parties with the intention to secure party tickets or nominations from the party so as to win an elections under the canopy of the new party, and after which, a good number of them will return to their former party abode. This is most common among the political gladiators in Nigeria, as it has been the members of the ruling party that defected to opposition party during non election period in order to secure the new party flag, contest and win the election under the party coverage, afterwards dumps the party and go back to the former or entirely another where there are promises of better opportunities and privileges.

In reality, the persistence of this ugly trend, its ubiquity and growth could provide a bleak future on the sustainability of party politics in Nigerian political system. As a result, the polity is bound to experience inevitable crisis in the quality of governance, peace, stability of the country, and above all, the challenges to the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy will be increasingly alarming. Thus, the study seeks to examine the issue of party defections, arising from internal party crisis and the extent it has affected sustainability of democratic principles in Nigeria.

History of Party Defection (Carpet Crossing) in Nigeria

Party defection has been given series of meaning in the present democratic dispensation. Some scholars call it “party-switching”, while some call it “carpet crossing”. Whatever nomenclature attached to it does not change its characteristics. Its historical origin in Nigeria dates back to the first republic, particularly in 1951 (Jaja, 2014). This could be seen a decade to Nigeria's political independence in the defunct western region House of Assembly. Contributing further, Aniche (2018) expressed that it was an overnight affair, when several members of the defunct National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), led by late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe decamped to the Action Group (AG), led by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo purposely to deny Zik and his party, the majority in the western region House of Assembly, which he required to form with the decamping group. AG was able to form the government in the region. Similarly, in that same first republic, another premier of that same western region of Nigeria – Ladoke Akintola left the then AG in a crisis rooted more in personality clash but explained as personal principles and his conviction to advance the Yoruba race into the Nigeria's mainstream politics to form the UNDP and enter into alliance with Northern People's Congress (Adejuwon, 2013). Subsequent republics are not exempted from defections, for instance, in the old Ondo state during the second republic, Akin Omoboriowo, the then Deputy governor of United Party of Nigeria (UPN) led government of Michael Ajasin defected and joined the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to become its gubernatorial candidate (Okparaji, 2010).

Explaining this history and the consolidation of the trend in Nigerian political system, Mbah (2011, p.3) opined that political party defection has become an increasingly permanent feature in Nigerian democratic experience. In fact, in the fourth republic of Nigeria, party defection and political instability are among the greatest challenges confronting Nigeria's democracy.

As a result, intra-party squabbles and disputable actions have continued to energize the growth of what is branded today as party defection which subsequently raises another issue of questioning the party ideology, and among others. Consequently, this sordid act termed as party defection has left a very uninteresting impression in party politics of many contemporary democracies. Evidently, massive party defections in Nigeria and the muzzy struggle that characterized the act were very fierce and intense, almost cutting the breadth of party politics in Nigeria (Awolowo, 2003). Drawing from the above, there seemed to be absence of internal party democracy in virtually all political parties in Nigeria, it is important to note that party defection is not the exclusive character of one party in Nigeria, but a general practice. Thus, the magnitude of the current defections and its impact on the body polity raises fundamental questions on the manifestation of the trend and sustainability of Nigerian democracy. In this regard, the need for in depth knowledge of the basic concepts here cannot be over emphasized.

Political Party, Defection and Democracy: Conceptual Underpinnings

Political Party

This refers to a group publicly organized by constitutional provisions and often times registered, with the objective of gaining political power in government (Unanka, 2009: 87). In a similar sense, Colomer (2005) define political parties as groups of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture, and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices. Furthermore, Anifowose and Enemuo (2005:195), identified three things that defines a political party to its members and onlookers;

- i) It is a label in the minds of its members and the wider public, especially the electorate,
- ii) It is an organization that recruits and campaigns for candidates seeking election and selection into public political offices, and
- iii) It is a set of leaders, who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government.

In line with the above, we see a political party as a group of people and an organization like any other organizations, except it is distinguished from any other group or organization by its unique objective which, in a democratic setting, is seeking control of government through nominating its candidates and presenting its programmes for endorsement through the electoral process in competition with other parties. It is more or less, a permanent institution with the goal of aggregating interests, presenting candidates for election with the purpose of controlling governments, and presenting such interest in government (Boafo-Arthur, 2003). As a vehicle for enhancing participation in governance, as well as a device not only for representation, but for conflict management, political parties help to organize public opinion, facilitate communication between government and the governed, articulate the feeling of community, and help in political recruitment. On this premise therefore, Ulu (2017) construed political party as a voluntarily organized and registered group of men and women with common interest and philosophy, and whose primary aim is to acquire and control the state power. In modern societies, political parties are distinct from other organizations because their main aim is to secure and control the state power. Political parties in modern societies have become essential to the development of political process. In any democratic system political parties are not only instruments for capturing political power but they are also vehicles for the aggregation of interests and ultimately the satisfaction of such interest through the control of government.

Defection

In politics, a defector is a person who gives up allegiance to one state in exchange for allegiance to another, in a way which is considered illegitimate by the first state (Badejo, Agunyai, Buraimo: 2016). More broadly, it involves abandoning a person, cause or some tie, as of allegiance or duty, binds doctrine to which one. This is also applied, often pejoratively, to anyone who switches loyalty to another religion, sports team, political party, or other rival faction (Mba, 2011:17). The term is often used as a synonym for traitor, especially if the defector brings with him secrets or confidential information. More broadly, it involves abandoning a person, course or doctrine to whom or to which one is bound by some tie, as of allegiance or duty. It is also, the state of having rejected one's political beliefs or political party, or a course and often in favour of opposing political beliefs or causes (Eme, and Ogbuche, 2014:15).

Therefore, the term 'political party defection' is used to refer to the departure of a member from a political party to join another political party, typically because of discontent in his existing party, depending on position of the person, which is sometimes given a different name such as party switching, carpet crossing or crossing the floor (Mathora, 2005). In most cases, political party defectors are regarded as political prostitutes without political principle, morality, conscience, and lacking in political ideology to champion the cause of leadership for the wellbeing of the society, and political development of the country.

Contributing Aleyomi (2013), there are many reasons for political party defections, which include the following

- i) The trend result from personality clash,
- ii) Power tussles,
- iii) Divergent views of on the operations of a political party's philosophy,
- iv) Crisis or division within a given political party,
- v) Disagreement on party's position on issue(s),
- vi) Realization of one's personal political ambition, and
- vii) Party leaders reneging on agreed issues of the political party, probably on power sharing formula, among other factors.

Drawing from the above, we see political party defection as an act of one's abandonment of his/her previous position or association, offers to join an opposition or ruling group/party over the issue of political ideology, manifesto or programme, and party management. However, Braji (2014) affirm that in Nigeria, from 2011 till date, many politicians at the local government, state, and federal levels had consistently defected from one political party to the other. Some politicians did so by abandoning parties on whose platform they were elected, while others after losing elections found it the best option for them to switch to another political party. Meanwhile, Baba and Aeysinghe (2017), agreed with the assertion that some past and present Governors, state/federal legislators, council Chairmen, and councilors have abandoned their elected political party platform for another, on the excuse of factional crisis or division within their political party.

Democracy

In the last decade, the global community has witnessed the emergence of mass organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe and other continents of the world. Ultimately, this has risen to demand an end to dictatorial rule and its replacement with democracy. But then, what exactly is democracy, why is it desirable, and under what conditions can it be secured? The concept of democracy has been defined by scholars from various perspectives such as direct/participatory view, liberal/representative view, and Marxist view of democracy. Hence, we wish to concentrate on liberal/representative democracy, because it has emerged as the dominant model of democracy. Therefore, from the liberal/representative point of view, democracy is a direct, popular participation in day-to-day governance. Contributing, Anifowose and Enemuo (2005), it is a set of ideals, institutions, and processes of governance that allows the broad mass of the people to choose their leaders, and that guarantees them a broad range of civic rights. It involves human rights/desiring freedom, sense of political responsibility, tolerance of opposition, majority rule, due

process, freedom of press/media, the rule of law, reasonable level of economic well-being among the people, etcetera.

Methodology

The study relies on documentary method of data collection, which is a qualitative study method. The method involves establishing information on research work from available published document such as books, journals conference papers, research reports, technical reports of concerned agencies, the internet sources, etcetera. Views of scholars/researchers are used to determine the effect of party defection on the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, 2011-2019.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted in this study is the game theory of politics. A game is any situation in which the outcomes (pay offs) are, the product of the interaction of more than one rational player. The term therefore includes not only games in the ordinary sense, such as chess and football, but enormously wide range of human interactions including politics. The theory, as the name implies, is a kind of game involving the manipulation of numbers. The theory was propounded by John Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern in 1944. Other advocates of game theory include Thomas Schelling, Martin Shubik, Morton Kaplan, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, among others. Igwe (2007:169), affirms that the game theory is applicable to examine and forecast outcomes in any competitive political process, and develop strategies for the optimization of the chances of success. Again, the game theory could be seen as a body of thought dealing with rational decision strategies in situations of conflict and competition, when each participant or player seeks to maximize gains and minimize losses. In addition, the theory is a formal study of the rational, consistent expectations that participants can have about each other's choices. Seeing politics as a game of number, the theory is a mathematical model for the study of some aspects of conscious decision making in situations involving the possibilities of conflict or cooperation, as well as processes in which the individual decision-unit has only partial control over the strategic factors affecting its environment. Thus, the applicability of the game theory of politics to this study is that it helps the analysts to focus on the strategies by which players could maximize their outcomes. Effectively, the game theory is used in;

- a) Simulating real life problem in the world system,
- b) Developing highly accurate and predictive behavior on the part of other actors,
- c) Equipping decision-makers with considerable ranges of policy choices.

Party Defection and Implications on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The current reoccurrence and the uncontrollable nature of political party defections have had a great implication on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In the past 20 years of democracy, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented drama of party prostitution by self-styled political leaders at the various levels of our democratic setting. The development which is generally referred to as party defection, cross-carpeting, decamping, party-switching, canoe-jumping, party-jumping, party-hopping, floor-crossing

etc. (Mbah,2011, Malthora, 2005) has become so popular that the average Nigerian sees it not only as a tradition but an indispensable feature of democracy. (Agudiegwu, & Ezeani, 2015, pp.105).

Between 2015 and 2019, Nigeria has recorded an unbelievable number of defection cases. Studies have revealed that under the present 2015 general election, out of the 29 governorship candidates of the main opposition party, the All Peoples Congress (APC), 18 had at one time or the other been members of the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which lost the March 29, 2015 presidential election to the APC. The roll call of these defectors are as follows: Aminu Tambwal –Sokoto, Abubakar Bagudu –Kebbi, Aminu Masari –Katsina, Umar Ganduje – Kano, Nasiri el-Rufai –Kaduna, Abubakar Badaru –Jigawa, Mohammad Abubakar –Bauchi, Inua Yahaya –Gombe, Abubakar Sani –Niger, Jibrilla Bindow –Adamawa, Simeon Lalong – Plateau, Aisha Jummai Alhassan – Taraba, Dakuku Peterside – Rivers, Okey Ezea – Enugu, Rochas Okorocha – Imo, Julius Ucha – Ebonyi, Samuel Ortom – Benue and Anyim Chinenye Nyerere – Abia. Some like Labaran Maku of Nasarawa and Adebayo Alao-Akala of Oyo after losing party primaries in the PDP dumped the party to become governorship flag bearers in All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Labour Party respectively. The absurdity of all is that these candidates of APC have held positions like senators, House of Representative Members, including Speakers, Ministers, Governors and other political appointments in the PDP government.

Conversely, the PDP governorship candidate in Adamawa state, Nuhu Ribadu was the presidential candidate of the then main opposition party, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in the 2011 general election and a front line member of the APC. The immediate past governor of Anambra state, Mr. Peter Obi having lost in the political chess of becoming a minister, resigned his membership and position as the Board of Trustee (BoT) chairman of APGA to become a frontline and caucus member of the PDP Presidential Campaign Organization, and was later “settled” with an appointment as the chairman of the Nigeria Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The same is former governors of Kano and Sokoto states, Ibrahim Shekarau and Atahiru Bafarawa who decamped from the APC to PDP to become the minister of education and frontline member cum leader of the PDP in Sokoto state respectively. In the same vein, Tom Ikimi, the founding interim national chairman of the APC is noted to have traversed the defunct All Progressives Party (APP), ANPP, CAN and APC to PDP, also Femi Fani Kayode from PDP to APC and back to PDP and endless of them!(Agudiegwu, & Ezeani, 2015, pp.105-106). The table below presents an empirical view of defection cases in Nigeria between 1999 to 2020.

Table 1: Major Catalogue of Political Party Defection in Nigeria, 1999-2020

Names	Old Party	New Party	Names	Old Party	New Party
Alhaji Kwatalo (Dep. Gov.)	ANPP	PDP	Chuba Okadigbo (Senator)	PDP	ANPP
Adamu Agungu (Dep. Gov.)	ANPP	PDP	Ike Nwachukwu (Senator)	PDP	NDP
Enyinnaya Abaribe (Dep. Gov.)	PDP	ANPP	Jim Nwobodo (Senator)	PDP	UNDP
John Okpa (Dep. Gov.)	PDP	ANPP	Chukwuemeka Ezeife	AD	UNPP
Buckmor Akerele (Dep. Gov.)	AD	NDP	Mohammed Goni	PDP	UNPP
Gbenga Aluko (Senator)	PDP	ANPP	Chris Okotie	NDP	JP
Khadirot A. Gwadabe	PDP	ANPP	Obinna Uzor (Gov. Aspirant)	PDP	NDP
Daniel Saro (Senator)	PDP	UNDP	Haruna Abubakar (Gov. Aspirant)	PDP	NDP
Peter Ajuwa	ANPP	LDP	Nuhu Audu (Gov. Aspirant)	PDP	UNDP
Mala Kachala (Gov. Aspirant)	ANPP	AD	Nnanna Onyenekon	ANPP	PDP
Mike Mku	PDP	UNDP	Catherine Acholonu	PDP	UNDP

Gbenga Olawepo (Gov. Aspirant)	PDP	NDP	Emma Bassey (HOR)	PDP	ANPP
Mathew T. Mbu Jnr. (Senator)	PDP	ANPP	Graham Ipingasi (HOR)	PDP	ANPP
Omololu Meroyi (Senator)	AD	PDP	Gbenga Oguniyi	AD	PDP
Alli Balogun (HOR)	AD	PDP	Kingsley Ogunlewe (HOR)	AD	PDP
Appolos Amodi (HOR)	PDP	NDP	Dorcas Odunjiri (HOR)	AD	PDP
Alh. M. Koirana-jana	UNPP	PDP	Rowland Owie	PDP	ANPP
Uche Ogbonnaya	PDP	ANPP	Marshall Harry	PDP	ANPP
Ukeje O.J Nwokeforo	UNPP	AD	Sergeant Awuse	PDP	ANPP
Emmanuel Okocha	APGA	PAC	Wahab Dounmu (Senator)	AD	PDP
Adamu Bulkachuwa	PDP	ANPP	Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu	ANPP	PDP
Kura Mohammed	PDP	ANPP	Iyola Omisore (Dep. Gov.)	AD	PDP
Chief Idowu Odeyemi	PDP	AD	Jonan Jang	PDP	ANPP
Chief Ade Akilaya	PDP	AD	Yemi Brinmo-Yusuf	AD	PDP
Olufemi Ojo	PDP	AD	Fedelis Okoro	AD	PDP
Kayode Oguntoye	PDP	AD	Gbolahan Okuneye (HOR)	AD	PDP
James Mako	AD	PDP	Authur Nzeribe	ANPP	PDP
Fedelis Ogodo	AD	PDP	Laken Balogun (Senator)	AAD	PDP
Arinze Egwu	ANPP	PDP	Alex Kadiri(Senator)	ANPP	PDP
Patrick Edediugwu	ANPP	PDP	Funso Williams	AD	PDP
Ray Akanwa	PDP	ANPP	Rochas Okorocha	PDP	ANPP
Bode Olajumoke	ANPP	PDP	Danishi Sango	PDP	AD
Hassan Y. Bagudu	PDP	ANPP	Olusola Saraki	ANPP	PDP
Ambali Amuda	ANPP	PDP	Alh.Abdulaziz Tonu(HOR)	ANPP	UNPP
Khinde Ayoola	AD	PDP	Muhammed Khalie	PDP	ANPP
Alli Balogun	AD	PDP	Mrs. O. Adiukwu Bakare	PDP	AD
Peter Oyetunji	AD	PDP	Audu Damsa	PDP	ANPP
Ramota Okemakinde	AD	PDP	Dapo Sarumi	PDP	PAC
Salisu Matori	PDP	ANPP	Toyin Anifowose	JP	NDP
Ibrahim Lame	PDP	ANPP	Bukar Mai Lafiya	ANPP	PDP
Annie Okonkwo	PDP	ANPP	Col. Magji Deb (Rtd.)	ANPP	PDP
Chief Akin Akomolefe	PDP	AD	Alh. Saidu ShehuAwak	ANPP	PDP
Chief (Mrs.) A. Olaye	PDP	AD	Muhammed Dukku (HOR)	ANPP	PDP
Tunde Owolabi	PDP	AD	Leke Kehinde (HOR)	AD	PDP
Emeka Nwajiuba	ANPP	NDP	Ademola Adegoroye	AD	NDP
Magnus Ngie-Abe	ANPP	PDP	Ichie Mike Ejezie	UNPP	ANPP
Prince Ugorji A. Oti	ANPP	PDP	E. Aguariwodo (HOR)	ANPP	PDP
Ben OkeObasi	ANPP	PDP	Toyin Anifowose	NDP	JP
Joseph Egwuta	ANPP	PDP	Alhaji Ibrahim Apata	ANPP	PDP
Linus Okorie	PDP	ANPP	Ikedi Ohakim (Gov.)	PPA	PDP
Jafar Bio Ibrahim	ANPP	PDP	Theodore Orji (Gov.)	PPA	PDP
Raheem Agboola	AD	ANPP	Orji Uzor Kalu (Gov.)	PDP	PPA
Uche Nwole	PDP	ANPP	Rochas Okorocha (Gov.)	APGA	APC
Peter Adeyemo	AD	ANPP	Chris Ngige	PDP	APC
Ayokan Lawani	AD	ANPP	Achike Udenwa	PDP	CAN
O. Odumbaku	AD	ANPP	Chibuike Amaechi (Gov.)	PDP	APC
Prince Elvis Jude Agukwe	PDP	AD	Attahiru Bafarawa	APC	PDP
Effiong Edunam	NDP	PDP	Muritala Nyako (Gov.)	PDP	APC

Catherine Acholonu	UNDP	NDP	Rabiu Kwankwaso (Gov.)	PDP	APC
Chinwoke Mbadinuju (Gov.)	PDP	AD	Abdulfatah Ahmed (Gov.)	PDP	APC
Alhaji BaffaGarkuwa	ANPP	PDP	Aliyu Wamakko (Gov.)	PDP	CAN
Abdulumminu Abubakar	ANPP	PDP	Ifeanyi Ararume	PDP	CAN
Sa'adu Muhammad	ANPP	PDP	Isa Yuguda	ANPP	PDP
Alhaji Sada Yakubu	ANPP	NDP	Mahmud Shinkafi (Gov.)	ANPP	PDP
Muhammed A. Umar	ANPP	PDP	Ibikunle Amosun	PDP	APC
George Okpagu	UNPP	ANPP	Segun Oni	PDP	APC
Alhaji Ibrahim Ali Amin	ANPP	PDP	George Akume	PDP	APC
Isa Kachoko	ANPP	PDP	Femi Pedro	CAN	LP
Segun Mimiko (Gov.)	LP	PDP	Emmanuel Ukoette	PDP	APC
Saminu Turaki (Gov.)	ANPP	PDP	Chuba Okadigbo (Senator)	PDP	ANPP
Atiku Abubakar (VP)	PDP	CAN	Andy Uba (Senator)	PDP	APC
Timipre Sylva	PDP	APC	Nelson Effiong (Senator)	PDP	APC
Tom Ikimi	PDP	APC	Aminu Tambuwal (Speaker HOR)	PDP	APC
Dino Melaye (Senator)	PDP	APC	Bukola Saraki (Senate President)	PDP	APC
Godwin Obaseki (Gov.)	APC	PDP	Atiku Abubakar	APC	PDP
Osagie Ize-Iyamu	PDP	APC	Dino Melaye	APC	PDP

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The above is a skeletal presentation of the madness cum political prostitution that has shrouded the Nigerian democratic politics. Imagine the situation where almost every politician dumps his former party and jumps into another with reckless abandon without any recourse to the rules. In a letter read on the Senate floor on July 24, 2018 stated that fourteen of the 16 lawmakers left the All Progressives Congress (APC) to join the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP). Another two senators later left the ruling party while parliament was in session. The then senate president –Bukola Saraki, speaking to Reuters, said he was considering his next move. “I will spend the next few days consulting with my colleagues who have defected and also my other colleagues from my state and make my announcement very soon,” Subsequently, he finally defected to PDP (Carsten & Eboh, 2018). In fact, the current trend of political defection, the nature and manner in which the politicians go about it has made some scholars to think it is normal to democracy. Robinson (2010) argues that defection is not a crime in Nigerian politics because there is nothing ideologically different in the manifestos of all parties in Nigeria. Therefore, he stated that:

The word “cross carpeting” in politics can only be relevant in a situation where parties have distinct ideologies and manifestos. Every one joins a party where his interest can be better served. Why should one continue to remain in a party that does not have his interest at heart? Political parties in Nigeria are not driven by any ideology other than making money. They all claim to be democratic just to deceive the public. Yes majority carries the vote, but must it be a majority made up of zombies or illiterates? It is obvious that one cannot play honest party politics in Nigeria unless he is ready to discard some principles that may not go well with his party. Unfortunately, there are some principles one cannot part with, even after becoming a member of a political party. One may have decided not to lie or be involved in rigging elections.

How can one accept that because he decided to be involved in partisan politics he must descend to the lowest social, educational and intellectual level to be relevant?" (Robinson, 2010:1).

The central thesis of the above is that this reckless type of defection is a mere condescension to the lowest level in personality and worth in the quest to remain politically relevant by the politicians. As a result, many Nigerians have played down on their political integrity and party is applying all means possible to regain their members, even with court litigations. With the recent litigation filed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) against its defecting senators, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and the suffocating haze foisted over the legislative ecology of the National Assembly since 2011 has taken yet another twist. The politics of defection holds critical implications for the National Assembly as the co-locus of the sovereignty of the nation state and guardian of the most populous democracy in Africa. Political Analysts and the informed Nigerian public, are already worried that the corrosive chemistry of the political defections in both chambers (upper and lower) of the National Assembly is not only diverting attention from its core mandate, but already brewing bad blood and entrenching avoidable intra-parliamentary crisis, which could jeopardize our democracy. Furthermore, the crisis of defection has led to hot plenary sessions in the red and green chambers as opponents and proponents of defection are locked in intrigues and point of order. The defectors and their protagonists anchor their defense on their inalienable right to freedom of association as guaranteed under section 40 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. Indeed, in the game of politics, there is nothing apparently wrong in one leaving one party for the other; yes, party defection is part of the game of politics, but what becomes the problem is the defectors play the game not according to the rules.

The implication, therefore, is that the current wave of discriminate defections, rather than promoting genuine competition, would reduce the political landscape to a mere field for all-comers with no focus or objective beyond self interests. With this, it is believable that if the trend continues, the right candidates will be forced to become apathetic, leaving the electorate without credible alternatives to choose from.

Vulnerabilities of the constitutional provisions of party defection in Nigeria

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended has made provisions with respect to defection from one political party to the other while holding any political office in Nigeria. These provisions could however, be categorized into two perspectives of elected executives and elected legislators. Sections 131 (c), 142 (1), 177 (d), and 187 (1) of the 1999 constitution provided that a President, Vice president, Governors and Deputy governors must prior to their elections into offices respectively belong to any of the registered Nigerian political parties and also be sponsored by such political parties during their elections into office. On the other hand, the legislators are only allowed to defect from one party to another throughout their tenure of four (4) years when and if the legislator defects to another political party as a result of internal division within his/her political party he/she defected from, or there is a merger between his/her political and one or some other parties (Ogbonna & Ezeani, 2015). Constitutional deficiency: Section 177 of the 1999 Constitution clearly states that a person shall only be qualified for election into the office of the governor of the state if he is a member of a political party and sponsored by a political party. The same 1999 Constitution fails to state that such a person cannot leave that party after achieving electoral victory. But in respect of elected senator, House of Representative members and state legislators, the 1999 Constitution specifically in section 68(1)(g) and (2) and 109 (1) (g) clearly states that a state or federal lawmaker must vacate his or her seat after defecting to another political party, member of the Senate or House of Representative shall vacate his seat in the House of

which he is a member if “being a person whose election to the House was sponsored by a political party before the expiration of the period for which that house was elected; provided that his membership of the latter political party is not as a result of a division in the political party of which he was previously a member or of a merger of two or more political parties or faction by one of which he was previously sponsored” (Agudiegwu, & Ezeani, 2015, pp.110-111). This provision has been explored by elected politicians to defect from their political party to another. Though it is evident that the Constitution stipulated that one can leave a political party on the ground of factional crisis within a given political party, it did not define “division”. It is as a result of this constitutional flaw that elected officials defect to other parties at the slightest provocation.

In this regard, the court system operations in Nigeria is characterized by politicization, corruption, and subversion of justice, where by the vulnerabilities and lacuna of the constitutional provisions on defection are fully exploited by the Nigerian politicians who decamp from one political party to the other.

Findings

The study made the following findings:

- The failure of political parties to consolidate democracy has dire consequences for the quality of governance in Nigeria and equally intensifies and escalates intra-party frictions.
- The trend of party defections in Nigeria is not only a threat to the political culture, its orientation and socialization, but also to the Nigerian legal system, since there are glaring abuses, confusion, manipulation and widening gap in the constitutional interpretation and adherence with the provision on political party defection among politicians in Nigeria.
- Most of the defecting politicians are neither responsible nor responsive to the yearnings of the electorate and the national interest, but their access to acquire, consolidation of political and economic powers of the state, as well as expropriation of public resources.
- The vulnerability of the Nigerian constitutions such as sections 68(1)(g), section 2, and section 109(1)(g), as well as some lacuna in the reference cases on legislators' defections have also fueled the defection syndrome.

Conclusion

The study explored party defection and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Nigeria at a critical period in Nigeria's political history when defection has become fashionable trend among politicians who recycle themselves from one political party to the other as old wine in new bottles. The golden days of politicians who play politics based on issues of ideology and principles no longer exist in the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The central argument of this paper is that in the game of politics, there is nothing apparently wrong in one leaving one party for the other; yes, party defection is conceived as part of the game of politics, but what becomes the problem is that the defectors rather play the game not according to the rules in relation to the constitutional provisions for party politics in any democratic system.

The perennial defections of politicians were not informed by the resolve to fight and protect the interest of the general public, but for their own selfish interests. Thus, the driving force is how to capture and consolidate state power for private gains. In search of this ultimately promote the great movement of politicians from one party to another (party defection). This trend of party switching shows that Nigerian politicians possess no democratic values, credentials, and our political system is awash with professional politicians and entrepreneurs who are devoid of modern political ideology and issue driven politics.

Recommendations

In view of the dangers of political party defection on the consolidation democracy in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

- The loopholes within our electoral system and constitution that permits party defection should be amended in order to cage this evil and ugly trend in our body politics.
- Secondly, for the purpose of deepening the practice of democracy and its consolidation in Nigeria, any elected politician that defects to another political party should be made to stand down and seek reelection.
- Thirdly, the judiciary must spell out in clear terms on the 'how', how not, and when' of inter party defection should be carried out in Nigeria, and sanction for those who do not play according to the stipulated rules.
- Fourthly, the alarming rate of carpet-crossing and its consequences in Nigeria calls for urgent amendment of both the federal constitution and electoral laws in order to checkmate and control the excessive dimension and evil trend of party defections in Nigeria polity.

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