

The Problematic of Party Defection and Nigeria's Democratic Consolidation (1999-2018)

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Abstract

Party defection, a political phenomenon though occurs in almost all "democratic" settings does not appear to enjoy universal acceptability. Its occurrence and prevalence depends on the level of political maturity of a system, the presence, significance and criticality of ideology as a political factor in the body politics of the state. The general socioeconomic and political value system of the political elites, and the generality of the populace also determine its prevalence. While it is rarely practiced in developed political systems, it is an act that is very common place in developing climes where political gladiators engage in it without recourse to its deleterious consequences on the system and the sanctity of personal integrity. It is instead employed as a political survival strategy by political jobbers to maintain their relevance in our uncertain political environment. This work represents a modest attempt at interrogating the major issues the act of frequent party defection has on the body politics of Nigeria most especially in her onerous task of democratic consolidation. The paper opines that while the goal of genuine democratic consolidation could be tasking and sacrificial, the preponderance of party switching demonstrated by the political elites with concrete and manifest personal interest obviously runs counter to the general avowed goal. The study which is essentially qualitative in methodology is based on secondary data. It suggests that a rather curious consequence of the act of defection is the problematic of getting our politics and in fact other sub-sectors right.

Keywords: *Democracy, deflection, democracy, democratic consolidation, party defection,*

Introduction

Nigeria's experimentation with liberal democratic practice since independence has thrown up a barrage of system threatening issues that are assuming more complex and protracted postures with the passage of each republic rather than assuaging. Central among these topical issues is the act of party defection, cross carpeting, switching, jumping, etc. The criticality of party defection most especially on attainment of its current dangerously high frequency level comes to the fore when viewed against its negative effects on the nation's democratic consolidation.

Although there exist an abundance of literature on the subject of party switching or defection, a remarkable contribution is that made by Chang, (2009) who argued that as an act, it is no respecter of the age of the democratic practice as it occurs in every political system but in varying degrees. It does however appear that its occurrence and frequency is a function of both the stability and maturity of the political system among other factors. According to Heller & Mershon, (2008), party switching is a natural consequence of political ambition and a reaction to party indiscipline. In effect, control mechanisms aimed at stemming the tide includes enshrined constitutional provisions which are rare in established democracies but very prevalent in developing systems. The problem of trying to comprehend the meaning and nature of party defection is further compounded by the type of multiple and complex interactions existing among the political parties as major institutional players, political gladiators and other social forces operating within the system. In effect, there is an absence of consensus among scholars and some active participants or players in the polity as to the desirability or otherwise of defection. This issue of lack of agreement is even extended beyond national boundaries. For example, crossing the floor in the Australian system does not necessarily mean defection or permanent switching of allegiance, but a change in voting position. This is quite different from normal parliamentary practices in other climes including Nigeria's First Republic which regarded the act of floor crossing as defection. What is, however, injurious or counterproductive to the polity is its frequency and the rather questionable reasons and uncivilized approaches adopted in carrying it out in some developing countries including Nigeria.

This paper tries to argue rather vigorously that the political elites consciously and deliberately encourage party defection not for any public benefit, but to sustain their political relevance at all times. An attempt is also made to extrapolate a theoretical framework on party defection in Nigeria's fourth republic vis-à-vis its occurrence and levels of operation in the past republics. Reasons for its astronomical progression and the dangers it portends for the nation's democratic consolidation are also of interest in this paper. This position is based on the observation that reviewing the events in the first, second and third Nigerian republics, the rate and level of political defection in the current dispensation is highest. This is a reflection of not only the diminishing values in politics, but in other social and moral spheres (Agbana & Opadere, 2014). Again, Ideological issues seem to be non-existent in the policy

positions of the major parties. Where there is semblance of it, they are down played as there are no remarkable differences among the parties and what they stand for. The import of this, is that it becomes easier for politicians to get engaged in acts of political promiscuity in the absence of visible and notable ideological alignments.

In pursuit of the foregoing, much reliance is placed on secondary source of data namely books, academic journals, published and unpublished works, newspapers and the internet. The style of presentation is narrative and the descriptive/historical approach was adopted. The paper also embraced a combination of theoretical viewpoints which serve as its guide. They include the colonial state, elite and institutional theories.

Party Defection

As is usual with most Political Science concepts, there appears to be some ambiguity among scholars on the exact meaning of party defection or decamping. Heoane, (2008); Okparaji, (2010); Chang,(2009); Blunt, (1964); and Aleyomi, (2013); situate party defection or decamping around an act involving an elected party representative within a legislative structure such as parliament embracing different political or policy perspectives that are incompatible with those of the party he represents. In a rather different tendril, Paul Malhotras, (2005); attempts a broader approach. He refers to political defection or party switching as the departure of members from a political party to join another party. Awofeso & Irabor, (2016); on the other hand, define cross carpeting as the act or practice in which government representatives elected on the platform of a party cross or move to another party. In effect, irrespective of the semantics involved, the emphasis is on the change of allegiance. The contextual factor comes into cognizance when reference is made to the fact that in parliamentary systems, there is usually a demarcating carpet between the majority and minority parties. Cross carpeting or defection involves the crossing of this carpet from one side of the divide to the other as was the case in the Western Regional House of Assembly in 1951 (Osaghae, 2011). Adopting this explanatory view point is rather problematic since emphasis is on any elected parliamentary representative while the movement of other key political actors or heavy weights including elected Governors, Deputies, Ministers and Party Managers is largely uncaptured, given the personalized nature of politics in the Nigerian political clime. This mode of understanding represents the position adopted in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 68 (1g) where deliberate silence is maintained on the defection of a President, Governors, Deputies and other categories of non elected political figures. In developing political systems, party defection can safely be viewed as a strong and handy political instrument of maneuverability by politicians to sustain their political relevance. Giving credence to the universal nature of party switching, Hellers & Mershon (2008) reveal that 39% of legislators defected in Brazil between 1991 and 1994, 33.7% in Italy (1992 1994), 12% in Spain (1986 - 1989) and 16% in

European parliament (1989 - 1994). It is however noteworthy that sufficient attention has not been focused on the motivation of the target party in a party switching deal. Indeed, the choices of the two actors the defector and the target party jointly determine the outcome in a potential party switching scenario. (Radean 2013).

On Political Parties

A brief consideration of the meaning, nature and activities of political parties is undertaken in order to appreciate their impact on attempts at democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Simply put, political parties are the organizing principles of modern democracies (Heywood, 1997). They are constituted by a group of people organized to acquire and exercise political power irrespective of their coloration or nomenclature. In a broader sense, a political party is made up of a group of persons bound in policy and opinions in support of a general political cause which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as is democratically feasible, of government and its officials (Agbaje, 2010). Dode (2012) argues that the existence of vibrant political parties is a *sine qua non* for democratic consolidation in any polity. In other words, the goal of institutionalizing a country's democratic ethos becomes an impossible mission without appreciating the existence, number, performance and activities of political parties. They are one of the major pillars on which the principles and practices of modern liberal democracy rest. Political parties establish their relevance according to Omilusi, (2013) by performing the functions of interest aggregation, articulation, political education and socialization. In fact they serve as instruments of translating electoral outcomes into effective action. It is therefore very arduous to imagine the smooth and successful functionality of modern democracies whether in large industrialized countries or elsewhere without political parties, irrespective of their oligarchical or plutocratic tendencies which are best regarded as necessary evil. Put differently, democracy and political parties are best seen as two faces of the same reality - the internal and the external of the same fabric. However, Jibrin and Hassan, (2015), argue that Nigerian Political parties are run by Godfathers equipped with cliental networks used for delivering crowds for party rallies and congresses. Socio-economic and political interactions within such parties are based on relationship between patrons and clients who are mobilized on pecuniary, ethnic, religious or other primordial fundamentals. Where adherence to political parties is not only fluid but opportunistic as is largely the case in Nigeria, democratic consolidation becomes rather herculean or at worst a mirage (Ibrahim, 2014).

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation can be comprehended both as a process and as a signal. As a focal point towards which political systems consciously work, a political regime is considered consolidated democratically if and when there exists, a comprehensive system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives that are

behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally observed. For Diamond, (1996), democratic consolidation exists with the operationalization and institutionalization of democratic norms and behaviours at three critical levels, namely: the elite, leader or top decision making level, the intermediate or political activities level with respect to party organization and movements, and the level of the mass public. As a process, democratic consolidation involves all those activities embarked upon at the different levels in pursuit of its realization. According to Omilusi, (2014), it is a periscope instrument employed in the act of balancing the clear management and communication structure existing within not just a political party, but a political system and it is well comprehended by its members. In effect, a political system is said to be consolidated if the structures are well established with high reverence for the rule of law, high level of political culture and free, fair and credible elections.

Origin of Party Defection in Nigeria

The question of cross carpeting or decamping is said to have found its way into Nigeria's political lexicon during the colonial pre-independence era in 1951, when the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) suddenly lost its majority position in the Western Regional House of Assembly. The NCNC had a clear majority which would have enabled Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to form a new government as the Premier. Within twenty four hours, twenty members of the NCNC cross carpeted to the Action Group (AG), mainly on the grounds of working towards avoiding major crisis in the region. It was strongly contemplated and feared that if Azikiwe who was not from the region became the Premier, there were likely to occur, negative reactions from the people. Chief Obafemi Awolowo a regional indigene and also the leader of the AG opposition party thus clinched the position of the premier while Azikiwe an Ibo by tribe was circumstantially exacted to relocate to the Eastern Region to become Premier. This singular event or phenomenon was one of the major factors that heralded tribalism and regionalism into the Nigerian political space.

Decamping or defection as an issue did not enjoy much prominence in the politics of the Second Republic most probably due to the ideological nature of some of the parties and the existence of party discipline compared to the 4th Republic. There were however, movements from some of the opposition parties at the center namely Unity Party of Nigeria, (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) to National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which was the dominant or ruling party. Eghosa Osaghae, (2011) argues that this was as a result of the Federal might and the prevalence of very attractive patronage system. Specific cases in point included the defection of Sunday Afolabi and Busari Adelakun both former avowed Awoists and lords of Ibadan politics from the UPN to the NPN. There was also the case of a sitting deputy governor in Ondo State, - Akin Omoboriowo who decamped from UPN to NPN, contested and won the governorship position in very controversial circumstances. The resultant protests, riots, deaths and

destruction of properties forced him into exile in Lagos until the results were reversed by a competent court (Osaghae, 2011).

In comparison with the 4th Republic, political parties that existed in the First and Second Republics were more ideologically oriented (Opedara and Agbana, 2011). The First Republic had AG and Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) which metamorphosed into the UPN and PRP respectively in the Second Republic. These were essentially principled, leftist and welfarist parties as distinct from the NCNC in the First Republic which was centrist and metamorphosed into NPP in the Second Republic. The first Republic conservative NPC still changed into NPN in the Second Republic retaining its conservative posture.

Ideology and Party Defection: A Theoretical Underpinning.

Interrogation of issues surrounding defection can hardly be exhausted within the gambit of a single theoretical explanatory framework. Consequently, resort is made to the application of a dual theoretical architecture in an attempt to fully grasp the existential dynamo of party defection. The theoretical constructions include the elite, and the colonial state theories.

An indeterminate look at the programmes of all the major political parties holding sway in the Nigerian 4th republic reveals a total eclipse or abeyance of ideological leaning or involvement. There is therefore the strong temptation to evince that the absence of ideology is a deliberate ploy by the political elites to evade responsibility and commitment. As Dahl, (1989) has argued, the wide acceptance of an ideology within a political system constrains the leadership and puts them at the risk of undermining their own legitimacy if they violate the norms. No doubt, it is the ideology that constitutes the keystone, the central cohesive source of support and stability for any political party or political group.

Elite Theory

The central thrust of the elite theory as propounded by its doyens- Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Roberto Michels is the existence of a compact minority in all spheres that rules over and controls the majority. The necessity for leadership in any organization whether social or otherwise is the reason for the existence of the Iron Law of Oligarchy which emphasizes the demarcation between the ruler and the ruled. It attempts to explain the ease with which the majority due to its slavish and pathetic nature is subject to manipulations and control by the minority. Michel, (1942) posits that the elites are immured to laws passed to regulate or control their activities as the laws get weakened instead of the leaders.

Apart from over monetization of politics and lack of internal party democracy being leading causes of party defection. (Musa, 2014), there is also the issue of elite impunity. Where governmental and party structures are strong and institutionalized, discipline is prevalent and the rate of party defection is lower as obtains in advanced

democracies. Nocken, (2000) strongly emphasizes the fact that only twenty defections took place in the American Congress in about fifty years: 1947 - 1997. In the case of Nigeria and some other developing democracies, it is the same set of politicians who constitute the party structures, that run governmental institutions with various kinds of undemocratic tendencies. In consequence, they not only deliberately undermine and weaken party structures, but also governmental institutions with impunity. For the average Nigerian political elite, defection is a political survival strategy. A careful reflection on the 1999 constitution most especially section 68 (1g) which deals with the issue of defection unfolds a deliberate contrivance aimed at protecting the interests of a section of the political elite namely the executive. It focuses on the legislature with no mention of the executive arm or other strata of the political elites. As is the case in law, silence means acquiescence. Even with the legislative arm, the conditions spelt out for legalizing the defection of the legislator are too flimsy and weak as all the major parties in the present dispensation have always been locked in one form of crisis or the other. Possibly due to the haste and sense of urgency with which the constitution was contrived and made operational, it painfully failed to properly interrogate the burning issues of democratic stability and the national question. Furthermore, the amended electoral act of 2010 which expunged section 87 (9) of the 2006 electoral act heightened in no small measure the suspicion again of the political elites. A substituting act section 31 (1) now *completely paralyzes Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on issues of disqualification of names submitted by parties. Also of significant note is the fact that the National Assembly in pursuit of its class interest in section 87 (10) of the 2010 electoral law as amended outlawed the powers of the courts to stop a party primary or an election in trying to determine the case of an aggrieved party.

According to Ralph Miliband, (1969), the political elite views the state or political power as an instrument to capture economic power. Where politics is run on a zero-sum basis, political combatants or belligerents stop at nothing in attempting to clinch political power including the amoral act of multiple frequent party switching. To them, the end is more crucial than the means as political integrity is regarded as a non-issue. David Easton, (1953), in his treaties, talks about the authoritative allocation of values in the determination of who gets what, when and how. This is nonetheless dependent on the acquisition of political power through the instrumentality of political parties and processes that the average Nigerian 4th Republic politician thinks must be manipulated to achieve set goals. Frequent and multiple party defections is one of the mechanisms of such manipulations.

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Colonial State Theory

The Colonial State Theory seeks to explain a situation where the colonialist political and economic activities created an attractive and powerful post-colonial state structure that could easily be converted by politicians to personal use. It spells the conspicuous absence of a productive, dynamic and independent ruling class. Consequently, the interest of politicians and so-called statesmen is geared toward maintaining the status quo rather than advocating or struggling for any meaningful change (Ake, 1981).

In pursuit of its mindless interest of pillaging and exploiting any conceivable and available resources in the colonized territories, the British colonial power as a matter of deliberate policy refused to create a productive, disciplined and independent ruling class that would galvanize both human and material resources towards sustained political and economic development. Instead, its focal point was the development of commerce that was state sponsored and run as a monopoly. (Ake, 1981). Since the petite bourgeoisie leadership was more interested in the inheritance of existing socio-political structures than in revolution, policies favourable to the dominant class were produced and maintained. There was now the emergence of the post-colonial state as a capitalist instrument of production designed and crafted by the colonial powers as a hot

bed of political contention among rival groups within the political class with fundamental understanding that its capture simply guaranteed abundant economic power and relevance. With the transmutation of the colonial state to an instrument for the achievement of private or personal interest, political defections, permutations and manipulations borne out of desperateness become ineluctable and unequivocal in attempting to control state power that has become a means of primitive capital accumulation (Iyayi, 1986). This desperateness for control of state resources chiefly drives politicians into all sorts of alliances and defections.

If and when coherently articulated, ideology as a vital attribute of a political party not only serves as a pillar of differentiation or demarcation between parties, but attracts the party to the electorates (Nnoli, 2003). Equally real and extant is the position that the absence of a strong ideology in a political party means the existence of a lacunna or defalcation which is filled by the pursuit of narrow socio-economic interests of the political elites. Expectedly, these increases further the general vagrancy of members most especially the political elites who desperately look out for where the lucre holds the greater promise (George & Genyi, 2014). With over 180 incidences of major defections within a period of eighteen years, there is little need for more proof that all the parties are essentially the same in orientation but slightly vary in nomenclature. They are owned and directed by a few elites not for the entire members of the party, but their own parochial interests (Oyovbaire, 2007). The parties are not only undemocratic, they are constructed and revolve around the personal whims and caprices of their owners with glaring inability to mobilise members including financial members (Momoh, 2010). Infact, Philip Asiodu (2012) strongly doubts whether any of the existing parties has a well articulated longterm plan for the country. A rather curious and unmitigated position of this paper is that the existing ideological obscurity in all the parties could be a calculated strategy by the political elites in the chess game of politics to sustain themselves in political relevance. In other words, at whatever point in time, they can always migrate in and out of the ruling or opposition parties depending on which side the political pendulum swings as there are no particular attachments but their self interests.

The absence of a strong ideological base relates to weak or lack of institutionalization within the political parties. Institutionalization refers to the maturity and strength of the internal working structure of the party and extent of support it enjoys from its members and others. As a phenomenon that develops with time, party institutionalization is inimical to the reign and spirit of godfatherism (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2014). While in uninstitutionalized parties loyalty is built around personalities and godfathers who in most cases are bigger than the parties, the reverse is the case in institutionalized parties where rules and structures are well established and obeyed. Party institutionalization helps to stabilize a country's democracy and minimize factional conflicts thereby promoting low leadership turnovers. Where party structures are weak, internal party democracy hardly exists. This results in intra-party crises,

instability and defection of aggrieved members. A striking example is the case of the People Democratic Party (PDP) which has effected changes in the occupants of its chairmanship position ten times within a space of fourteen years (Adejumobi, 2000). A critical point of note in this case is that most of the changes were not only disorderly, but often based on the endorsement and subject to the whims and caprices of certain sections of the political elite, headed often times by the incumbent president (Adejumobi, 2000).

A major characteristic of the Nigerian political system is the zero sum approach to the game of politics. Encumbered by a lot of uncertainty, flexibility and survival instincts where players must employ the best winning strategy in order to maximize their rewards, political gladiators are always on the look out for opportunities for relevance and political survival. In the Nigeria political scenario, those who lose politically are at the receiving end and subjected to loss of patronage and access to socio-economic benefits. Although the zero sum game has survived all the other republics, its prominence in the 4th Republic is exacerbated by the complete extinction of ideological principles from Nigerian body politics. It creates a wide demarcation between the party in power and the opposition where spoils of office are employed as instruments of attraction, coercion and subjugation (Nwanegbo et al, 2014). In the Second Republic, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) employed its federal might not only to attract decaamperes from the opposition parties but to precipitate crises and splits within them (Osaghae, 2011). A similar case occurred in the current 4th Republic when the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP) employed its electoral advantage at the federal level to muzzle Alliance for Democracy (AD) out of relevance and existence. In both Republics, there have been obvious cases of factionalization and realignments by desperate politicians in preparation for electoral battles. In all, the compelling prospect for material advantage, patronage and political appointments are the motivations behind the incredible actions of politicians (Osaghae, 2011).

The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) became the most affected party by series of defections. Unrestrained by any constitutional provisions, Governor Yuguda of Bauchi state and a large number of his supporters switched from the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) to the People Democratic Party (PDP). This was closely followed by Ali Shinkafi of Zamfara state, Saminu Turaki of Jigawa state and six serving senators elected on the platform of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Accord party and Action congress moving to Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Mbah, 2004). In a nutshell, the post 2003 feeble socio-economic position of the ANPP caused it to shrink almost into oblivion as it failed to hold its own together. Genyi-George (2010) puts it succinctly thus 'After the 2003 general elections, the party was torn apart by the offer of ministerial appointments in government by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) government. This development led to the resignation and subsequent defection of its former national chairman, Dan Etiebet. The political tsunami of massive defection also visited the ruling People Democratic

Party (PDP) in preparation for the 2015 general elections. The event was actually a fall out from the internal wranglings and acrimony among members of the Party over fundamental issues of supremacy and office sharing formula. The defection which resembled the enormity of a rebellion culminated in the mass movement of key members to the APC (Olufowobi, 2013). Owing to the style and magnitude of the defection, it almost assumed the posture of a regional conspiracy involving thirty seven members of the House of Representatives, five State Governors and eleven serving Senators within weeks. It was not only the single case of defection involving the highest number of political office holders in the political history of Nigeria, but also stands out as one of the few unnatural scenarios where people defected from the ruling party to an opposition party in preparation for an electoral contest. Indeed majority of the key defectors hailed from a particular section or region of the country. The strategy worked well as the ruling party was so weakened that it failed to secure victory in the next elections.

Party switching may occur as a consequence of very severe oppression and or persecution a member or members maybe experiencing within a political party. Undoubtedly, a significant and rather disturbing characteristic of political parties in Nigeria is the reality of political godfathers and barons who manage these parties through their cliental networks (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2015). They not only treat their members with disdain and disrespect, more so as they are retained on pecuniary and tribal basis, but threaten to and actually in some cases move ahead if and when they fail to obtain nomination either for themselves or their surrogates. This thus supports the position that defection and indiscipline thrive more where adherence to political party rules is very fluid and opportunistic (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2015). It may further be strongly averred that Atiku Abubakar's defection from People Democratic Party (PDP) to Action Congress (AC) in 2007 was occasioned by the persecution and deprivation he was subjected to by his erstwhile boss (the President) and the PDP for his opposition to the later's third term bid (Jibrin & Hassan, 2015).

Party Defection in Nigeria's 4th Republic

In most cases, movement of party members or decampment necessarily involves switching to align with a more high ranking political head or leader who may also have decamped. In effect, it is a calculated political decision strategy of Nigerian politicians on the quality of personalities that defected which in turn affects their decision on whether to stay or move on. Badejo, Agunya & Buraimo (2016) observed that legislators were noted to have towed the line of their state governors during the mass exodus of key members from PDP to APC in 2013 - 2014.

The political waters in the 4th Republic is anything but calm and stable. The rate of political defection compared to the past Republics has been astronomically high (Baiyeru, 2012). Political parties in the current republic have demonstrated unparallel levels of ideological barrenness, transmuted into the personal estates of few political

elites around whose clout they are built and have consequently assumed the inevitable positions of political entrepreneurs. These are naturally influenced and controlled by perceived opportunities and avenues to get as much of the national cake as possible (Ogundiya, 2005).

In all rational spheres, frequent party decamping in the current Republic can be viewed as a fallout or consequence of the fact that not enough time was allowed for the process of party formation. What was perfected was essentially an assemblage of strange bed fellows attempting to manage the unmanageable. The resultant effects are tales of party indiscipline and a high rate of political migrations for greener pastures (Oyovbaire, 2007). Oyebode (2012) also opined that Nigeria 4th Republic has been flooded with political parties that can best be described as opportunistic contraptions, highly plastic, synthetic and inorganic, competing in a system that is visibly manipulated and controlled by stomach infrastructure. Ideological bankruptcy and clear visionary sterility have reduced the whole game of politics to bread and butter affair where the "prostitutional" and unaverred attachment to monetary considerations hold sway.

There are accounts of various cases or pockets of defection at the State, Local Government and even Ward levels which included the defection of two deputy governors, eleven legislators and other prominent members from the ANPP to the PDP and its eventual paralysis. The AD also virtually faced extinction after series of manipulations culminating in a political crescendo during the count down to 2007 general elections. However, emanating from series of intra-class negotiations and political horse trading which obviously were unmindful of the masses interests, there was the unprecedented defection of five governors, eleven senators and thirty seven house of representative members from the PDP to the APC – a newly registered political party. (Badejo, 2011),. The trend and direction of defection at this junction was rather abnormal as it involved movement from the ruling party to an opposition party and it was the highest in the political annals of Nigeria. A slight dissection of the cases reveals that the law makers simply towed the lines of their state governors where eleven came from Kano, ten from Sokoto, eight from Rivers and six from Kwara states where all the governors defected also. The defection drama also featured eleven senators while more were expected to join shortly. (Aziken, 2014). At the state and local government levels, the political holocaust of defections continued to assume a bandwagon posture during the 2015 general elections. In states like Edo, prominent PDP businessmen and money bags were observed to be shifting allegiance to the victorious APC in the presidential elections even by refusing to financially backup the remaining segments of the elections for fear of possible political reprimand and consequent economic malignity. It is therefore of little wonder that all the known PDP chieftains in the state including a former governor and his deputy, together with some gubernatorial aspirants switched over to APC from PDP. In fact, in terms of personalities, Atiku Abubakar and Alao Akala are reputed to be among the most celebrated national political defectors in the 4th Republic. Atiku's easy and frequent

back and forth movement between the APC and PDP depicts a total absence of principle and ideology reminiscent of Nigeria's current political gladiators and their political parties while Akala's profile of joining four different parties in four years may constitute an interesting study in the act of party defection.

Effects of Party Deflection on the Consolidation of Nigeria's Nascent Democracy

Although freedom of association enjoys not only the recognition of the Nigerian constitution, but that of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, its exercise without caution like several other rights will assuredly produce very damaging and unpalatable consequences most especially to the process of democratic consolidation. In effect, the act of party defection as part of a citizen's inalienable rights may not be absolutely bad in itself if moderately exercised as it is a constant political phenomenon in all democratic climes (Evans & Hadley, 2010).

The effects of frequent and unrestrained party defection on Nigeria's democratic consolidative process can be mirrored from the very critical location political parties occupy in the political system. As political institutions, the existence of very vibrant political parties is a sine qua non for democratic consolidation in any polity. The reverberance and health of any political system is a function of the extent to which parties are favourably disposed towards performing their functions of articulating and aggregating social interests, serving as intermediaries between the state and society, political education and presenting candidates and manifestoes for electorates consideration. This position is further reinforced by the argument of Levitsky & Cameron (2003) namely that well functioning political parties constitute the foundation of a strong and sustainable democracy.

But in concrete terms, the existential realities in the Nigerian political scenario are not in tandem with broad universal expectations from parties. Omilusi (2013) forcefully argues that parties have not only fallen short of anticipation in the performance of their functions, but have also negatively affected the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Their actions by persistently refusing to imbibe the democratic ethos have reduced accountability, increased uncertainty and stifled their institutionalisation. What exist in most cases are a contrivance of "cash and carry" groups in the similitude of parties detached from the vast majority of their members with money bag godfathers calling the shots. A grand resultant effect of the foregoing is that there is Public loss of confidence in the political parties and the political system, while the entire democratic process groans in pains.

A major derivative of party defection on the political system is the weakening of the opposition and the natural tendency of drifting towards a one party state or system and eventual absolutism.

Not only in Nigeria was there a gradual slide towards a one party state, most especially in the First, Second and the initial period of the Fourth Republics, but several other African countries including Malawi, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo etc (Meredith, 2011).

The rather disturbing case of Nigeria's First Republic saw an attempt at muzzling out the AG by declaring a state of emergency in the Western region, prosecuting its leader Chief Obafemi Awolowo on charges of treasonable felony and causing deep divisions within the party (Anifowoshe, 1982). The situation during the Second Republic was not any better as the NPN controlled Federal Government worked assiduously towards the castration of other parties while in the Fourth Republic PDP through its instrumentalities of manipulations and intimidation caused the death of AD and the permanent paralysis of ANPP before it was pitifully absolved in an unequal merger relationship to birth the APC (Bogaards, 2008).

When a prominent political figure defects, the likely hood is for a disjoint in the political structure of the new party as he may be unwilling to queue behind old members who also may have been faithfully working for the progress of the party. The consequent crises if not properly managed could result in another chain of defections and political instability. Ability to defect easily without restraints promotes and encourages money bag politics, party indiscipline and general absence of internal party democracy (Mbah, 2014). This practice of lawlessness, impunity and indiscipline which are corollaries of political corruption is transferred into the political system as the party produces those who operate the governmental machinery.

Defection, if massive, frequent and left unchecked is capable of heating up the polity thereby leading to political instability and governmental shut down as happened in Lesotho in 1997 (Omilusi, 2013). In Nigeria, the catastrophe of governmental collapse was narrowly escaped as a result of over politicisation of governmental business when APC assumed a majority position in the House of Representatives following the massive defection of PDP members to the APC. The APC as a party instructed all its members to cause the occlusion of all executive bills, passage of budget including approval for appointment of new officers. A similar situation also plays out at the National Assembly when as a result of the massive defection of fourteen Senators and thirty nine House of Representatives members including the Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives from the ruling APC to PDP and other parties, and the consequent heating up of the system, the National Assembly could not convey in plenary to consider the critical issue of INEC budget proposal for the 2019 general elections. Besides, honourable members of both the upper and lower legislative chambers were on a forced recess for over three months because of fear of impeachment hanging on the necks of their leaders for defecting. Indeed, the resultant political war that ensued between the legislative and executive arms of government witnessed among other events the illegal gestapo invasion of the National Assembly by men of the Directorate of state security services. (DSS) As it were, this singular event elicited both national and international condemnation, thus making a mockery of Nigeria's democratic practice.

To buttress the unpalatable quiddity of party switching, it has been legally and

officially ostracized in many countries of the world. Nation states including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Nepal etc enshrined anti-defection provisions in their national constitutions as one of the mechanisms of checking it (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2014). In South Africa, a Prominent political figure,- Mongosuthu Buthelezi, equates defection with the deadly HIV AIDS virus because of its dangerous effects on the political system. He further argued that party defection robs the political system of all honour, holding political parties hostage by rendering them unable to discipline their own members. In addition, it allows the emergence of careerists, self serving strange breed because they do not honour the sanctity of votes cast in the ballot box. (DCID, 2008) (Gazzett, 2009).

As excoriated by Chang (2009), Badejo (2011), defection is obtainable in all political systems irrespective of its age or structure. It can only be valuable and healthy to the political system if and when it is principled and ideology based. Conversely therefore, where there is constant and frequent party switching as is the case in the 4th Republic, the growth and stability of the political system stands the risk of being compromised and mitigated.

The Panacea

Party defection, switching or cross carpeting in itself as an act maybe unharmed to a political system if moderately or sparsely practiced most especially when it is ideologically tailored. Indeed, its deleterious effects on democratic consolidation is a function of its frequent occurrence as has been experienced in many political systems. To checkmate its abuse and attendant jeopardy, certain steps are strongly advocated. A major issue for urgent consideration is the introduction and encouragement of ideological conformance or conventionality in our political parties and indeed the political system. Appropriating and implementing a well thought out ideological position by parties and their membership will enhance quick identification as well as help to restrain easy party switch without moral reprimands and recriminations from the public. As it stands today the Nigerian Constitution not only condones, but injudiciously encourages easy and frequent defections. Its position on the issue appears capricious as it contains a lot of exploitable lacunas (Section 68, Sub-section 1g). A process of urgent constitutional amendments must be set in motion not only to include all categories of political office holders but shrivel or limit the number of times a political functionary can engage in party switching. Indeed, judicial pronouncements on the matter must be very clear and held sacrosanct at least to save the country's nascent democracy. Very practical and unwavering steps must be taken by the government to concretize fully, the recommendations of the Uwais Panel Report (2007). Special note must be taken of its thoughts on the dismembering of INEC into three different bodies for effective handling of not just election matters but party affairs including the critical issues bordering on party internal democracy and the discouragement of excessive monetization of the political process. Also among the

solutions suggested is the idea of embarking on major structural adjustments of the polity in order to make the centre less attractive as it presently appears too powerful and inducing.

Elected representatives should be made to accept sitting allowances instead of the present fabulous unjustifiable emoluments. (Babalola, 2018). The government of the day should muster the political will to set up the legal framework for the implementation of the reports of the 2014 constitutional conference. The entrenchment of internal party democracy will help guarantee not only civil and political rights but the attainment of fair competition and inclusiveness in electoral practices Dahl, (1989). Paden (2013), and Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011) powerfully argue for the idea of creating and sustaining a social capital culture in the political system. This embodies the sharing of social trust among parties, individuals, groups, etc. It also includes mutual understanding, tolerance, cooperation and reciprocity. The net effect of the foregoing is the development of cohesion and homogeneity within groups and parties and less tendency for division and defection. The extrinsic position of effective mass education and mobilization is no less important as issues rather than personalities would be made the focal point of our political activities. In addition, there exists the urgent need for the redefinition of the rule of law most especially as it has to do with curtailing acts of impunity of political gladiators. Besides, the practice of polyarchy or effective public and or group activism and vibrancy must be encouraged at least to checkmate the excesses of politicians. All these will help to check the political brummagem attached to godfathers and their negative influences.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates strenuous attempts that have been made at identifying not just the reasons for frequent party defection in Nigeria, but its effects on the country's democratic process and possible way out. A critical point of departure here is the urge and desperateness of our political elites to sustain their political relevance continually. State institutions and the rule of law are not only manipulated and skewed towards achieving their personal desires, dissenting views are regarded as serious offences against the state and adequately dealt with. The net effect of the above is that the system experiences deterioration or negative growth as those inclusive ingredients needed for positive socio-political development are conspicuously absent. A fall out of the above is that the absence of growth in the political system also disfigures other sectors as the political superstructure drives other areas. Crises or instability in the political system immediately reverberates in the other sectors.

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