

## **PARTY DEFECTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA, 1999-2009**

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### **Abstract**

Extant literature reveals that the issue of party defection is rampant in Nigeria. The literature that explains Nigeria's nascent democracy since 1999 depicts fraud and violence in the democratic process. It is in this context that this paper maintains that the rampant cases of party defections show a development that incorporates potential negative implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper tends to explain the major issues for defection in essence and in practice. Consequently, it argues that the absence of productive and disciplined ruling class and constitutional ambiguities in the 1999 Nigerian constitution is the explanatory variables. This paper through the use of the theory of post-colonial state which unfolds the machinations and manipulations of the post- colonial state explains how state power has become a major means of production for those who have acquired such power and the great struggle for those outside the gate to acquire state power. The paper concludes that party defection of political office holders who do not resign the first platform before coming to political position do not add value to the process of democratic consolidation. Alternative to the practice should be found while the current practice should be abolished.

**Keywords:** democracy, cross-carpeting or party defection, democratic consolidation, constitutional ambiguity, class rule

## **Introduction**

In about the last twelve years, Nigerian democracy has witnessed series of political defections with politicians decamping from one political party to the other particularly from opposition parties to the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). This development which is generally referred to as party defection, cross- carpeting, party-switching, floor-crossing, party-hopping, canoe-jumping, decamping, party- jumping etc are employed to mean the same thing as defection (Malthora, 2005). This has become a permanent feature of the Nigerian nascent democracy. Political party defection or party-switching occurs when every elected party representative within a legislative structure such as a parliament, embraces a different political or policy perspective that is incompatible with that of the party/parties he or she represents (Hoeane, 2008:70). Basically, the decamped feels dissatisfied and discontent with his or her former party from where he or she decamps without the defection reflecting any ideological leaning. However, the persistent party defection is not new. In fact it is a common phenomenon in both the developed and the developing democracies.

Scholars and commentators see the reasons as resulting from personality clash, power tussles, divergent views on the operations of a political party's philosophy, crisis or division within a given party, disagreement on party's position on an issue, realization of one's personal political ambition and party leaders reneging on agreed issues of the political party probably on power sharing formula. Defectors from All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) to PDP hinged their decision to dump ANPP on the dwindling fortunes of the party occasioned by its leadership crisis. The general reason that underpins floor-crossing is that given the dynamic nature of politics, public representatives should be allowed to change their political viewpoints to align them with what they perceive as changing political circumstances (Hoeane, 2008:71).

However, the general view or reason for cross-carpeting seems simple but not entirely wrong. As a result, they need to be transcended in order to provide new concepts that better capture the contending problems of cross-carpeting. Our aim is not only to come up with an explanatory framework on party defections in Nigeria, but most importantly to analyze a new framework and

proffer explanations on why political party defection has become an increasingly permanent feature in the Nigerian democratic experience.

### **History of Cross Carpeting and Nigeria Democracy**

Cross-carpeting in Nigeria pre-dates independence. Therefore, it is as old as Nigerian politics. In 1951 the first celebrated cross-carpeting episode occurred in Nigeria. This cross-carpeting scenario robbed Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe the chance to lead the government business of the Western Nigeria. This was the most celebrated cross-carpet episode in Nigeria.

The Yoruba members of the National Council for Nigerian and the Cameroon (NCNC) were lobbied to cross over to the Action Group (AG) to stop Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man, from becoming the premier of Western Region. When the House met, there was a red carpet, and the speaker's bench was in the centre; the government side was on the right whereas the opposition bench was on the left side. The NCNC, the majority party occupying the government side, had the red carpet separating them from the opposition. The Governor was then the Speaker or the Chairman of the House. He took his seat. Chief Awolowo got up and announced that he had a matter of urgency to raise in order to forestall a situation that could lead to riots and anarchy, and which many members of the House had decided to correct. One of the NCNC members got up and remarked "Your Excellency, I do not want to be part of a situation where Yorubaland would be set on fire". So I am crossing over to the other side. Consequently, the gentleman crossed over to AG on the floor of the Western House of Assembly (Nnanna, 2010:3). This heralded the massive cross over to the AG.

As the leader of the NCNC, Azikiwe was to be the Premier of Western Nigeria following the elections of 1951 with Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba man, and the leader of Action Group, the leader of the opposition in the Regional House of Assembly. The NCNC won 42 seats out of 80, but within 24 hours, 20 of them had cross carpeted to AG. It was Chief Awolowo that exerted pressure on a number of Yoruba elected members on the NCNC platform to "cross-carpet" in the House and join the AG, in order to deny Dr. Azikiwe the premiership in favour of

Awolowo. Azikiwe had assumed the leadership of the NCNC following the death of Herbert Macaulay. There would have been no basis for carpet crossing if Macaulay a Yoruba man, and not Azikiwe, were elected Premier of Western Region on the NCNC platform in 1951.

As a result of this blatant injection of ethnic rivalry into Nigerian politics, Azikiwe was compelled to “return home” to the East where he became the premier of the government (Natufe, 1999:3). This dangerous precedent set the pace for the development of Nigerian politics built around ethnic and regional rivalry as well as crisis and instability that followed later. These conditions gave birth to an increase in the number of ethnic based political parties in the country up until today. These ethnic groups are entangled in perpetual conflicts such as the current issue of zoning.

Essentially, this started from Ibadan, where Adisa Akinloye led the decampees. Adelabu, Richard Akinjide and Mojeed Agbaje refused to cross carpet. After the cross carpeting, the NCNC majority was reduced to a minority. Their action for their defection to AG was simply to deny Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe an Igbo Politician from becoming the Premier of Western Region. That automatically signalled, the beginning of ethnic and regional politics in Nigeria. At that time, to be a member of House of Representatives, one had to be an elected member of the Regional House of Assembly. That was essentially how the expression, “cross-carpeting” came into the political dictionary of Nigeria and has remained till today thereby reducing politics in Nigeria to absurd tribal level.

In the First Republic (1960-1966), the former Premier of the defunct Western Region of Nigeria, Chief Ladoke Akintola left the then Action Group based on personality clash between him and chief Obafemi Awolowo and on personal principle, necessitated by the need to move the Yoruba people into Nigeria’s mainstream politics. In the same way as it happened between Akintola and Awolowo, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC and Dr Kingsley Mbadiwe had an occasion to fall apart in their political relationship which led to Mbadiwe’s formation of the Democratic Party of Nigeria Citizens (DPNC), which sought a working relationship with the AG at the Federal Elections in 1959.

While in the Second Republic (1979-1983), the repackage off-shoot of Action Group, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Chief Awolowo's loyalists such as Adisa Oladosu Akintola, Anthony Enahoro, Richard Akinyide, and S.G. Ikoku reconsidered their loyalty to the party. Of course, a number of them defected to National Party of Nigeria (NPN). One important issue of the cross-carpeting of the Second Republic was the decamping of Chief Akin Omoboriowo from UPN to NPN as the Ondo state gubernatorial candidate. In the same manner, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi was elected under the ticket of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and Rimi later decamped to the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), on which platform he sought re-election in 1983. Many politicians from the opposition parties decamped to join NPN during this period.

Since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the catalogue of decamping over the years is a long one, from one party to another, from smaller party to a bigger and stronger one and a losing party to a ruling one. Dum (2002:4) argues that the pattern (that is defection) appeared better defined on ideological ground, the nature of formation and decamping up to the set of parties between 1979 and 1983. He argues that the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) of 1979 was a semblance of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) of old; Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) like the NCNC before it; Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) like the Action Group (AG) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) wearing the cloak of Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) of old. The three major parties beget the old order of parties in the First Republic.

Contrarily to the foregoing, in today's political scene only the Old Alliance for Democracy (AD) (1999-2003) had a close appearance in ideology to the parent UPN, a party whose stronghold remained strongest in the Southwest of Nigeria. Other parties did not have any significant identity of the parties of the old. The series and rate of decamping explains the emphasis on private interest as no politician wants to remain in a losing party. It also explains one fact that political parties in Nigeria lack ideological base. Essentially, politicians who stick together on ideological understanding make for a better strength and cohesion in the party. The movement into the ruling PDP does not augur well for democratic consolidation. Every game has its own rule(s) or it ends up in a storm of confusion.

In 1999, Chief Evan Enwerem, having lost the gubernatorial primaries in the All Peoples Party (APP) in Imo State, decamped and joined the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on whose ticket he won a sensational seat. His cross carpeting was rewarded as he was elected the Senate President (Odum, 2002). In Plateau State Alhaji Alhassan Shaibu decamped from the APP and joined the PDP in 1999. He is now a leading member of the Northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC). In Cross River State, not less than seven prominent APP and AD members have cross-carpeted to the PDP so that today, Cross River State is PDP state in every respect. Evidently, the direction of defection shows that it is one-sided, and is essentially into the PDP, the ruling party. Only little percentage seems to be defecting from PDP to other parties or form a new political party. However, there is nothing wrong in people cross-carpeting if they do not find the programmes of their party in consonance with their ideals. It becomes dubious when politicians begin to mortgage their consciences as well as seek to pursue their private and selfish interest in the name of cross carpeting. This may have stemmed from the mere fact that politicians are poor and desperate to hold public office as a means of accumulating wealth. In advanced democracies, cross carpeting is done on principle, rather than on selfish and personal interest. What we are witnessing today is political prostitution which lacks political morality.

A chronicle of defection shows that the most recent cases of cross-carpeting is that of the former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar. He was a founding member of the PDP, and defected to the Action Congress (AC) after a running battle with the former President Olusegun Obasanjo. In 2007 he contested the presidential elections on the platform of AC, but lost to the late President Umaru Yar'Adua. A few months ago, Atiku went back to the PDP where he contested the presidential primaries.

Before Atiku's defection, Ondo and Edo States witnessed cross-carpeting of members of the opposition parties to the party of the incumbent governor. Edo State witnessed a large defection of members of the PDP to the AC, which is the Governor's party (Agina, 2010:3). In Ondo state, it was a mass cross-carpeting of PDP members to the Labour Party (LP) of which the incumbent governor is a member. In both cases, the cross-carpeting were an aftermath of political battles and in-fighting.

There again came defection of state governors to the ruling party, the PDP. The first was that of incumbent governor of Bauchi State, Isa Yaguda who had won the governorship election on the platform of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), but defected to the PDP with a large number of his supporters. Others include the incumbent governor of Imo state, Ikedi Ohakim, who won the governorship election on the platform of the Peoples Progressive Alliance (PPA) but defected to the PDP. Aliyu Shinkafi of Zamfara State (ANPP) and Saminu Turaki of Jigawa state (ANPP) all defected to PDP.

Defections in recent times is not only peculiar to states, senators are equally involved. Recently, six senators who were elected on the platform of the ANPP, the Accord Party (AP) and the Action Congress (AC) cross-carpeted to PDP. These include Senators Sali Gogwin (AC, Plateau state), Patrick Osakwe (AP, Delta state), Patricia Akawasike, (ANPP, Nassarawa state) and Sa'di Yauo (ANPP, Zamfara state). Since 2007 when the present National Assembly was inaugurated, no fewer than 13 Senators and 15 members of the House of Representatives have defected to the PDP.

Cross-carpeting certainly predates Nigeria's independence. However, this has been shaped and sharpened by colonialism and sustained by the structures of post-colonial state. It was colonialism that set the pace for modernization and economic development in Nigeria, while dramatically changing the existing patterns of social, political and economic interactions among peoples and groups. Colonialism had far reaching and uniform impact on the development of the Nigerian ruling class, their character and behaviour. There are two ways the defections occur. First, there is great movement of politicians from different political parties into the ruling party towards the time of the general elections. The idea is to participate in party primaries of the ruling party.

The second movement starts after the party primaries. At this point those who lost in the party primaries move to their former parties or to new ones or even to form a new party under which they intend to contest the coming elections.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts the theory of postcolonial state as its framework of analysis for understanding party defection and the problem of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The variety of states and societies found in Africa is reflected in their political diversity. The contemporary politics in Africa bear the imprint of the legacy of colonialism but is also marked both by their pre-colonial heritage and their different postcolonial experiences. The historical proximate experience of colonialism has had a significant impact on postcolonial political development in Africa. This historical proximate experience helped to shape the new politics in Nigeria today.

The postcolonial state is merely a convenient way of describing the state at a particular historical period, namely the period following the winning of formal political independence. It is specifically post modern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of the cultural legacy of colonialism (Wikipedia, 2010). The nationalist petit-bourgeoisie which fought for independence, had insisted that political independence was the essential preliminary to a fundamental restructuring of the colonial economy. The postcolonial state was meant to combat the residual effect of colonialism on cultures. This was because colonialism and the political hegemony of colonizers was a critical factor in the under-development of African social formations. The state at this level of development was oppressive and repressive and as such was an instrument of exploitation. By the time political independence came, the colonial economy had become mature; its structure was firmly set and could not easily be changed. The new government no longer enjoyed the freedom of fabricating an economy from the state (Ake, 1981:88). Ake argues that enclave development continues, particularly in the sense that developmental activity and social amenities are concentrated in a few urban centres. This enclave development is a manifestation of the class contradictions of postcolonial socio- economic formations.

The inequalities evident among the sections and regions of the countries combined with other forces of centrifugal nature to produce a brand of politics that threatened the foundations, and the very existence of these nations became imperative. To be sure, in this type of politics there was a frantic and very great struggle by political competitors to have a firm control of the state power at all costs. Monopoly tendencies and market imperfections according to Ake are highly significant figures of the postcolonial economy. They affect the character of accumulation, the



prospect of liquidating under-development, and the character of politics. After independence of most colonized states, a new dimension of politics came into the political scene. This was the creation of a new type of monopoly resulting from state capitalism, and this involved the state in an entrepreneurial role. This arose primarily out of the desire of the national petit-bourgeoisie who inherited political power from the colonial masters to create an economic base for those who have acquired it. The petit-bourgeoisie found out that although they have acquired political power, they were not truly in control of the economy. However, they understood that political power offered opportunities for economic power, and therefore the opportunities inherent in their political power were the best and perhaps the only way they had to create an economic base for themselves. Thus, the state power became major means of production for those who have acquired it. This informs the great emphasis and struggle to control the state power at all levels of governance in Nigeria.

The inherent contradiction in this development was the emergence of a highly fractious ruling class in postcolonial formations. The fractions roughly correspond to the patterns of dominance before independence. The effect is that the ruling class in Nigeria engages in grim factional battles for the control of state power. There is therefore absence of an independent and creative ruling class of the type that brought the industrial revolution to the Western World and Japan or even the self-disciplined and sacrificing type that engineered self sustained growth in Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore (Nnoli, 1993:3). This class has external rather than internal focus in outlook and behaviour. The effect of the foregoing is the emergence of a Nigerian state with limited potential for mediating class struggle and the endemic party defections arising from high premium on political power. This is because the legal framework (constitution) is drafted by the ruling elite to favour their desire for domination and control of state power with many sections containing parallel ambiguities and clauses which make party switching a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria today.

### **Class Rule and Party Defection in Nigeria**

The critical role of the Nigerian ruling class is becoming increasingly obvious. Class is a scientific concept. Lenin explains that:

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy (Lenin, cited in Ekekwe, 1986:6).

Classes are, therefore, defined and structured by the relations concerning work and labour as well as ownership or possession of property and the means of production. These economic factors more fully govern social relationships in capitalist systems of production.

The post-colonial state is a capitalist type of state so is classes even though to some extent it is different from the state and classes in advanced capitalist formations. Whereas the state (and classes) in the advanced capitalist formations function to maintain the economic and social relations under which bourgeois accumulation takes place, in the periphery of capitalism, factors which have to do with the level of development of the productive forces make the state (and classes) through its several institutions and apparatuses, a direct instrument for accumulation for the dominant class or its elements (Ekekwe, 1986:12). A class structure is a particular set of economic processes of producing, appropriating, and distributing the surplus that occur in every society. How this is done is very important in class analysis.

The class structure in Nigeria was the creation of colonialism where British commerce in Nigeria played prominent roles in the formation. Often, Nigerians were encouraged to enter into commerce by the foreign enterprises when those enterprises were seeking to diversify somewhat. Commerce did not inevitably evolve into productive activity and possibly discouraged it. Nigerian middlemen who had accumulated significant funds through commerce did not invest in production. There was a divorce between local resources and the external raw materials used in manufacturing industries in Nigeria. Due to this situation, as already reported in Nnoli, 1993, there was absence of an independent and creative ruling class of the type that brought the industrial revolution to the Western World and Japan, or even the self-disciplined and sacrificing

type that engineered self-sustained growth in Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore absent.

The Nigerian state emerged in the phase of monopoly capitalism despite its peripheral variant. This state shows all the interventionist character of the monopoly capitalist state in addition to its unique form especially its underdevelopment and dependence, its authoritarianism and its low autonomy. It was at this stage also that its present class formation evolved. The Nigerian state as a peripheral capitalist state and the emergence of the Nigerian ruling class at the state of monopoly capitalism, which has been shaped by it, also has focused attention exclusively at the level of superstructure and were no where controlling system of production on which politics has been anchored as in advanced capitalist state.

What followed was that the class resorted to the use of state power to secure economic base and built an economic empire for themselves. The state or class therefore, becomes an instrument for the achievement of personal or private interests. Since every public office-holder uses the state power for that purpose, defections or cross carpeting becomes inevitable from this process, since this state has become a “means of production” and a “means of primitive accumulation” (Ekekwe, 1986; Iyayi, 1986).

The defection from opposition parties to the ruling party explains the emphasis on the primacy of political power in Nigeria. This is because the possession of state power leads directly to economic power, and who hold positions in the power structure determine the location and distribution of economic resources and political rewards. Exclusion from this position is unfortunately very costly. B.J. Dudley correctly explains that:

... the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics. To get politics, there is always a price .... To be a member of the Government Party means open avenue to Government patronage, contract deals and the like. But once, having known the profitability of having power, the party (and the individual members) naturally uses the same

governmental machinery to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy- and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself (Dudley, 1973:3).

This condition has negative impact on democratic consolidation and party development. First, building strong opposition parties under these momentous defections has become difficult. Secondly, parties developing different ideological platforms to win elections and form new government have prove abortive because politicians have one common motive using state power for capital accumulation.

### **Constitutional Ambiguities and Party Defections in Nigeria**

In the last decade of democratic governance in Nigeria, the country has witnessed series of carpet crossing, with politicians jumping from one party to the other especially to the ruling party, the PDP. This development has generated heated debates on whether the constitution should allow carpet crossing or not.

There is no doubt that African states inherited democracy – a form of political order of the Western type. This was adopted in order to keep the new found system and in the belief that only by working a constitutional democracy would they claim equal status with the ex-colonial masters. Within a decade of independence, the elaborate framework was dismantled, leading to military authoritarian rule. In many ways the most remarkable feature of the period during which the 1999 constitution was framed, was the lack of participation and discussion by Nigerians of how it was likely to work in practice and how far the structure would be affected by the activities and outlook of the Nigerian political parties and their leaders.

Generals Abacha and Abubakar did not intend to put in place a democratic government based on popular consent. For Abacha, the 1999 constitution was meant for self succession, while for Abubakar it was rather a mechanism for quick handover to civilian elected democratic government. The constitution, therefore, did not address the national question and other nagging issues pertaining to Nigerian federalism. In all, the process that culminated in the constitution

ignored the structural issues that have bedeviled the country's ability to enthrone a truly accountable, transparent and democratic political order. Consequently, it produced a draft that was full of ambiguities, which have led to the increasing rate of party defections immediately it came into operation, in May 29, 1999(see sections 68(1) and 109(1) of the 1999 constitution)

However, loopholes exist in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, especially in section 68 1(g) and 109(1). Although section 68 1(a) states "A member of the Senate or the House of Representatives 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, he becomes a member of another political party before 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 factions by one of which he was previously sponsored" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:34). This last part of the foregoing section provided an escape root for politicians to cross-carpet since there are always divisions within the political parties. It provided the platform for many legislators and governors who defected to justify their actions on the grounds of divisions or crisis within their political parties since the 1999 constitution is not definitive of crisis or division that could cause defection or cross-carpet. Three AD senators, in 1999, Wahab Dosunmu, Yemi Brimoh and Fidelis Okoro who defected to the PDP exploited the constitutional provision which grants an elected member the right to defect if there is a division in his party.

The provisions of these sections of the constitution were explicit in matter which concerned the legislature. It clearly mandates that any member of the legislature, who intends to defect to another party, must prove that division or factions exists in the party of which he was a member, or that his party has merged with other or more parties or factions.

While the constitution made provisions for legislators, it was silent on those of the members of the executive arm such as the president, the vice president, the Governors and the Deputy Governors. The ambiguity of the constitution caused defections among Nigerian politicians to be on the increase, with the greatest casualty being the opposition parties. The country has in

recent times witnessed a great deal of defections among legislators, governors, deputy governors, party members and other political office holders, who in most cases defect to the PDP.

Constitutional controversy and struggle for state power have been the recurring themes in Nigeria's political history. The constitutional crisis in Nigeria between 1962 (Western Nigeria Crisis) and 1964 and the issue of two-thirds majority of 19 states in 1979 readily comes to mind. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria rather it characterizes nearly all developing nations where politics is primarily concerned with the sharing of scarce resources among various competing groups (Anifowose, 1982: viii). Today, it is no longer the sharing of pitifully small resources, but huge resources that makes the struggle for state power fierce.

Since the capture of state power guarantees control of the allocation of scarce economic resources, including the spoils of office and patronage, the ruling party simply accepts defectors from opposition parties in order to avoid serious competition and wresting of power away from them to remain in power as long as they want. The competition between the ruling party and the opposition is, therefore, weakened. Politics of defection is, therefore, derived from the pattern of guaranteed patronage and the spoils of office. As a result of the above, the ultimate technique of politics in Nigeria is the distribution of material benefit among the major players and among the members of the ruling party. To be excluded from politics means outright ruin and to be included means outright prosperity. In order to avoid economic discrimination as a political weapon in the hands of the ruling party, every politician seems to be moving into the ruling party in their large numbers in order to be included in the distribution of economic resources accruing from state power. The loopholes in the 1999 constitution were immediately taken advantage of as the basis for retaining their position as political office holders while defecting to the ruling party. The country gradually gravitates towards a one party state with its harmful implications to the nascent democracy. In this way, political parties exist in Nigeria as both material and social forces. The social forces include ethnic based political parties which to a great extent have been de-emphasized, but they still exist. This emphasizes the centrality of political power in Nigeria.

However, the 1999 Nigerian constitution was promulgated into law by a military regime characterized by autocracy and arbitrariness (Joab-Peterside, 2007:6). It was not people's

constitution, rather it was a constitution that was hurriedly put in place and as such was accepted by Nigerians in order to return to democratic governance.

### **Internal Democracy in Nigerian Political Parties and Party Defections**

The basis of the political parties and their activities as aspect of the guiding principle of political party organizational structure, democratic system and internal party democracy signifies the active participation of all party members to contest any position both within the party and for public offices. Since 1999 when the Fourth Republic was inaugurated, political parties have faced the problem of nondemocratic practices. The expectation generally is that since the country has embraced democracy, its political parties must be democratic not only externally, in their goals but also democratic internally in their organizational practices and behaviour. However, lack of internal democracy in Nigerian political parties has become a persistent threat to the country's nascent democracy. Party primaries throughout the country clearly show that Nigeria political parties are not operating within norms of democratic principles. Various political parties have failed to adopt the provisions of the party's constitutions to all party members who are eligible and want to run for office in their party primaries. Some candidates were imposed on the party without election and due process.

One major issue that has increased the rate of defection is the Amended Electoral Act 2010 which removed section 87(9) of the 2006 Act. The National Assembly in the process of amending the 2006 Electoral Act amended the section in such a way that it completely strips Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of any say in the matter of disqualification of nominees submitted by political parties. Whereas, in the amended Electoral Act 2010, this provision has been expunged by the National Assembly in order to render section 87(9) ineffective or irrelevant. This section of the previous Act underscores the inherent inability of INEC as a commission to arbitrate timely on contentious party nominations which do not follow stated party guidelines by specifying in section 87(9) of the old Electoral Act 2006 that: "where a political party fails to comply with the provision of this Act in the conduct of its primaries, its candidates for elections shall not be included in the election for the particular position in issue".

In the amended Electoral Act 2010, the provision was expunged by the lawmakers. It however, introduced a new provision to section 31(1) which completely strips INEC of any say in the matter of disqualification of nominees submitted by political parties. This new provision states that: “Every political party shall not later than 60 days before the date appointed for a general election under the provisions of this Bill, submitted to the commission in the prescribed forms, the list of candidates the party proposes to sponsor at the elections, provided that the commission shall not reject or disqualify candidates for any reason whatsoever” By using the blanket phrase “any reason whatsoever”, the National Assembly stripped INEC, the supposed umpire of the ability to determine the qualification or status of any candidate submitted by a party, irrespective of any circumstances surrounding a candidate’s status. Due to this provision, the party now dictates, imposes, and determines how, who and why a candidate can contest in an election in which they are participating, even if INEC has doubts over the candidate’s credibility. The supervisory role in ensuring internal democracy in selecting party candidates was then eroded. Consequently, litigations and court injunctions and counter orders stopping candidates from parading themselves have become quite high.

### **Party Defections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

Democratic consolidation is a contested concept. It is defined as the process by which a new democracy matures in a way that means it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism without an external shock (Wikipedia, 2009:1). Contrary to the foregoing, unconsolidated democracies suffer from formalized but intermittent elections and clientelism (O’Donnell, 1996). Democracies can be considered consolidated when democracy becomes institutionalized behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally. Behaviourally, a democracy is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic political or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime or by seceding from the state. Attitudinally, a democracy is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with the incumbent, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for anti-system alternatives is quite small or isolated from pro-democratic forces. Constitutionally, a democracy is consolidated when governmental



and non-governmental forces alike become subject to, and habituated to the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, and produces institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process (Linz and Stepan, 1996:20). One of the greatest elements of democratic consolidation is free, fair and credible elections for transition from one administration to another. The above seems to be absent in Nigeria. This is because it has not internalized democratic ideals and does not exhibit them behaviourally and constitutionally. The nature and the character of the neo-colonial state exhibit inhibitive characteristics that do not allow competitive elections to ensure liberty, responsiveness and rule of law.

Party defection has negative impact in the process of consolidating democracy under unwarranted situations of plethora of defections among legislators, governors, deputy governors, and other party members to the ruling party. This trend tends to make caricature of democracy and belittles the spirit of opposition parties and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This is because there is a great movement of members of the opposition to the ruling party. The case of Bauchi state becomes illustrative at this juncture.

Isa Yaguda who is the current governor of Bauchi state was elected in 2007 under the platform of the ANPP, but he defected to the PDP with a large number of his supporters including the members of the State House of Assembly. But in a dramatic twist, his deputy governor, Garba Gadi who adamantly refused to go the way of his governor by joining the PDP was impeached by the members of the State House of Assembly. Due to the unlawful impeachment, he went to court to contest his removal. Recently, the court ruled in his favour, and he was reinstated as the deputy governor. The governor is a PDP member and his deputy an ANPP member. What a divided House? It will be very difficult for both of them to work in harmony and make a sensible progress politically. The deputy governor is likely to be subordinated and subjugated in all areas of public service. It is morally wrong for an aspirant to use one political platform to ascend power only to dump that platform at the least opportunity for another party. With the growing cases of defections to the PDP and the depleting member of the opposition, there is a mounting fear that Nigeria may gradually be moving toward a one –party state which may be harmful to the nation's nascent democracy and its consolidation.

One of the greatest fears of the current defection from other parties to the PDP is that it is leading to a further fragmentation of opposition parties from where politicians have defected to the ruling party. It also creates chances for the emergence of new political parties that lack strength and focus on the political scene. Today, Nigeria has 62 registered political parties from three in 1999 when the Fourth Republic was enthroned. As a result, this situation of defection leads to mushrooming of political parties and reinforces the weakness of opposition parties. This does not augur well for the development of party politics because it promotes money-bag-politics. This does not give room for ideology-based political parties to thrive and develop. Parties are formed and joined for personal interests. The type of allowances they allocate to themselves make the ideology-based political parties impossible.

Another underlying problem with political party defection is the development of dishonest traits in some politicians that have accompanied the introduction of floor-crossing, resulting in the tainting of good and credible democratic practice (Hoeane, 2008:74). One of the ways through which floor-crossing does this is that politicians become political prostitutes. Odum (2002:1) captures this when he argues that:

Politicians and prostitutes are two seemingly parallel professions. One supposedly displaying constitutional leadership virtue in governance is the latter revealing social vice – the fabric of a decadent society. Incidentally, one common denominator for both appears to be their loyalty, which stands on quick sand, shifting as mundane attractions glow in their adulterous eyes. The consideration, especially with the modern day politician is where stakes may be lower and gains higher. It does not matter who is the offer. So, while the prostitutes switch beds, the politicians change camp in this game of cross-carpeting.

That simply put, is the internal ordering of our nascent democracy. Power is no longer a thing held in trust. It has become a fraud which every politician is clamouring to hold.

From the foregoing, there is increasing inculcation of undemocratic practices in our polity, indicative of poor leadership of political parties where different political views do not exist and if they exist they are not accommodated. For example, the ANPP is devastated by the potential severe loss of members to the PDP. Over 15 members of the ANPP in the National Assembly have defected to the PDP since 2007. This has also affected the leadership of the party and its effort to hold a credible convention or congress since the past two months.

It could also lead to outright political instability if not checked. This is because in countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, political party defection is regarded sufficiently threatening to the stability of the political systems. Hoeane, (2008:71) argues that in extreme cases of floor-crossing, where the number of public representatives who have defected has been significantly high, such shifts of allegiance have led to the collapse of democratically elected governments, such as in Lesotho in 1997. Political party defections of political office holders who do not resign the first platform for coming to political position do not add value to the process of democratic consolidation.

## **Conclusion**

The glorious days of politicians who carry on politics based on ideology and principles no longer exist in the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria. What exists is a group of politicians so mindful of their private interests not the common good of Nigerians. The driving force is how to capture state power for private gains. In search of this is the great movement of politicians from one party to the other. This trend of cross carpeting shows that Nigerian politicians have no democratic values and our political system is awash with professional politicians who are devoid of modern political ideology.

It is our candid opinion that for the purposes of deepening the practice of democracy in Nigeria, any elected politician that defects to another party should be made to stand down and seek re-election. The loophole within our electoral system that allows this to happen must be changed.

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