



## **Elections and the Politics of Party Defection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications on Democratic Consolidation**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the politics of party defection in Nigeria's fourth republic from 1999 to 2022 and its implications on democratic consolidation in the country. To achieve this broad objective, the paper employed secondary method of data collection and analysis, which entails collecting data from books, journals and web-based materials among others. Theoretically, the paper adopted the eclectic approach anchored on Elite Theory and Rational Choice theory. The paper posits that the rate at which Nigerian politicians defect from one party to another makes mockery of the country's democracy, negates the values of opposition parties in a democratic system, invalidates opposing views and reduces the efficacy of alternative democratic choices. The results of this analytical discourse reveal factors ranging from lack of party ideology, economic interest, lack of internal democracy, constitutional vagueness to fear of persecution as responsible for incessant party defections in party politics in Nigeria in recent years. The paper concludes that the incidences of party defection in Nigerian party politics if not checked, could move the country into a political system without viable opposition to serve as watchdog to the ruling party. The paper therefore recommends among others that political parties in Nigeria should be grounded in and founded on strong political ideology as practiced in developed countries of Europe and America to avoid frequent defections by politicians from one political party to another at any slightest provocation.

**Keywords:** Democratic consolidation, election, party defection, politics, political party.

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## Introduction

Party defection is not a new practice in Nigeria's party politics. Neither did the practice start in the Fourth Republic. Party defection has being a part and parcel of the country's party politics even before her political independence in 1960. The practice of decamping from one political party to another actually began in 1951 (Nwanegbo, Odigbo & Nnorom, 2014). Citing Adejuwon, (2013), Edet (2017) disclosed that the defection that took place in 1951 was a calculated move by some members of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) who decamped to the Action Group (AG) in order to deny Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his party (NCNC) the majority in the Western Regional House of Assembly, which was a necessary requirement for the party to form the government in the Western Region. As a result of this defection therefore, it became possible for the AG to form a government in the Region. In the same vein, a chieftain of the AG, Chief Ladoke Akintola left the party as a result of ideological and personality clash with the party leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and thereafter formed the United Nigeria Democratic Party (UNDP). The UNDP later entered into an alliance with the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in order to weaken the dominance of the AG in the Western Region. The personality clash between Chief Ladoke Akintola and his former boss Chief Obafemi Awolowo lingered for a very long time resulting in the brutal violence that led to the first coup in Nigeria (Khalid, 2021). Since then, party defection has become a fundamental feature of party politics in Nigeria.

Nigerian politicians easily and freely defect from one party to the other especially when they fail to secure nomination in primaries either through election or consensus candidature in their party. Most of the politicians that defect do so mainly after party primaries, claiming that they have been cheated, or that the selection process of the party flag bearer is fraught with malpractice. Party defection and instability have therefore become a threat to the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy. Subsequent republics are not exempted from defections and carpet-crossing. For instance, in the old Ondo state during the Second Republic, Akin Omoboriowo; the then Deputy Governor of United Party of Nigeria (UPN) led government of Michael Ajasin defected to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to become its gubernatorial candidate. Thus, party defection has once again being the practice in Nigeria since the reintroduction of democratic rule in the country on May 29, 1999, marking the beginning of



the fourth republic (Okparaji, 2010) and an end to a protracted military rule in the country (Okpeh, 2002).

Events across the country prior to the 2019 General elections indicated that, the practice of party defection appears to have become a necessary attribute of politics in Nigeria. A record of eighty-four members of both chambers of the National Assembly defected from the various political parties on which they were elected during the 2015 elections. The defectors are twenty-seven senators and fifty-seven members of the House of Representatives (Nwaneri, 2018). The history of this phenomenon could be traced to the First Republic. Subscribing to this viewpoint, Edet (2017, p.2) states that “defection has become not only a norm but an increasingly enduring feature in the Nigerian democratic setting”. Similarly, Ake (1982, p.2) opines that “economic considerations underscore, define and indeed determine the pattern of human behavior in all societies”. This was probably what Agan, Adzaigba and Vihimga (2020, p. 30) had in mind when they said:

People are primarily concerned with carrying out activities that gratify their needs and are basically out to meet their interest most often. In Nigeria for instance, most times, two factors influences the chances of a candidate representing a party at the general elections. This is either economic or political power

Mbah (2011) in his analysis of the trend of Nigerian political system observed that political party defection has become an increasingly permanent feature in the Nigerian party politics. In fact, since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, party defections and political instability are the greatest challenges confronting democratic consolidation in the country. The usual practice in the past has being for politicians to defect to other parties with promises of election tickets if they fail to secure party nominations during their own party’s primaries. Some politicians who feel disenchanted or denied of a level playing ground, defect to participate in the election, with some still having the intention of returning to their parties.

A major factor responsible for the rising cases of party defection in Nigeria has been the issue of lack of internal democracy within the various political parties. In Nigeria, the recognition of candidates and their selection for primary elections depend on the candidate's strength in the field of economic and political power, without due consideration of the candidate's integrity and capacity (Jinadu, 2014). These actions lead to political crises, which cause



individuals to defect to other parties and/or establish new parties as a result of dissatisfaction with party functioning and the indifference of general voters in the democratic process (Badejo *et al*, 2015). For example, unhealthy power competition and intra-party crises made prominent members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to seek refuge in the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) incessantly between 2013 and 2015. No political party in Nigeria has a clear cut ideology, which explains why there are constant internal party crises that often lead to splits. According to Omotola (2009), the baseless foundation of Nigerian political parties is actually responsible for party's ideological barrenness. This made Edet (2017) to conclude that complete absence of ideology in Nigerian political parties has accounted for the prevailing party crossover and party switching in the country. But in some cases, politicians shift to another party even when there is no crisis in their former political party. It should be noted however that, as a result of the above scenario, party defections in Nigeria are not limited to one party, but have become a political norm in Nigerian democracy (Abraham, 2019).

Furthermore, the wave of party defections and its implications on Nigeria's democracy has raised a fundamental question on democratic consolidation in the country. Thus, the paper seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- a. What are the factors responsible for incessant party defections in Nigeria?
- b. What are the implications of party defections on democratic consolidation in Nigeria?
- c. How can party defections be effectively managed for democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Party Politics**

Party politics has been viewed from different angles and perspectives by political analysts, political commentators, scholars and theorists. According to Awopeju (2012), party politics consists of the functioning of political parties, especially the creation of organizational structures of political parties, the establishment of political parties and the election principles. Olaniyan (2009) defines party politics as the process of taking political activities within the democratic sphere in order to gain political power and control political systems through the adoption of elections. He disclosed that party politics emerged in the presence of electoral



principles in a country during the democratic regime, when peoples were allowed to elect their leaders to represent them in government offices. Furthermore, party politics as political activity of an institution, the official structure strives from the election for the control of personnel and government policies to distribute and allocate scarce resources through state procedure. From this point of view, the main purpose of party politics is the struggle to obtain political power in the state. The struggle for political power creates competition and conflict between political parties.

### **Party Defection**

Party defection is known by different nomenclatures such as “floor-crossing,” “carpet-crossing,” “party hopping,” “dispute”, “political party transition”, “political party switching”, “decamping” and “waka (canoe)-jumping” (Malhotra. 2005). According to Moliki (2019), party defection is more common in the current democratic dispensation than any republic and any political party in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic, which is not suffering from asylum crises. He also argued that issues identified as factors responsible for leaving one party to another includes intra-party feuds, selfish interests of the political class, incomplete party ideology, internal democracy and leadership crisis among others.

Party defection refers to changing political parties. In other words, it means changing from one political party to another. It is the political orientation of a member of a political party to move to another political party as a result of dissatisfaction in his current party (Jiddere, 2015). Malthora (2005) defined political party defection as party switching, cross carpeting, party switching, floor crossing, party hoping, canoe jumping, camping out; party jumping and so on. Political transition, as it is sometimes called, is the practice of moving from one political party to another or the act of abandoning one's political principles. Cross carpeting or party defection in the words of Khalid (2021, p.255) citing Nasidi (2009) is “a sign of cowardice. It is also a sign of insincerity and the absence of principle.”

Party defection from one political party to another by elected leaders and party officials, whether in developed or developing democracies, may be associated with compromise and, at times, abandonment of political principles. Political transition, also known as political rolling stone or political *jumpology*, is not limited to emerging democracies. The point is, party defection is not bad in itself as it is compatible with freedom of political assembly and



association. It only becomes dangerous when it develops effects that shake democratic governance. Political change is much more common in less developed democracies, due to the lack of clear ideology between political parties and weak political institutions (Mbah, 2011; Unahon, 2014). There is a nexus between party defection and political culture, which suggests the emergence of new political culture to build on new values and virtues and to reinforce the democratic practice in Nigeria (Momoh, 2010)

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Democratic consolidation is a concept that has attracted the attention of scholars and policy makers since the emergence of the third wave of democratization (Fukuyama, 1992). On the one hand, scholars have argued that the institutionalization of electoral rules is not the most crucial feature of democratic consolidation. On the other hand, informal practices of political actors are crucial in democratic consolidation. Therefore, consolidation occurs when the political actors in a political system follow the formal rules of the democratic institutions (Abdullahi, 2018).

However, taking a closer look at the situation in Nigeria where communal violence has increased exponentially; it is difficult to say whether or not democracy has been consolidated. The public still casts doubt on the state's capacity to manage internal crises and protect lives and property. To reinforce the above position, Fayemi (2012) stated that it is difficult to “have democracy without democrats”. His claim is a justification for the attitude of political party hierarchies, who see political parties as their personal empires and thus impose decisions and candidates on political parties.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The paper adopts the eclectic approach. It is anchored on Elite Theory and Rational Choice Theory.

#### **Elite Theory**

Elite Theory is majorly associated with the works of Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Roberto Michells (Varma, 1975). The major assumption of this theory is that in every society there are two classes of people—the class that rules and the class that is ruled. The class that rules is usually less numerous and always tries to perpetually dominate the class that is ruled.



Thus, the essence of the elitist doctrine is that in every society there can be found a minority of the population making the important decisions for the majority members of the society. According to Meisel (1958), the elite maintain its dominance in the society because it exhibits such characteristics as consciousness, harmony and political conspiracy among others.

According to Mills (1959), the elite group is divided into two categories namely inner core elite and outer margin elite. Pareto on his part divided the elite group into the governing and non-governing elite (Varma, 1975). In the words of Omodia (2009), the theory of elite, as popularized by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michells and Wright Mills among others, undoubtedly explains Nigeria's electoral and political system, considering the political realities in existence today. Democratic exemption can be classified as cadre or elite parties that manipulate the emotions of the masses for the selfish purpose of gaining an economic basis. Therefore, it can be argued that it is practically impossible to discuss democracy in Nigeria without considering the roles played by the Nigerian elite (political, economic, military or bureaucratic elite), because in the final analysis, recruitment into political leadership is usually made from this group.

The issue of party defection in Nigeria's party politics can be explained using the elite theory, especially from the perspective of Meisel (1958), who in his analysis reveals that the consciousness, cohesion and political conspiracy of the elite in each society are essential elements that enable the elite to maintain political power and dominance in the society. The Nigerian elite, which mainly constitute the political leadership, exhibits the aforementioned characteristics with regard to the separation from political parties to ensure that they know each other, integrate properly and always work towards unity in most of their actions to retain power. Therefore, the elite sees party defection as a lucrative tool that can be used to ensure their power is maintained and hold on to Nigerian society as long as possible. This probably explains why most of the Nigerian politicians either advise one another or advised by other members of the elite to leave at every "necessary" point in time or at any given opportunity to join another political party where they feel their aim of accessing political power could be achieved.



### **Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory is largely attributed to Anthony Downs' "Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957). The Theory is considered an attempt to explain all social and political phenomena in terms of how individuals making choices under the influence of self-interests and preferences. It treats social and political change in a similar way to economic exchange, where all parties try to maximize their advantages or gains and minimize their disadvantages or losses (Eke, 2012). The theory as applied in political science is adapted from the ideas of choices, costs and benefits inherent in the study of Economics. Therefore, due to the relative success of economics in understanding markets, Rational Choice Theory has also been increasingly used in other Social Science disciplines such as Sociology and Political Science among others. (Scott, 2000)

Dunleavy (1991) noted that the theory has had far-reaching effects on the examination of interest groups, elections, voting behavior; behavior of the Legislature, coalitions and the bureaucracy. The approach assumes that all political actors or a certain class of them are rational, and according to Downs (1957) to be rational is to be efficient at maximizing output for a given input or maximizing input for an output. The theory can be used to explain party defection in Nigeria in the sense that Nigerian politicians are always conscious of their own interests and always tend to adopt the tools that will help them achieve and realize them. According to Sowole (2010), a common stereotype in the nation's political circle is that there are permanent interests, not permanent friends. Based on this assumption, Nigerian politicians are prepared to *cross-carpet* from one party to another if they discover that their interests are no longer protected in their original party; they are always accustomed to moving to where the stakes will be lower and wins higher.

It should also be noted that the Rational Choice Theory is of the opinion that the individual does not really take into account the sense of ethics and morality when making certain decisions, especially when such decisions are aimed at achieving personal interests. Nigerian politicians are always ready to switch from one political party to another at any "necessary" point in time, as long as they achieve their goal of remaining relevant in the party politics of the country, however immoral and unethical these actions may be.





### **Historical Overview of Party Defection in Nigeria's Democracy**

The origin of the party defection in Nigeria dates back to 1951, when members of the then Western House of Assembly elected under the NCNC platform deliberately decided to take refuge in the AG in order to deny Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his party-NCNC the majority in the Western Regional House of Assembly, which was a necessary requirement for the party to form the government in the Western Region. The NCNC was the dominant party winning 42 of the 84 members of the Regional Assembly, but within 24 hours, 20 of its members decamped to AG under pressure from Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Mbah, 2011; Jiddere, 2015; Godwin, 2015). In the First Republic, Chief Ladoke Akintola defected from AG to a new party, NNDP, as a result of the personality clash between him and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Mbah, 2011). In the Second Republic, Awolowo's Dais Olado, Akintola, Anthony Anahoro, Richard Akinjide, S.G. Loyalists in the Nigerian Unity Party (UPN), such as Chief Akin Omoboriowo, Ikoku and even the governorship candidate in Ondo state took refuge in the National Party Nigeria (NPN). Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, who was elected under the People's Redemption Party (PRP) platform, also defected to the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). In fact, many politicians decamped to NPN during the Second Republic (Mbah, 2011).

During the Third Republic, the military junta sought to moderate party politics by establishing two political parties, namely the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) and mandated each political party to have its presence felt in at least two-thirds (2/3) of the states of the federation. However, the Third Republic was truncated by the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida who felt that the 1993 General elections were fraught with electoral malpractices and went ahead to annul the results of the elections. Thus, the political parties of the First, Second, and Third Republics, though constrained by party ideology were not insulated from the challenges of political change (Enefe, 2008).

Unlike the First, Second and aborted Third Republics in which political parties developed from cultural organizations and had a clear party ideology, parties in the Fourth Republic lacked clearly defined political ideology. According to Tanko (2007), many of the political parties founded in 1999 can be described as merely “proper marriages” designed to take political power from the military rather than as a gathering of individuals bound together by a



common ideology. While describing the nature of some Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic, Saka and Solomon (2015) noted that the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) is not perceived as a party with a certain strong ideological identity but rather as a centrist party. Domingo and Nwankwo (2010) on the other hand felt that the PDP is a political party made up of several organizations with different political positions. The party generally maintained the "conservative position on social issues" but preaches economic liberalism and the preservation of welfare. As a matter of fact, the PDP was mainly a conglomerate of several political parties (Tamen, 2012).

In February 2013, a faction of ACN, ANPP, CPC and APGA merged into a new political party-All Progressives Congress (APC). APC received INEC approvals on July 31, 2013. However, as a party of different bedmates, APC also does not have a separate ideology (Hassan & Olaniyi, 2015). However, it is interesting to note that the formation of the party seems to have changed the face of opposition politics in Nigeria (Hassan & Olaniyi, 2015). In essence, politics of ethnicity and regionalism, political polarizations, self-serving political alliances, anti-party policies and fragmentation of political parties rather than politics seeking to serve the national interest or majority were some of the main indicators of political change. These indices identified the origin, trends and dynamics of political change in the country. In the First and Second Republics and at the beginning of the Fourth Republic, political change was ethnically and regionally based. Currently, the ruling APC and the major opposition PDP are not ethnically and regionally based. They spread nationally but are punctuated by massive, frequent transitions, especially from opposition political parties to the ruling party and vice versa.

### **Causes of Party Defection in Nigeria's Democracy**

Some of the factors responsible for incessant party defections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are examined below:

**Constitutional Vagueness:** Constitutional vagueness is a major factor responsible for the defection of Nigerian politicians from one party to another. Nigeria has witnessed a series of party defections in the last two decades of her democratic experiments, with politicians decamping from one party to the other especially to the dominant political parties-the PDP and APC. This development as generated heated debates on whether the Constitution should allow



party defection or not. Ali and Mohammed (2019, p.122) carry this viewpoint further when they opined that the “vulnerability of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution especially in such sections as 68(2) and 109(2), as well as some lacuna in the reference cases on Legislators' defections have also fueled the defection syndrome, while the politicized and corrupt nature of the Nigerian Judiciary as characterized by bribery, delay in decisions, inconsistency in verdicts and interpretations are being fully exploited by the defecting politicians.” The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 has made provisions with respect to defection from one political party to the other while holding any political (Executive or Legislative) offices in the country.

Mohammed, Aisha and Saidu (2018) on their part pointed out that, the provisions of the Constitution could however, be categorized into two perspectives of elected Executives and elected Legislators. Sections 131(c), 142(1), 177(d) and 187(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended which together provided that a President and Vice President, Governors and Deputy Governors must, prior to their elections into offices respectively, belong to any of the registered political parties in Nigeria and also be sponsored by such parties during their elections into office. In view of the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the issue of the defection of the Executive officers such as the President and Vice President, Governors and Deputy Governors are shrouded in ambiguities. On the other hand, the Legislators are only allowed to defect from one party to another throughout their tenure of four years when and if the Legislator defects to another political party as a result of internal division within the party he/she defected from or there is a merger between his/her political party and one or some other political parties.

**Lack of Party Ideology:** Lack of internal democracy in Nigeria’s party politics tends to impinge on democratic consolidation in the country. Political parties are ordinarily expected to be founded and grounded on sustainable ideology. It is not just a platform to rise to political power; ideology is a belief system that legitimizes the chosen political order for society (Christenson, 1981). In other words, it is a distinctive feature of social/political identity as well as a motivating and unifying factor (Omotola, 2009). Ideology can be roughly divided into three specific categories: beliefs, values, and ideals (Bodley, 2008). More specifically, Olaolu and Agbana (2015) argue that people's beliefs give them an understanding of how the World works and how they should respond to the actions and environments of others.



Party politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic reveals that political parties lack clearly defined ideologies. This could explain the unnecessary defections from one political party to another. This has caused these political parties to change nomenclature, merge with other political parties and form alliances from time to time, but still encounter unique problems. For a political party to promote democratic sustainability, it must be based on a clearly defined ideology. According to Edet (2017), political party is the fruit of ideology and ideology is the root of political party. No fewer than 84 Senators and members of the House of Representatives decamped from the political parties that brought them to power prior to 2019 General Elections in Nigeria.

Barnes (2018) was very explicit in his observation of the lack of ideology in Nigerian political parties. According to him, political parties on the African continent tend to lack clear messages that set them apart. The resulting political alliance is mostly based on personalities and agreements between political leaders, and does not necessarily reflect differences in policy choice or ideology. The success of the APC in the 2015 General Elections for instance, was as a result of the failure of the PDP to effectively manage issues ranging from corruption, insecurity to unemployment; and not necessarily due to the lack of ideology in the PDP. However, during the 2019 General Elections, neither the PDP nor the APC, as the party controlling the national government, could give a clear message as to why it should win the elections.

**Economic Interest:** In Nigeria, people join and defect from one political party to another based on the economic opportunities the party can offer. This situation is very common in the Fourth Republic. For many Nigerians, politics is a means to an end. The manifestos of almost all political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are the same when subjected to critical analysis. Thus, defection is not whether a party's manifesto is better than those of the others, but rather a matter of self-interest and economic opportunities. Aleyomi (2013) argues that there is a usually massive defection of politicians from opposition parties to the ruling party prior to General Elections in Nigeria. The idea is to participate in the primaries of the ruling party. On the other hand, another round of defection starts after the party primaries are over. Losers in the party primaries usually decamp to their former or new parties, or even form a new party to enable them participate in future elections. Incessant defection by Nigerian



political actors is a reflection of their constant quest for political advantage. This was probably what Aleyomi (2013, p. 83) had in mind when he said:

Some politicians take a deep plunge into politics and a political party because of their selfish interest and where their interest can be better served. Defectors from one political party to another hinge their decision on the dwindling fortunes of the party occasioned by its leadership crisis, lack of internal democracy and 'political' favouritism.

**Lack of Internal Democracy:** Democracy requires political parties to be organizations that mediate the democratic process and produce leaders who carry out democratic policies (George-Genyi, 2019). The absence of intra-party democracy as seen in Nigeria represents the most daunting challenge to the maintenance and deepening of democracy and democratic culture in the country. Political elite are often scared of losing their relevance by allowing transparent processes and principles to be enforced, because this will increase the likelihood of harming their selfish interests through the defeat of their preferred candidates. Widespread intra-party crises within the ruling party and other opposition parties in Nigeria are manifestations of the extent political elite could go to maintain unethical practices that delay progressive democratic forces, which secure their own interests and seek to consolidate core democratic values. In line with this viewpoint, George-Genyi (2019, p. 423) has this to say:

It has never been a party that speaks to issues. The polarization in People's Democratic Party has never been which policy direction the government produced by which the party should go on the economy, healthcare, education or the collapsed infrastructure. It has always been a game of intrigues between those who want to pocket the party for the purpose of next election. The electoral law provides that it is the party that should present candidates. So, whoever controls the party mechanism determines those to field for elections. It has never been about the poor Nigerians.

**Fear of Prosecution:** Politics has become the most lucrative industry in Nigeria today. This fact is responsible for the level of corruption among the elite. Corruption is a generic term that covers abuse of power due to personal interests (Nwanta, Okechukwu, & Chigozie, 2009). Mbah (2011) averred that desperation to hold public office as means of accumulating wealth makes Nigerian politicians to cross-carpet without justifications. Thus, for politicians who engage in behavior that is considered contrary to the trust of office bestowed upon them,



they often leave their party when their party loses election to the ruling political party to avoid being called to explain some of their actions or inactions while performing their duties while in public office. The defection of many elected public officials to the ruling APC before and after the 2019 General Elections could as well be linked to the fear of prosecution. Inyang (2019) citing Adams Oshiomhole, the former National Chairman of the APC said that the sins of politicians are forgiven when they join the ruling party. This suggests that politicians with cases of corruption could be forgiven their “sins” the moment they join the ruling party-the APC. What this implies is that defection to the government in power is a common ground to be discharged and acquitted for those persons with charges against them at the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Ironically, the same party claims to be fighting against corruption.

### **Implications of Party Defection on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

Events in Nigeria’s party politics since the beginning of the Fourth Republic show that political parties are not built on or rooted in ideas and principles. This ideological vacuum has reduced Nigerian political parties to organizations that survive on financial incentives as the basis of loyalty and support. This action erodes the effectiveness of democratic life through party processes. In Nigeria, politicians defect from one party to another not just on the basis of running for elections or party ideological differences as the case may be. The concept of opposition in a democracy requires political parties to present credible alternatives in the form of development policies. In some cases, a ruling party may borrow an opposition’s view and transform it into its own. But, the idea of a strong opposition party in the name of personal superiority, which is the essence of the multi-party system; is defeated because everyone wants to belong to the ruling party. This represents the tragic state of contemporary democracy in Nigeria. Therefore, the ruling party often does not have a strong opposition to help control their excesses. The absence of this makes the ruling party to monopolize the political system.

Mbah (2011) noted that desperation to hold public office as means of accumulating wealth makes Nigerian politicians to cross-carpet without justifications. In developed Western democracies such as United States of America, Britain and Germany among others, defection from one party to another is usually done on ideological grounds rather than on selfish and personal interests. For instance, a member of Republican Party in the USA can express



support for Democratic Party member or aspirant without necessarily defecting to Democratic Party. In 2008, Collin Powell, a former US Secretary of Defense publicly supported Democratic Party candidate, Barrack Obama during the US presidential elections without necessarily defecting to the Democratic Party. Party defection in Nigeria, especially since 1999 when democracy was introduced in the country, has become more of a political culture mainly because of lack ideas, collapse of political values and norms, lack of principles based on shared beliefs and the selfish interest of Nigerian politicians (Edet, 2017)

According to Momoh (2010), political parties in Nigeria have manifestoes that are virtually the same. These manifestoes are formulated by consultants, not party members or activists. This explains may Nigerian political parties always look up to electoral commissions to help in educating the voters. It is difficult to have democracy without genuine and committed political parties (Oyebode, 2012). Most of the political parties operating are merely organizations managed by opportunists. In Nigerian democracy, there is lack of internal democracy within political parties as a result of frequent conflicts, crises and imposition of candidates for elections. According to Aleyomi (2013, p.86),

Many Nigerian politicians who found it expedient to dump any political party will opportunistically flock back if the party they dumped wins the election. This is where politicians play politics with defection. Nigerian grandees specialize in this kind of aggressive, shame-free jockeying for eternal relevance; and some, to be fair, do not even have to do any jockeying at all.

Aina (2002) on the one hand doubts the integrity of political participation and competitions in Nigeria of which parties are the basis while Mbah (2011) on the other hand describes Nigerian political party as barren of ideological foundation, deficit in ideas and deficient in principles. This ideological barrenness, according to Edet (2017), has reduced Nigerian political parties to mere organizations that survive on monetization as the basis for loyalty and support. This act erodes the effectiveness of democratic sustenance through party processes. In Nigeria, politicians only defect from one party to another to contest elections or get favour not on the basis of party ideological differences, but because of their selfish economic interest. This practice thrives in Nigeria because there is no adequate legal instrument for effective redress and has thus continued to threaten the consolidation of democracy in the country (Khalid, 2021).





Unfortunately, in Nigeria, whenever members of an opposition party try to criticize the ruling party, the latter uses the instrumentality of the state to prosecute such individuals. The idea of wooing or accepting politicians from other political parties and erasing their corrupt practices against the state is unhealthy in the country's fight against corruption, which constitutes a threat to national development. This attitude has given the country a bad name in the international community. The orientation whereby personal interests take precedence over public interest is responsible for the absence of good governance in Nigeria. Defections in Nigeria are often not made in accordance with Constitutional provisions. It most times amounts to mockery of the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examined the politics of party defection and its implications on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic from the perspectives of Elite Theory and Rational Choice Theory. The analytical discourse revealed that party defection arising from lack of internal party democracy and lack of party ideology has become a major challenge to democratic consolidation in the country. Nigerian politicians are selfish and self-centered; they care only about themselves and their cronies rather than the mass of people, which explains why they often defect from one party to another. The rate at which Nigerian politicians defect from one party to another makes mockery of the country's democracy, negates the values of opposition parties in democratic system, invalidates opposing views and reduces the efficacy of alternative democratic choices.

The paper concludes that the incidences of party defection in Nigerian party politics, if not checked, could move the country into a political system without viable opposition to serve as watchdog to the ruling party. It is also worthy to note that the nature and character of political parties most times frustrates party members thereby encouraging them to defect. Democracy built on ideologically sustained political parties and the extent to which this is derailed can exert negative influence on democratic stability and consolidation.

The paper recommends the strengthening and amendment of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Electoral Laws in order to regulate the increasing rate of party defections by politicians in the country. Strengthening and sustaining Nigeria's democracy equally requires a social reorientation, consistent political education and mobilization based





on democratic culture that would directed towards inculcation of new values in the political system. This is where social revolution comes in.

The powers conferred on the presiding officers of Legislative chambers as contained in Sections 68 (2) and 109 (2) of the 1999 Constitution should be amended to provide for the time frame within which a verdict on the resignation, if any, tendered by a defecting Legislator must be delivered, upholding resignation of the member or otherwise. It should also be able to empower the head of Legislative chambers further to go ahead and determine the resignation of the defecting member with or without the resignation notice but after the expiration of the allotted time frame. The Constitution should also be amended to provide for the powers to declare vacant the seat of the presiding officers of the Legislative chambers on the order of the Executive President and the Governor of a state in the event of defection by these officers.

Lastly, Nigerian political parties need to be reorganized on the basis of principles. This will help overcome the problem of monopolization of party decision-making mechanism thereby helping to restore internal democracy in the political system. Party primaries are the first aspects of democracy in which the flag bearers representing various political parties are elected. The lack of credibility, freeness and fairness during most party primaries violates the core values of democracy, and this often leads to defections by politicians from one party to another.

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