

Legislative Defections and Democratization in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the phenomenon of legislative/party defection in Nigeria, underscoring the historical dimensions of the problem, conceptual and theoretical issues of party defection, defections in the 2015 elections, and predisposing factors of legislative defection/carpet crossing in Nigeria. The paper submits that the problem of legislative defection/carpet crossing is deep rooted such that they cannot, in their present form and character, midwife successful democratization in Nigeria. Some of its notable causes include the poverty of political party ideology and poor institutionalisation of political parties; the form and character of the post-colonial state, constitutional ambiguities regarding carpet crossing, primacy of political power and politics of patronage, among others. Consolidating Nigeria's democracy demands that the roots of these contradictions are adequately redressed.

Keywords: Defection, Political Party, Democracy, Democratization, Legislature

Introduction

One of the most complex and critical institutions of democracy is political party. It has been argued that in the absence of viable political parties, being 'makers' of democracy, neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable. Parties not only perform functions that are government related, such as making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people's demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices; but also, linkage related functions, that is, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate, (Omotola, 2010).

In recent years, Nigerian democracy has witnessed series of political defections with politicians decamping from one political party to the other. This development, which is generally referred to as cross carpeting, party-switching, floor-crossing, party-hopping, canoe-jumping, decamping, party-jumping, etc., is employed to mean the same thing as defection. This has become a permanent feature of the Nigerian nascent democracy; although not an exclusive preserve for Nigeria. 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) ;(Aleyomi, 2013). 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, (Mbah, 2011). However, the persistent party defection is not new. In fact it is a common phenomenon in both the developed and the developing democracies

As noted by (Anifowose, 2004), (Omilusi, 2015), from the restoration of civil rule in 1999, the political scene has witnessed frequent discords, unresolved political issues, recriminations,

threats of impeachments of executives, treacheries, flagrant breach of party rules, carpet crossings, inter-communal rivalries and resurgence of factional cleavages within the parties which have continued to undermine the democratization process in Nigeria. The existing political parties in Nigeria are known largely for their barrenness in ideas and ideological dispositions, and owned by a handful of persons with which to trade and bargain for material benefits (Oyovbaire, 2007). In practice, members of the political oligarchy switch political parties, form new ones, or change party affiliations according to shifting opportunities to gain access to petro-rents and political privileges- regardless of professed political principles, or regional or ethnic affiliations.

This paper seeks to explore this development, underscoring its historical dimensions and predisposing factors. The paper is organized into three sections. The first section situates the problem in historical perspective; the second explains defections in the 2015 elections in Nigeria. Finally, the paper discusses the predisposing factors of legislative defection/carpet crossing by looking at the causes/explanations, before concluding.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

The word “Defect” or “Defection” is defined as „the act of leaving a political party, country etc to join another that is considered to be an opposition“. This act, when engaged in flippantly and outside the rules of political bellum is an act of treachery and dishonesty of the highest order (Adekunle,2015). Defection or Carpet-Crossing by Political Office holders or Nigerian politicians generally is not a new phenomenon but one that has persisted since the first republic in the period leading to independence of Nigeria as a sovereign nation.

The term defection appears to have been derived, as the dictionary meaning suggests, from the Latin word ‘defectio’, indicating ‘an act of abandonment of a person or a cause to which such person is bound by reason of allegiance or duty, or to which he has willfully attached himself’. It, similarly, indicates revolt, dissent, and rebellion by a person or a party. Defection thus connotes the process of abandoning a cause or withdrawing from it or from a party or programme. It has thus an element, on the one hand, of giving up one and, on the other, an element of joining another (Omilusi,2015). When the process is complete by reason of a person defecting from a cause or a party or a programme, he is termed as a defector. Defection thus is a process by which a person abandons or withdraws his allegiance or duty. Malhotra (2005), argues that traditionally, this phenomenon is known as ‘floor crossing’ which had its origin in the British House of Commons where a legislator changed his allegiance when he crossed the floor and moved from the Government to the opposition side, or vice-versa.

In politics, a defector is a person who gives up allegiance to one state in exchange for allegiance to another, in a way which is considered illegitimate by the first state. More broadly, it involves abandoning a person, cause or doctrine to which one is bound by some tie, as of allegiance or duty (Eme and Ogbochie, 2014). This term is also applied, often pejoratively, to anyone who switches loyalty to another religion, sports team, political party, or other rival faction. In that sense, the defector is often considered a traitor by their original side. In domestic politics, a defector is a person who gives up allegiance to one state or political entity in exchange for allegiance to another. The term is sometimes used as a synonym for traitor, especially if the defector brings with him secrets or confidential information. More broadly, it involves abandoning a person, cause or doctrine to whom or to which one is bound by some tie, as of

allegiance or duty. It is also the state of having rejected one's political beliefs, political party or a cause and often in favor of opposing political beliefs or causes.

In advanced democracies, reasons adduced by politicians for defection include divergent views on the operations of party's philosophy, crisis, division, and party leaders reneging on agreements. In Nigeria of late, most defection cases, have been mainly informed by personality clash, financial considerations, power tussles, personal glorification, among others (Adekunle, 2015). The main theoretical approaches for explaining party switching (Heller and Mershon, 2009), (Goeke and Hartman, 2011) can be divided according to whether they highlight individual motivations of party switchers or are more interested in the structural and institutional contexts.

The structural approach view party switching as a result of party systems that are unconsolidated or where parties are relatively weak, which is the case for most African countries. Most students of African political parties see these parties characterized by a lack of internal-party democracy, strong personalism, high degrees of factionalism and loose membership. These features when taken together indicate a low degree of institutionalization, (Erdman, 2004). Internal party conflicts are typically resolved by the secession of the defeated faction, which leaves the party and creates a new one, and which might lead to collective processes of party switching, (Goeke and Hartman, 2011).

The institutional approach within the broad literature of 'institutional engineering' and even within more specific literature on how to strengthen political parties and party systems by institutional arrangements, the potential role of floor-crossing regulations has not been systematically explored. Institutional approach demands for such anti-defection laws, as observed in African countries with participatory processes of constitutional reform which implement legislation demanding that representatives who change their party affiliation have to vacate their seats in parliament.

History of Carpet Crossing in Nigeria

The advent and growth of Cross-carpeting in Nigeria politics 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 (Mbah, 2011).

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 avert a situation that could lead to break down of law and order, political instability 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). 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 influenced some 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 was alive. Macaulay’s death gave Azikiwe, the opportunity to be elected the Premier of Western Region on the NCNC platform in 1951.

As a result of this apparent 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). 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 till today. That was essentially how, in practical terms, the expression. “Cross carpeting” came into the political lexicon of Nigeria and has remained till today, thereby reducing politics in Nigeria to abysmal tribal level, (Opadare and Agbana, 2015). These tribal groupings engulfed in continuous political acrimony for politics of ethnic superiority.

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 Awolowo; and on personal principle, necessitated by the perceived need to move the Yoruba people into Nigeria’s mainstream politics. In the same way as it happened between Akintola and Awolowo; 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 Nigerian Citizens (DPNC), which sought a working relationship with the AG at the Federal Elections in 1959. While in the Second Republic (1979-1983), the repackaged offshoot of Action Group, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Awolowo’s loyalists, such as Adisa Oladosu Akintola, Anthony Enahoro, Richard Akinjide, and S.G. Ikoku reconsidered their loyalty to the party. However, a number of them defected to National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was the leading political party of that era. An interesting episode 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, who was elected under the ticket of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), 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 him during this period abdicate regional political affiliations for the mainstream political identity, ((Mbah, 2011); (Opadare and Agbana, 2015).

Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the spade of political defection over the years is alarming, both vertical and horizontal party defections, losing party to a ruling one and vice versa. In his own submission, (Dum,2002) 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 People's 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 People's Democratic Party (PDP) on whose ticket he won a senatorial seat. His cross carpeting was rewarded as he was elected the Senate President. In Plateau State, Alhaji Alhassan Shaibu decamped from the APP and joined the PDP in 1999; as a result, he became a leading member of the Northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC). Before the recent merger of some political parties to form the now popular and ruling All Progressives' Congress (APC) party, the direction of defection was one-sided, into the PDP. Only a few percentages were defecting from PDP to other parties or to form new political parties. In fact and Law, there is nothing wrong in people cross carpeting, if they do not find the programmes of their party in consonance with their ideals. This proposition is buttressed by the constitutional right of peaceful assembly and association, which provides that "Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests". However, when it comes to the issue of cross carpeting, it seems this self-explanatory provision must be read in conjunction with that of section 68(1)(g), which states thus:

A member of the Senate or of 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 the expiration of the period for which that House was elected: Provided that his membership of the latter political party is not as a result of a division in the political party of which he was previously a member or of a merger of two or more political parties or factions by one of which he was previously sponsored, (Opadare and Agbana, 2015). The implication of the foregoing constitutional provision is that, a Member of Parliament automatically loses his seat as a result of defection, except:

- a) The defection is a result of division in his previous political party; or
- b) The defection is a result of merger between his previous political party and another.

One threatening dimension is the unprecedented rate of political party defections. Party defection or cross carpeting certainly predates Nigeria's independence and is older than her sovereignty. However, this has been shaped and sharpened by colonialism and sustained by the structures of post-colonial state (Mbah, 2011). 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 character and behavior of Nigerian ruling class. 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 moves to their former parties or to new ones or even to form a new party under which they intend to contest the coming elections, (Aleyomi, 2013).

Defections in the 2015 Election

The 2015 General elections were held in Nigeria on 28 and 29 March 2015, the fifth quadrennial election to be held since the end of military rule in 1999. Voters elected the President and members to the House of Representatives and the Senate. The elections were first scheduled to be held on 14 February 2015. However, the electoral commission postponed it by six weeks to 28 March, mainly due to the poor distribution of Permanent Voter Cards, and also to curb the Boko Haram insurgency in certain North-Eastern states of the country. The government closed its land and sea borders from midnight on 25 March until the end of the polling date. The election was extended to 29 March due to delays and technical problems with the biometric card readers in some part of the country.

Before the election was held, the wave of defection from one party to another in the National Assembly has been that of different strokes for different folks. In the House of Representatives, members have been defecting from one political party to another at will and unhindered by the leadership. This has become a regular event in the house since the five PDP governors defected to All Progressives Congress (APC) at the peak of the intra -party crisis that rocked PDP in 2013 (Eme and Ogbochie, 2014). In 2014, during a national convention organized by the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), five sitting state governors, namely, Rabi'u Kwankwaso of Kano State, Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara State, Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto and Murtala Nyako Adamawa, formed what was later referred to as New PDP and later dumped it for the All Progressives Congress (APC).

The 2014 defection of five sitting governors is still regarded as one of the biggest in our recent political history. In the National Assembly, however, there is a new wave of defection sweeping across both chambers. The defection of five sitting governors to APC, was preceded by a similar major cross carpeting of twenty-two Senators. Few of them mentioned here were Bukola Saraki (Kwara Central), Bello Gwarzo (Kano North), Senator Abdullahi Adamu (Nasarawa West), Senator Magnus Abe (River South-east), Wilson Ake (Rivers West), Senator Shaba Lafiagi (Kwara North) and others

The senators communicated their decision to decamp to the APC in a letter addressed to the Senate President, David Mark. The two page letter, which also listed the senators and their signatures, reads:

We the undersigned Senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria elected under the People's Democratic Party (PDP) wish to notify you that we have severally and jointly joined the All Progressives Congress (APC). This action and

decision is as a result of the division and factionalisation in the Peoples Democratic Party that sponsored our election into the Senate. In view of the above, we write to inform you that following the division and factionalisation in the PDP, we have formally joined the All Progressives Congress (APC). This communication is made pursuant to Section 68 (1) (g) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) for your information, guidance and record purposes (Daily Post Editorial, 2014).

In the House of Representatives within the same period, thirty-seven members defected from the PDP to APC. Among the law lawmakers who defected then were Nasir G. Sule, Ahmad A. Zarewa, Aliyu Sani Madaki, Bashir Babale, Alhassan Ado, Munir Dan' Agundi, Aminu Suleiman, Abudulmumin Jibrin, Musa Ado, Musthapha Bala and Mukthari Mohammed. Others were Dakuku Peterside, Mpigi Barinada, Pronen Maurice, Dawari George, Ogbonna Nwuke, and Yakubu Dogara from Bauchi, were also on the list. Observers of the Nigerian political space, while admitting that the nation's democratic culture is yet immature, however, hold that the spate of defections is essentially driven by selfishness and greed for the many who see politics not as a call to service but an invitation to 'come and chop' or 'stomach infrastructure' as made popular by former Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State.

Predisposing Factors

From the preceding section, it has become clear that the causes of legislative defection/carpet crossing are deep-rooted such that they cannot, in their present form and character, midwife democracy and democratization in Nigeria. In what follows, this section identifies and explains some of the causes of defection in Nigeria.

Poverty of Political Party Ideology

One of the causes of legislative defection/carpet crossing in Nigeria is that the Nigerian political parties suffer from "poverty of ideology" (Omotola, 2010). Ideology should serve as the road map for party operations, provide it with a veritable tool for mobilization, conflict management, and identification and serve as a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgement. Whatever the case, it is important to note that at the very heart of the success or otherwise of political party is the important question of political ideology. The issue of ideology has been so central to the activities of political parties across time and space that (Anson D. Morse, 1896) has argued that ideology, being the durable convictions held in common by party members in respect to the most desirable form, institutions, spirit and course of action of the state, determines the natural attitude of a party towards every public question, (Iyare, 2004). In an incisive piece on "political party convention", (Richard and Strickler, 1996) similarly argue that "ideology functions as planks", that is, single issue statements within the platform, the exact ideological orientation of which is often used as a bargaining chip in seeking party unity. Here, the platform connotes a statement of the official party position on a variety of issues.

Although Nigerian parties do have their manifestoes from which their ideological leaning can be gleaned, such manifestoes have always proved to be insufficient in reality for obvious reasons. For one, there are usually few differences in the manifestoes of most parties, making it difficult to differentiate among them ideologically. This was particularly the case with parties under the Fourth Republic, as parties of the First and Second Republics could easily be identified with

some form of specific ideologies. Similarly, the form and character of political contestation in Nigeria, usually informed by the character of the state and the elite, give little or no consideration to ideological dispositions. Rather, forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion assume dominance. It is not surprising, therefore, that when one party captures power it tends to govern on the basis of the whims and caprices of the power holder, not so much by party manifestoes. Opposition parties behave in similar fashion. This explains the ignominious pattern and trends of political vagrancy in Nigeria's political system. As a commentator points out, while political vagrancy, a condition whereby politicians cross-carpet from one party to another, is not inherently bad, it becomes a liability when the shift is not informed and based on ethical and philosophical considerations. In such situations, it can lead to the "confusion of political followership, constricts development, if not completely destabilize[s] the political process," (Okosi-Simbine, 2005). The lack of political ideology among the political parties in Nigeria enhances legislative defection/carpet crossing.

Low level of political party institutionalisation

Again, Nigerian parties have not been able to attain a reasonable degree of institutionalization especially in the areas of internal cohesion and discipline. This deficiency has also contributed to the decline of the conflict management capacity of the parties at both intra and inter-party relations levels. The level of crisis at both levels of party relations is worrisome. It is such that none of the parties have been able to hold itself together without conflict that most times threaten the very heart of the parties. The most notable illustrations can be located in the morality of leadership in all the parties, as well as the unprecedented rate of political vagrancy. (Omoruyi, 2002) has observed this trend of conflicts between the executive branch and the National Assembly when he notes that "members of the National Assembly are not able to work with the president in his agenda – setting function". The situation couldn't have been different because the parties are not necessarily motivated by a commitment to party agenda, if at all they have any, but by different personal and sectional interests.

Primacy of Political power in Nigeria

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 (Mbah, 2011). 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 (Mbah, 2011).

This condition has negative impact on democratic development in Nigeria and building strong opposition parties under these serial legislative defections/carpet crossing has become a thorn in political party development in Nigeria.

Character of the Colonial and post-colonial Nigerian state

Again, the present trend of legislative defections/ cross carpeting was caused by colonialism, and upheld by the structures of post-colonial state. It was the advent of colonialism that set the pace for modernization and economic prosperity in Nigeria, while dramatically altering the modus operandi of the existing patterns of social, political and economic interactions among peoples and groups. Colonialism had contributed to the emergence and the development of the Nigerian ruling class, their character and behavior.

Constitutional Ambiguity

There are various lacunas in some sections in the 1999 constitution that have provided an escape root for politicians to defect ,carpet cross or party switch‘ anyhow. Section 68 (1) (g) of the constitution states that a member of Senate of House of Representative may vacate his seat if:

*being a person whose election to the House was sponsored by a political party, he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which that House was elected; Provided that his membership of the latter political party is not as a result of a division in the political party of which he was previously a member or of a merger of two or more political parties or factions by one of which he was previously sponsored*ll. (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria)

Section 68 (1) (g)) this provision addresses the issue of defection of a law-maker to another political party after such a law-maker has been elected on the platform of a particular party. The only defense for a defected law-maker not to lose his seat is where the defection is as a result of a merger of his original party with another party as it happened in the past among some political parties resulting into the formation of the present ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC) or a division in his party.

Notwithstanding the above constitutional provisions, the last part of the section gave an escape root and platform for many politicians to cross carpet since there are always divisions within the political parties (Aleyomi, 2013). The provisions of these sections of the constitution were explicit in matters which concern 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 is a member, or that his/her party has merged with other parties or factions. The ambiguity of the constitution comes to the fore where it is silent on defection/carpet crossing of the members of the Executive arm such as the president, the vice president, the Governors and the deputy Governors. This constitutional ambiguity is increasing the rate of defections among the executive arms of the government.

Now turning to the Governors and prospective Governors, Section 166(1) of the 1979 Constitution does not have a replication in the 1999 Constitution and thus, a person cannot be disqualified from seeking “election to the office of Governor” solely because “he does any act, acquires any status or suffers any disability which if he were a member of the Senate would

have disqualified him from membership of the Senate”. Thus, the defection of the G5 Governors from PDP to APC may not, legally, count against them, for those of them who are first term Governors wishing to recontest for the Governorship seats in the next round of elections. Also, legislators who have cross-carpeted and face the risk of being thrown out of the legislature pursuant to Sections 68(1)(g) and 109(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution are not howsoever disqualified from contesting for Governorship seats. Indeed, there is no equivalent of Section 68(1)(g) of the 1999 Constitution forbidding Governors from cross-carpeting from one party to another. It would thus appear that Governors have the constitutional liberty to cross carpet while legislators do not; legislators who stand the risk of suffering punitive consequences of cross-carpeting may face no constitutional hurdle in having new leases of life as Governors. With the increasing tempo of electioneering activities and politicking leading up to the 2015 General Elections, it would be interesting to see how these constitutional cross-carpeting provisions play out in the political space and are interpreted and applied by the Courts in the coming days of the country’s political and democratic history.

Political patronage

Fonchingong (2004), Marty (2002) and Fatton (1992, 1995) submit that patronage hampers the ideals of democracy and instead entrenches the personalisation of power and autocratic rulers who are protected from the checks and balances that other arms of government are supposed to provide. In Latin America, (Taylor,2004) submits that patronage takes preeminence over important issues such as citizenship, and racial and gender inequality as long as politicians continually provide ‘goods’ to clients. Nonetheless, in contrast to the views espoused above, some other scholars view patronage from a more positive perspective. Again, (Zappala,1998) submits that patronage evolved in Australia as a result of the alienation of non-whites and immigrants from the economic and political process. The only avenue available to the underprivileged and minority groups for the satisfaction of survival and development needs is to throw their loyalty behind political parties and politicians willing to assure them the delivery of ‘goods’ in return for votes. Furthermore, (Philp,2001) views patronage as a sort of inbuilt mechanism for accountability in societies where it is accepted as cultural. Irrespective of the divergent views of scholars espoused above, it is important to note that patronage is not alien to Nigeria’s socio-political system.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the phenomenon of legislative/party defection in Nigeria, underscoring the contending arguments for and against party defection. It also explored the historical dimension of the problem from the independence in 1960 to 2019 and offers explanations for the development. The study reveals that it has become clear that the causes of legislative defection/carpet crossing are deep rooted such that they cannot, in their present form and character, midwife democracy and democratization in Nigeria. There is therefore the need to seriously address the problem, if Nigerian democracy is to be consolidated. This demands addressing the roots of the contradictions as identified in the paper.

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