

THE NUANCES AND NUISANCES OF PARTY DEFECTION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines one of the challenges confronting electoral democracy in Nigeria for further analysis. The way and manner politicians defect from one party to the other has continued to raise concern among Nigerian political observers; a situation that clearly lends credence to the poverty of ideology that characterizes party politics in the country. This observable development, in the first few years of this Republic, was usually excused as one of the teething problems associated with nascent democracies. Over a decade after, we still witness more of these defections that depict immaturity and lack of sense of direction among the political class. This essay interrogates the peculiar trend of party switching and defection in Nigeria and its effects on the country's democratic experiment.

INTRODUCTION

In a democracy, parties are not personalized and limited to serving only the interests of the elite. Rather, they have structures, rules, procedures, norms and principles. Also, they are institutionalized coalitions, not just for the elites but for the mass of members as well. Their formal machinery or structures are found at all levels of political activity- national, regional, district, constituency and ward. They operate within specified legal frameworks that define their membership, composition, roles and functions, financial base, and operational rules and discipline (FES, 2010:1). The import of this is that party politics is an essential element of democracy and the nature it assumes in a particular society depends on the existing institutions and the political actors that drive the process. Nigeria had another chance of democratic governance in 1999 after many years of military authoritarianism. But this change of government has also exposed many challenges in the system particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. In Nigeria, many people believe in vote rigging, corruption, electoral malpractices, intrigue, subterfuge, mindless violence and the pursuit of reactionary-minded tendencies that are anti-democratic (Esiemokhai, 2010).

In its 2012 Country Report, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index observes that the country's political institutions cannot be considered fully democratic. However, most influential political, social and economic actors within and without the state system generally accept and support the state's (nominally) democratic institutions and regard them as legitimate. As noted by Anifowose (2004:57), 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 growth of democracy 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). Political actors who circulate within the political parties sponsored by the oligarchy claim to represent regional, ethnic, and religious groups. 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. The outcome is a patrimonial, patronage system that tends toward unstable authoritarianism without accountability, transparency, or democratically organized political parties (USAID, 2006:15).

PARTY SWITCHING AND DEFECTION: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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 wilfully 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. 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. 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 (Malhotra, 2005). In Nigeria, party switching is commonly referred to as “cross-carpeting” or “decamping”, and only sometimes, by the media as “defection”. Defection, as noted by Malthora (cited in Ogundiya, 2011:202), is used to refer to the departure of a member from a political party to join another political party, typically because of discontent in his/her existing party, and depending on the position of the person, it may be given a different name such as party switching or crossing the floor. In some states, defection or “crossing the floor” sometimes refers merely to voting with the opposition without changing party affiliations. Carpet crossing is a form of defection which occurs when a member of parliament abandons his or her party of affiliation for an alternative party or when such member votes against his or her political party in the parliament (ibid).

Among the existing literature, two basic approaches can be distinguished. The first approach addresses the problem at a systemic level, asserting that party-switching can be attributed to the high volatility of newly developing party systems, in which party splits, mergers and dissolutions are frequent occurrences. According to this type of explanation, party-switching is largely involuntary, and occurs in response to excessive “flux” in the party system structure (Beers, 2004:4). The problem with this type of explanation is that it ultimately glosses over the question since, as asserted by many scholars, widespread party switching in new democracies may actually *prevent* party systems from reaching the point of stabilization. Desposato (2006:62-63) gives three reasons why party switching warrants study. First, frequent switching makes it clear that parties *do* matter- otherwise politicians would not bother to switch. Second, and more importantly, switching provides a unique window on politicians’ underlying preferences, including their incentives for belonging to political parties. An examination of patterns of party affiliations can reveal the roles parties play in meeting politicians’ varied career challenges. This increases our understanding of inchoate party systems; it also aids in the design of party-strengthening institutions. Finally, switching poses a normative problem for representation in democracies. Parties are the primary mechanism linking voters and politicians in modern democracies. Meaningful and stable party labels enable voters to make identify optimal candidates and cast appropriate ballots. Party switching, however, violates the basic electoral pact and effectively makes party labels meaningless.

PARTY SWITCHING (DEFECTION) IN NIGERIA'S *FOURTH REPUBLIC*

Since 1999, when the current democratic dispensation began, Nigeria has witnessed a plethora of defections by politicians. The defection rate is widely believed to be more than any other time in the nation's political history (Baiyewu, 2012). Party defection is not a strange phenomenon in Nigeria; it characterized previous republics, though at a minimal and reasonable level. Today, reasons for this (Party Defection) are not far-fetched as supposed loyal party activists do this with reckless abandon as if this is a new virtue for relevance in party politics. Party defection is always organized with fanfare just as defectors adduce it to "marginalization in my former party", "moving from darkness to where there is light", "wanting a platform to take my people to the Promised Land", "the ruling party has betrayed us" or "I can no longer live among enemies". In Nigeria, cases abound where a politician may defect to four different political parties within one or two years, still repeating these monotonous but mundane excuses, yet incredibly, with admiration from the receiving party on each occasion. As soon as this notorious defector leaves a party, he becomes a nonentity "who had no political value while with us". State and Federal legislators elected on the platform of a particular party have also found value in mainstream politics as a way of defecting to the ruling party, thereby giving the impression that it is a taboo to be in opposition party in Nigeria.

This phenomenon has become a regular scenario at party meetings and rallies¹. It is not limited to the legislative arm as cases of elected governors defecting to a ruling party at the center have also been recorded. A few governors have also explored the political economy of marriage by opting to marry daughters of sitting and former presidents as in the cases of Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State and Usman Dakingari of Kebbi State, who married the daughters of President ,afi Umaru Yar'Adua while in power. Governor of Zamfara State, Alhaji Mahmud Shinkafi like Yuguda, was also elected into office on the platform of ANPP, before defecting to PDP mid way into his tenure. Ahead of his coming to PDP, Shinkafi had also married the daughter of former military President, Ibrahim Babangida, a stalwart in PDP. Three years into the present political dispensation, the signs were abundant that there would be massive defections of politicians from one party to another. Disagreements and office ticket racketeering created deep gulfs and upheavals in the political parties (NBF News, 2011). Most of the politicians involved in the act are mostly legislators, governors, and party members who failed to get election tickets. The party perceived to be worst hit by the political hurricane is the All Nigeria People's Party, which lost most of its governors and lawmakers to the ruling PDP. They included former governors Saminu Turaki of Jigawa State; Aliyu Shinkafi of Zamfara State; Adamu Aliero of Kebbi and Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State. Similarly, between 1999 and 2007, many Senators and members of the House of Representatives defected. In 2010, six senators from the ANPP, Accord Party and the Action Congress of Nigeria defected to the PDP. They were Sati Gogwin (AC, Plateau State); Patrick Osakwe (AP, Delta State); Patricia Akwasike, (ANPP, Nasarawa State); and Sa'di Yao (ANPP, Zamfara State). The PDP has also suffered some losses.

¹ As a democracy monitor with the Justice, Development and Peace Commission, I witnessed several of such events (defections) since 1999 at ward, council and state/federal constituency levels. As a participant observer, I severally attended party meetings, conventions and rallies. Usually, one of the core agenda on each occasion was to officially "welcome new defectors to our party". A colleague once likened this phenomenon to the mobilisation strategy -Testimony Time- being adopted by the new generation churches in Nigeria; Members giving account of wonderful things God Has done for them through the "Man of God" or the Church with a view to convincing others. While many of these testimonies are genuine, some are said to be stage-managed!

Prominent is the case of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who left the party to join the AC in 2006 after a loss in the PDP presidential primaries. But after losing the 2007 presidential election to the PDP, he later returned to the party. Earlier, at the AC convention ground where he was adopted as a Presidential candidate, Abubakar described the PDP as moribund while he had beautiful words for his new party. He said, "The PDP is defunct. It is no longer in existence. As you can see, all its founders have all left. There is no other party left in this country today except the AC. It is with high humility and a great sense of responsibility that I accept my adoption by this great party as its candidate in the 2007 presidential election. As a politician, and the sitting vice-president, I have observed with very keen interest the evolution of this great party and the other political parties in our country over the years" (*The Guardian*, December 21, 2006). The political comedy generated by Mr. Ayo Fayose in Ekiti State presents an interesting scenario for our discussion here. He was elected on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as Governor of Ekiti in 2003. He was impeached in October 2006 by a PDP-dominated House of Assembly in very controversial circumstances. He left the party thereafter and deployed his supporters to the People Progressive Alliance (PPA) with available resources that could be seen in the dozens of vehicles and gigantic party secretariat that he was reported to have funded. The mission was, initially, as clueless just as it later became a political albatross. In 2011, he officially defected to the Labour Party in an elaborate political rally that attracted national officials of the party. Earlier before this, Fayose had treated his fans and critics alike to another show of anomie when in a dramatic twist, he aligned with the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and its candidate in 2008 to publicly campaign against the PDP at different rallies during Dr. Kayode Fayemi's Legal battle against the then sitting Governor, Mr Segun Oni. As a Labour Party candidate, he was to later contest against the ACN Senatorial candidate in the 2011 general elections which he lost. By 2012, he was back in the PDP where he contested the governorship election and won in 2014.

Another character in the political comedy is Mr. Femi Pedro who was the Deputy Governor in Lagos State- elected on the platform of the AC in 2003. Pedro could not secure his party ticket for the 2007 gubernatorial election. On December 13 2006, Pedro dumped the AC to declare his ambition in the Labour Party. He cited gross manipulation in the selection process that did not favour him. Declaring for the party, he stated that his action was the latest in his quest for an enduring and robust platform to serve humanity and actualize his dreams as a change agent in the society. He also added that *politics is too important to be left to those who abhor service*. He contested the governorship election on the platform of the Labour Party in 2007 and lost. After the election in 2007, Pedro defected to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Yet, while decamping to the LP as an incumbent AC Deputy Governor, he had said that the PDP (and other parties) "*lack freshness and are filled with over-used politicians*" (*Newswatch*, January 29 2007). Within a span of one year, Pedro had sojourned in three different political parties (AC, LP and PDP; 2006-2007). In Imo State, Rochas Okorochoa's unending defections present some of the nuances and nuisances in the country's party politics. As a member of the People's Democratic Party in 1999, he wanted to become the PDP governorship candidate but failed. In 2003, he defected to the All Nigeria People's Party, ANPP where he contested for the presidential election but was unsuccessful. Between 2003 and 2004, Rochas Okorochoa was back in the PDP and was appointed as special assistant to President Obasanjo. In 2005, he formed and funded Action Alliance, AA, in order to have a platform to contest for the 2007 presidential election. That ambition was also unsuccessful. He defected back to the PDP in 2007 where he indicated interest in the party's national chairmanship position. In 2010, he joined the All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA on which platform he contested the 2011 gubernatorial election and won. Okorochoa's faction of APGA has merged with other political parties to form the All Progressives Congress. Next on this list of zigzag party defections in

their various states is Mr. Theodore Orji of Abia State who was elected Governor in 2007 on the platform of PPA. He, alongside some PDP members, had left the ruling party to join PPA at inception. His predecessor in office and founder of PPA, Mr. Orji Uzor Kalu, had shown preference for him eventually ensured his success at the poll. But the two soon fell apart and when persecution arose in the PPA, Orji sought for solace and found one in the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) which welcomed him to its fold with pomp and circumstance. The romance did not last long, as the Governor headed for the PDP shortly after his former principal, Kalu, rejoined the ruling party (Oyebode, 2011). He was re-elected as Governor on the platform of the PDP in 2011. In Oyo State, the trend is exemplified by Mr. Abiola Ajimobi who was a prominent member of the Alliance for Democracy in 1999, on which platform he got elected into the Senate. When a section of the party joined other groups to form AC in 2006, he was a front runner for the party's governorship ticket in Oyo State. He left the AC in protest against the selection process and secured the governorship ticket of the ANPP for the governorship election in 2007. He lost to former Governor Adebayo Alao-Akala and pursued the case to the Court of Appeal, which upheld Alao-Akala's election. He thereafter defected to the ACN probably for a better platform to realise his ambition. In 2011, he contested and won the governorship election on the platform of ACN.

Also, a former PDP member of the Senate, Senator Ibikunle Amosun, sought for the party's nomination for the 2007 governorship election but lost out. Reports had it that there was an unwritten agreement between him and the then incumbent Governor of the state that he (Amosun) would succeed him (Gbenga Daniel) in 2007. When that arrangement failed, the senator decided to dump the People's Democratic Party (PDP) for the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) on which platform he contested and lost the 2007 governorship election in Ogun State. He has since ditched ANPP and joined ACN on which platform he contested and won the 2011 governorship election.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POLITY

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 those who hold positions in the power structure determine the location and distribution of economic resources and political rewards. Exclusion from this position is very costly (Mbah, 2011:13). For Ogundiya (2011:209), the alarming trend of defection of politicians and increasing number of party switchers since 1999 remains a source of concern; both for the observers, the political analysts and students of Nigerian politics. The concern, according to him, is justifiable on the grounds that the collapse of the previous republics could partly be associated with party switching and the attendant crises. As aptly captured by Elombah (2010), "in the past, we witnessed the occasional parliamentarian defection, now it is a whole government; from the executive governor and state assembly to the local government councilors. It is like an epidemic; a variant of swine flu hitting politicians". A writer, Ikuenbor (2012), relates the unguarded act of politicians' defections to prostitution: There is a striking similarity between politicians and prostitutes as the endeavours of both professionals are geared towards the acquisition of power and money respectively; both glowing in their adulterous eyes. In both professions, switching is the game. However while prostitutes switch beds the politicians switch parties! In as much as politicians around the world have given bountiful reasons for defecting from one party to another, these reasons are however appearing to be vague and inconsequential in the eyes of the masses as the politicians themselves have seemingly abandoned their initial reasons, and instead have geared all efforts at self-accomplishment and personal aggrandizement. In his analysis of party defection and

democratic consolidation in Nigeria, Mbah (2011:6) opines that “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, carpet-crossing is done on principle, rather than on selfish and personal interest”. Other factors responsible for this phenomenon of soliciting votes under false pretences have been attributed to the collapse of values, the absence of principles, paucity of ideas, and the promotion of the individual over the collective good and the mindless sharing of the national wealth exacerbated by the lack of transparency and accountability. The implication of this is that the voters are left “to choose between parties, not on the basis of policy positions, but on the basis of individual personality, ethnicity, religion, and regionalism, among other things” (IEAT, 2010:6).

As argued by Asiodu (2012:35) the present post-1998 political parties, formed even more hastily than those in 1979, have no roots in past political parties and cleavages. They have not yet articulated long-term party visions for Nigerian society or the federation that they seek to administer. Most of our new politicians are not aware of the self-sacrifice, the patriotism, the idealism, the promise and commitment of the pre-independence politicians to improving the welfare of the masses after independence nor do they know about the discipline and self-restraint required in managing the lean resources of pre-oil Nigeria. Chukwumerije (2009) observes that in many parties, personality cult takes the place of ideology in the hearts of generality of members, thereby undermining adequate internalization of its values by members. The structure of the party and state of discipline are among the early casualties. The by-products of personality cults are godfathers and patron saints. In place of healthy doctrinal discourses, differences of opinion result in personality clashes among turf leaders. This point has also been emphasised by Momoh (2010): The political parties manifest tendencies that are alien to traditional political parties. Many of the parties are anti-democratic, more of a one-man show. They cannot mobilise membership. They do not have financial members. They do not engage in membership drive and voter education. Campaigns are often more of sloganeering and abuse of opponents, than explanation on candidate's skills, competences and party programmes. The manifestoes of virtually all the political parties are the same. They were written by consultants rather than party members and activists. They look up to INEC to help them educate the voters.

Akin Oyeboode (2012) argues that it is practically impossible to have democracy without genuine, committed democrats and an electorate unencumbered by lack of the vital necessities for existence. According to him, the political parties operating in the country today are little more than opportunistic contraptions, highly plastic, synthetic and inorganic, leaving the electorate with little more than a choice between *Tweedledee* and *Twedeledum*. Furthermore, democracy is more than elections which are, more often than not, a product of politics of the stomach than the interplay of competing ideologies. Worse still, and in consonance with the inheritance of dictatorship, contemporary political parties operate without regard to the demands of federalism. They are established and controlled unitarily and hierarchically by their head offices and central leaderships. We are under civil rule and aspire to democracy, yet the constitutional structure of political parties and the party system are devoid of the essential elements of internal democracy. They are also devoid of the lessons which society and the larger political process is expected to draw from the machinery of political parties. From the perspective of political science, we do not have political parties in present day governance. They are all assortment of political vehicles with all manner of mechanical and electrical debilities. We do not have a party system in aid of governance and political development

(Oyovbaire, 2007: 16). Aina (2002:7) further establishes the fact that “the integrity of political participation and competition in Nigeria is in doubt. Political parties in Nigeria portend a vehicle of political utility and convenience, bereaved of ideology, and deficit in both ideas and principle, characterized by immoderate migrations for greener political pasture”. In all, Nigerian parties are made up of strange bed-fellows whose political persuasions are diametrically opposed and this also explains the high level of party indiscipline and collapse of party machinery. Because of their artificiality, all the parties are experiencing cracks; mass exodus and carpet crossing from one party to the other. Indeed, Nigeria is a case study. The political class has always remained bereft of viable political ideology on which the nation’s political future could be anchored. This bankruptcy in ideology and vision has reduced party politics in Nigeria to a bread and butter game where monetisation of the political process is the bedrock of loyalty and support. This erodes the aim of the democratisation process. For the avoidance of doubt, the democratisation process is a process of political renewal and the affirmative acceptance of the supremacy of popular will and consensual obligation over the logic of elitism and parochialism (Nwankwo, http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/particles/political_parties_in_nigeria.htm).

However, one of the illusions pointed out by Momoh (2010) about the present democratic experiment in the country is that the political elite can become progressive merely by moving from a dominant party to an opposition party. He observes that the progressive-reactionary divide does not fit into the politics of today as it used to fit the ideologically-based politics of the Second Republic-Progressive People’s Alliance (PPA) versus National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Today, he notes further, politicians defect to other political parties not on the basis of party ideology or programme but simply on whether they can find a platform to contest election.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

In some countries, defections are a non-issue and not perceived as a problem, whereas in some other countries, they have at times threatened the very stability of the government. Naturally, therefore, while some countries deal with defections with the help of well-established customs, conventions and parliamentary practices and procedures, others have framed laws and rules to tackle the problem. The purpose of party laws tends to vary across different types of political regimes: authoritarian regimes may use party laws to limit political competition; new democracies may adopt them to contain the rise of anti-democratic tendencies, specifically anti-democratic parties (Carothers 2006 cited in Nikolenyi, 2011:6); while stable democracies resort to the use of party laws either to safeguard the democratic fundamentals of political parties (Avnon 1995, cited in Nikolenyi, 2011:6), reflecting the legacy of historical concern with earlier instances of democratic breakdown (e.g. Austria, Germany), or to create the framework for the public financing and subsidy of political parties.

According to Marius Radean (2012:23):

Party switching raises significant normative concerns for democratic representation, and can have a deleterious impact on political outcomes such as government stability. Traditionally, scholars have dismissed party switching as a characteristic of an inchoate political system, something that disappears as democracies mature and party systems become more stable. This view of party switching is hard to maintain, though, in the face of party switching in such well-established democracies as Italy, France, Australia, the United States, and Japan. In recent years, concerns with party switching have led many countries to adopt laws that regulate parliamentary party defection. Janda (2005) notes that one of the key areas where party law

differs significantly in old and new democracies is the regulation of party switching and defections. In the former, such regulation is normally left to the political parties themselves. In the latter, however, it is not surprising to find that the state plays a stronger role in regulating party cohesion and discipline. In support of this claim, Janda (2009) finds that only 14% of the 41 states that report laws, constitutional or not, against party defections and switching, were established democracies, while 24% were new democracies, the rest being semi- or non-democratic regimes. The merits and disadvantages of anti-defection laws- legal provisions limiting an elected representatives' ability to leave the party on whose ticket s/he was elected- have generated debate among academics, constitutional and human rights experts, democracy support specialists and politicians. As posited by Kelly and Ashiagbor (2011:15-16):

Others argue that anti-defection measures stifle free speech and freedom of association and are thus inherently undemocratic. By concentrating power in the hands of party leaders, these laws may stifle intra-party deliberation. Critics also point out that in cases where a party fails to represent its own members or constituents, or deviates from previously agreed upon principles and policies, a representative should have the option of continuing to represent those views through defection. The constitutions of several Western democracies – including Andorra, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Romania and Spain – explicitly protect MPs' rights to vote their conscience and to exercise their own judgment. Similar provisions exist in the constitutions of Montenegro, Nigeria, Peru and Serbia. However, a wider range of emerging democracies have passed anti-defection laws or introduced constitutional measures in recent years. Defection has been used as a smoke screen for bribery and leads to corrupt practices. There is, therefore, a need for anti-defection laws which should stipulate that any person wanting to change party affiliation after being elected on that party's ticket, should first resign his elected office and seek a fresh mandate on the new party's ticket. Such a person should also be debarred from ministerial or other government appointment during the term of their original office or the next election, whichever is shorter (Emelonye, 2004:73).

In Nigeria, sections 68 1(g) of the 1999 Constitution, states that a member of the Senate or House of Representatives shall vacate his seat in the House of which he is a member if: (g) 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 (1999 Nigerian Constitution). While this section of the constitution emphasises the conditions for a lawmaker, it however, exempts members of the federal and state executive cabinets, where the anomaly also exists (Baiyewu, 2012). For the legislator, the Constitution is clear: in attempting to cross to another political party, he or she must prove that there is merger or factional crisis in the party.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As rightly submitted by Mbah (2011:16), party defection has negative impact on consolidation of democracy where legislators, governors, deputy governors, and other party members defect to the ruling party. This trend tends to make caricature of democracy and undermines the opposition, the validity of contrary views and undercuts the principle of alternative democratic choice. In Nigeria, those who defect do so in favour of the ruling political party in power either at the centre or state level. This situation portends great danger because, if unchecked, it could move the nation towards one political party system without any viable opposition to act as

check on the ruling party (Okparaji, 2010). This observation may have necessitated Momoh's (2010) submission that a new political culture must emerge, built on values and virtues; one that must undergird the practice of democracy. Politicians can only be civil if society itself becomes truly civil and internalise the values and nuances of civility. In this way they will collectively reject, disown and resist uncivil conduct of politicians. Politicians cannot become democrats over-night. He notes further:

Popular and democratic ownership of political parties rather than personal ownership, political education rather than disinformation, collective financial membership rather than money bags control, party ideology and precepts rather than personality traits and charisma should drive the new mode of politics in Nigeria (ibid).

Empirical analyses of party politics have proved that internal activities of political parties; from their organizational standards, institutional capacity democracy and leadership recruitment, socio-political ideologies, manifestoes and programmes, funding and campaign etc structure electoral process and affect the operation of government (Wordu, 2011). Having established in this essay that the incessant party defections in Nigeria can be largely ascribed to selfish interests, desperation and a lack of discipline on the part of the politicians, it should be noted that the nature and character of the political parties are also capable of frustrating members to seek external refuge. In addressing this phenomenon, therefore, it is my contention that these parties should be made viable and strong to accommodate divergent interests and rescued from the grip of a few individuals. As pointed out in the beginning of this essay, party switching or defection is a universal phenomenon (and in the real sense of the word, not a negative exercise) even in developed democracies and there are laws guiding the process. The difference identified here is that, in relation to the Nigerian democracy, it has assumed an amusing but dangerous dimension capable of derailing the democratization effort. The bottom line is that party-switching prevents parties, and in turn, party systems, from stabilizing, thus threatening the development of the democratic system. Viewed this way, the topic of party-switching is far from irrelevant in the context of new democracies. Rather, one could argue that it is important precisely because of the problems of developing meaningful, stable political parties in new democracies.

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