

Research Article

Footloose Legislators: Implications of Legislative Cross-Carpeting on Multi-Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract: The study examines the high incidence of political cross-carpeting as obtained in the 8th National Assembly in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Building on the foundations of ideological disposition, it claims the widespread absence of political ideology, political careerization and the do or die dynamics of political leadership as the root causes of cross-carpeting amongst other causal factors. Further claiming the effects of the latter as in terrifying on growth of competitive multi-party politics and institutionalization of democracy. To address the prevailing trend, the study proposes strict adherence to constitutional provisions on party switching, formation of ideology based parties as against ethnic or electoral ones as it also clamors for transparent internal party politics. Regrettably, it concludes the trend is less likely to stop, considering the high incidence of political careerization by the ruling elite, and election winning basis of political parties in Nigeria.

Keywords: Legislature, Cross-Carpeting, Multi-Party Politics, Ideology, Elections; Competitive Democracy.

Introduction

The incidence of political cross-carpeting, defection or decamping as contextually coined in Nigeria plays a centrifugal role in the internal dynamics of multi-party party politics in Africa's most populous nation. Decamping has not only become a seasonal ritual in the build up to elections, it is embodied in the practice of multi-party politics as obtained in Nigeria. Seasonal trends of decamping do not only negate democratization process, it perverts the philosophical foundations and underpinnings of multi-party politics. The absence of readily identifiable party philosophies, manifestos and policy preference has sustained and enthroned the regime of decamping since return to multi-party politics in 1999.

In tandem with the on-going discussion, political entrepreneurs alike have inculcated the habit of switching party allegiance in a bid to secure or ascend to various elected offices. In extreme cases the formidable permanent political classes in Nigeria have gone as far as registering new political parties in their bid to consolidate of power and ensure political relevance. The accompanying negative implications of this trend is multifaceted, more so in the areas of fostering opposition politics, consolidation of internal transparency in the affairs of political parties. Resultantly, the absence of functional opposition parties mitigates any meaningful attempts at consolidating democracies. Nonetheless, the incidence of decamping remains particularly alarming.

In assent Olu and Paul (2016, p. 32) are of the view that multi-party democracies thrive on the existence of multiple political parties, where one serves as the ruling party and others as oppositions and alternatives respectively. Contrary to this assumption, the relative ease at

which legislators in Nigeria switch party allegiance remains a formidable threat against the consolidation of multi-party democracy in the country. Fashagba (2014) conceives cross-carpeting as instances where politicians move from or switch allegiance from one political party to another owing to a myriad of reasons. While Eme and Ogbochie (2014, p. 20) are of the opinion that the wave of defection from one party to another in the National Assembly has been the case of different strokes for different folks. In the House of Representatives, elected members defect from one party to another unhindered by the leadership of the house and senate.

Regrettably, the underlying movement across political parties could be attributed to power tussle, personality clash, internal crisis or divisions with a given party, realization of personal political ambition amongst other causalities. While the phenomenon of switching from one party to another is not confined to any region, it remains particularly prevalent in Nigeria as in a better part of the developing world. The need for an objective literary endeavor's to resonate the implications of cross-carpeting is underpinned by Desposato (2006, p. 63) who argue;

Party switching merits study for three reasons; first recurrent defections reinforces the centrality of political parties, else, legislative decamping will not be a thing. In furtherance, he posits decamping accords politicians with the luxury of preferences; including their incentives for belonging to political parties. Finally, defections pose normative problems for representation in mass democracies, as parties are intermediaries through which citizens communicate their policy and representative preferences.

By examining the historical antecedent of legislative decamping in Nigeria to situate the present day events, this study sets out to analyze the plausible implications of legislative decamping on multi-party politics in Nigeria's fourth republic.

Statement the Problem

Party switching has become a common phenomenon among the Nigerian elites. This has not only undermined the democratic process, but also resulted to political party factionalism and fragmentation. Accordingly, the probability of actualizing institutionalized and consolidated multi-party system in Nigeria remains particularly low.

The incidence of decamping has also affected the emergence of a formidable opposition party which is the hallmark of representative democracy.

Objectives

The objectives of the underlying literary endeavor are stated as follows;

- 1) To examine the implications of legislative decamping on multi-party politics in Nigeria.
- 2) To examine the effects of legislative decamping as obtained in Nigeria's fourth republic on the probability of democratization.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study a descriptive method of social inquiry will be adopted. The method is amongst other functions concerned with conditions, practices, structures, differences or relationships that exist, opinions held processes that are going on or trends that are evident. Against this backdrop, it best suits the underlying study as it will aid in describing trends and resultant effects of the interpenetrations of the variables under study.

Conceptual Framework

Owing to the fluidity of concepts in the field of social science, this section is committed to operationalizing pertinent concepts that are central to the better understand of the discussion in view. Amongst others they include political party, political decamping and legislative respectively.

Political Parties

Idyllically, political parties form the core of a democratic system of government. They serve as platform through which citizens elect their representatives into government from the grassroots to the national level. Should we adhere to the underlying statement, we can also argue there is no democracy without political parties, or at least electoral democracies. While there remains no universality in terms of definition, we can all converge that political parties are central institutions through which democratic governments are legitimized. Accordingly, Likoti (2005) is of the view that political parties constitutes the organized assemblage of a group of individuals with common political objectives, that seek to get elected into public office with a view to affecting policy outcomes. In his views Osaghae (1982) defined political parties as associations that function, both as interest and pressure groups carrying out the imperative functions of recruitment of political actors, conscription of the citizenry and provision of choice alternatives for the populace organizing and campaigning for votes. In a similar vein Political party has also been conceived as an organized group of people with mutual, who aspire to control the government in a state in order to put their ideology or programmes into practice (Chidi, 2015).

Hence, it will suffice to argue the practice of democratic forms of governance; more so in the case of liberal and electoral democracy will largely remain illegitimate without political parties. In this regard this study defines political parties as formally recognized and organized platform through which intending public officials compete against each other for electoral position in government. While they may differ contextually, their role as intermediaries to governance cuts across time and space. Thus, the idea of a legitimate legislative is less likely in the absence of political parties.

Legislature

Until very recently, the purpose of the legislature as obtained in the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended has attracted very limited attention in the academic realm as compared to the executive. This is not surprising consideration the untamed, concentrated and overarching influence of the presidency on other arms of government. However, the incidence of presidential supremacy has waned over time, in the face of a rising legislature in Nigeria. A textbook example is the resistance that meted the then President Olusegun Obasanjo's bid to amend the constitution, with a view to increase presidential term limit in 2007. This act resonate the rise and acknowledgement of legislative functions in Nigeria's fourth republic. Hence, Nwaubani (2004, p. 49) claims the centrality of legislative functions as embedded in democratic values are to amongst other ensure effective policy making, ensure good governance as well as the hindrance of executive absolutism in the business of governance. In another instance Legislature refers to a formal body, usually chosen by election and empowered by constitutional provisions to legislate or public bills with a view to making, changing and repealing of laws; as well as powers to represent the constituent units and control government Lafenwa (2002, p. 5). In furtherance, Loewenberg (1995, p. 736) conceptualizes legislatures as assemblies of elected representatives from geographically defined constituencies, harnessed with the responsibility of law making apparatus in the business of governance. In the same vein, Jewell (1997) identified two

distinct features inherent in the legislative arm of government. He opines that legislatures have constitutional backing to pass laws, which are implemented and interpreted by the executive and judicial branches and their members normally are elected to represent various elements in the population. It is significant to note that legislatures vary in terms of composition, structure and role, from one democracy to the other.

Based on the views of prior studies on the subject matter of legislature, one can argue the element of election, representation and law making as the core attributes of such institutions. In the absence of constitutional provisions enforcing the idea of independent candidacy in Nigeria, political parties remain the legitimate means of ascription to the legislature in Nigeria. Hence, all members of House of Representative and the Senate rode on the backs of political parties to the legislature. Why then do law-makers defect upon winning on a platform of a party to another? What are the implications of such defections on multi-party and opposition politics in Nigeria? Amongst a handful of other questions bothering on defection, the underlying ones as mentioned by this study, remains particularly puzzling.

Cross-Carpeting

Contrary to conventional knowledge the incidence of switching party allegiance is not confined to any particular society or level of institutionalized democracy. Nonetheless, they tend to be more pronounced in the developing world where political parties are conceived solely in their ability to deliver votes and not ideological and policy under-pinning's amongst other issues of substance. More than often political parties in these regions are also constituted on the basis of ethnic, religious and cultural foundations. According Chang (2009) employed the term political defection, which he conceives as a situation where a legislator switched from his primal party to another. Similarly, Blunt (1964) defines the act as a situation where a serving legislator elected on the platform of a certain party, changes his political allegiance before the next election. Consequently, Olu *et al.*, (2016, p. 34) refer to party defectors as political prostitutes void of political principle, morality and lacking in ideological politics.

In this regard various explanations have been proffered to account for the prevalence of political defections in Africa. To this end Olu *et al.*, (2016) are of the view that party formation in the region remains largely propelled by political careerism rather than ideology. Relatedly, Omotola (2009) shares a similar view, when he argued the weak nature of ideology and competition in party formation process mitigates the emergence of viable opposition. For this study however, persistence of party defection in Nigeria could be grouped tied to individual and institutional determinants respectively. On the individual level, the need to pursue politics as a career drives political entrepreneurs to switch party allegiance without recourse to implications of doing so. Furthermore, the do or die nature of politics in the region has also sustained the idea of party cross-carpeting. Lastly, the absence of ideological politics also plays a central role in propelling political prostitution as the case maybe. While for the institutional determinants, the centralized and personalistic nature of these societies drive the legislators to always aim to pitch tent with incumbent or ruling parties. In furtherance, ruling political parties have also not fallen short of employing state apparatus to disenfranchise, deprive and frustrate the effort of the opposition in their bit to consolidate hold on power. More than often we hear of instances where oppositions are marginalized and reduced to mere on lookers by ruling parties in Nigeria. Even within ruling parties, legislators whom fail to share a common ground with the body to which they belong are institutionally disadvantaged. In lieu, it will suffice to argue parochially, that the prevailing incidence of political defections in Nigeria is sustained and reinforced by the

absence of ideological politics, centralized state apparatus and the *careerization* of politics by ruling elites.

Theoretical Framework

Theories in their capacity as scientific statements or rational accounts of inherent nature of phenomena aid in explaining the mechanism through which variables interact and condition certain outcomes. Hence, with a view to accounting for the contextual causes, trends and attitudes towards political cross-carpeting in the legislature in Nigeria on multi-party politics, the study employs the ideology and political theory.

The concept of ideology can be historically traced to and grounded in political theory. As a concept, it was coined by the late eighteenth century French philosopher, Destutt de Tracy (1754 – 1836). According to Nnoli (2003, p. 177), Destutt de Tracy used it to describe a new scientific discipline that systematically studies ideas, emotions and sensations the science of ideas. This conception has since evolved and ideology has come to embody the ideas inherent. As a result of the underlying evolvement, ideology has come to be presented as a subject representing two contradictory realities—the good and the bad, the former depicting ideology as a system of thought that animates social or political action”, and the latter as a “misleading, illusory or one-sided criticism or condemnation Nnoli, (2003, p. 178-79).

Regardless, of the standpoint of individuals or groups, the veracity of political life across political structures over is a result of existential alternative political options from which inevitably, choices must be made. At such precarious crossroads, ideology or policy preference occupies the central position of established guiding principles for favored course of action. Relatedly, Shively (1997, p. 46–47) suggests that ideology is expedient to people in their private affairs as well as in the realm of political activities. At the individual level, ideology allows for the ease of making sense reasonably easily and quickly of the varied political questions that come to one’s attention. In terms of its public utilities, it helps people to make swaying arguments compellingly to lend popular support for a given public policy.

Penultimately, ideology can be argued to be central to the idea and practice of political activities.. This is thought to be so because, it does not only serve as a major instrument of state power, it also plays a centrifugal role in the manner in which power is acquired and preserved. Regrettably, in Nigeria political parties have gradually loosed any sense of ideological foundations that may have birthed their existence rather the simple ideology is popularly referred to as APP (Any Party in Power). The ease at which the ruling elites criticize and hastily dump parties through which they won election in months leading to elections have become a ritual of a sort. This singular act reinforces the growing rate of career politicians. As exemplified in the build up to the 2015 general elections, legislators, governors and political bigwigs dumped the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) for the emerging Action People’s Congress who went on the win the elections. Fast forward to September 2018, a mass of those crop of legislators have defected back to the PDP sighting numerous flimsy excuses to justify their political prostituting.

Political Parties, Ideological Disposition and Legislative Cross-carpeting in Nigeria

Having dedicated the preceding session to examining the theoretical precepts of ideological and political theory, this section compliments the by interrogating the perceived state of ideological disposition in Nigerian political terrain to legislative cross-carpeting. The absence of ideological guiding principles as basis for constituting parties in Nigeria demeans that parties are mere tools for ascension to electoral offices. In this regards political entrepreneurs

more than often switch allegiance to winning or prospective winning parties, with little or no recourse to policy preference, ideological disposition, manifestos and party blueprint.

Accordingly, Omotola (2009, p. 623) is of the view that if the parties had been directed by a clear commitment to a precise belief system and principles, much of the predicament and illogicalities that characterizes party politics in Nigeria could have been averted. Furthering claiming, the high incidence of ethnically motivated power competition for power through their respective ethnic champions, as another major hindrance to ideologically grounded parties in Nigeria.

Relatedly, the challenges of ideological indisposition ascribed to party politics as practiced in Nigeria, is according to Taiwo (2016) thought to be tied to the fact that political parties exist within a democratic space where all fingers are pointed at the political elites as not only corrupt but also lacking in integrity and democratic values. For this study, the underlying argument is rightly placed as a better of the Nigerian legislature are either facing charges of mal-administration, financial misconducts amongst other vile and sharp practices. According to Jinadu (2011), some of the challenges faced by the Nigerian Political parties include, but not limited to; absence of mechanism for public- and self-assessment of extent of democratic values in handling in-house matters in the party. Issues such as how parties choose Nominees, conduct their primaries, and handle official matters requiring technocratic practices that only career bureaucrats can handle, are a source of continuous challenge to the parties.

With recourse to the Nigerian legislature, Section 39 and 40 of the 1999 constitution as amended guarantees the fundamental right of expression and opinion as it does freedom of association to which every citizen is entitled too. By virtue of the constitutional provision citizens have the right to belong to any political party, but such freedom is circumscribed in the case of elected public officials. While there remains a hot war of words across different quarters as to the legality of decamping it constitutes a part and parcel of multi-party politics in Nigeria. In buttressing the underlying assertion, Omotola (2009) claims if parties of preceding republics were found wanting on ideological standpoint and pledge, those of the Fourth Republic are observably worse. Omoruyi (2002, p. 8) has noted that the foundational basis of the parties does not fit conventional conceptions of parties as obtained in relevant literature, their transient and unstable nature makes them mere instruments of transition from military to civil rule. And for the future and with the prospect for more parties, they raise more questions than answers to the lingering political problems for Nigeria.

Penultimately, the ideological baldness of parties could be tied to the manner through which they came into existence, their indisposition makes it particularly difficult for them to constitute and abide by certain guiding principles. In 2013-14 a year to the elections, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost a better part of their high profile members to the mega All Progressive Congress (APC) the party that eventually swept the 2015 general elections. Fast forward to 2018 the defections resurged, only this time the elected lawmakers defected back to the PDP citing various reasons. By way of conclusion, it is the opinion of this study that the inherent ideological disposition that characterizes the nature of multi-party politics in Nigeria, has sustained the regime of political defections in the legislature. Amongst other multifaceted effects of this trend; probabilities at consolidating and institutionalizing multi-party politics and democracy in the fourth republic remains particularly slim. In furtherance, Nigerian parties have largely been wanting in the areas of institutionalization, more so in the areas of internal cohesion, constitutional implementation, leadership crisis, factional tendencies and structural management. The under listed inefficacies have

immensely contributed too and sustained the seasonal ritual of political cross-carpeting in Nigeria's in the legislature as it has across other competitive electoral offices both in the local, state and federal levels respectively.

Conclusion

The high rate of ideological indisposition remains particularly worrisome. It is such that none of the parties have been capable of holding its ranks and file together without conflict that most times threaten the very existence of the parties. The most noteworthy illustrations of these claims can be located in the doctrines of leadership in all the parties, as well as the unprecedented rate of political homelessness.

Conclusively, the bareness of political ideology that has come to characterize multi-party politics in Nigeria parties over the years, cum attendant crisis and contradictions, has been of theatrical effect not only on the parties, but also on national development and sustainable democracy. Resultantly, instead of parties serving as agents of democracies, they have been reduced to tools for promoting sectionalism and opportunism. The single most dominant acts of Nigerian political elites remains cross-carpeting and switching party allegiance for the sole purpose of promoting their political aspirations amongst other self-seeking interests. To address the underlying dominant trend of defections the need for constituting parties on ideological foundations as opposed to ethnic, religious, sectional cum other motives cannot be over emphasized.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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