

Internal Democracy and The Politics of Defection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This study undertook a comprehensive appraisal of the nature of internal democracy in Nigeria, vis-a-vis its impact on the circumstances that promote the sustained rise in incidences of inter-party cross-carpeting by politicians, particularly in this fourth republic era. The background to this study demonstrated the widely-acknowledged role political parties play in entrenching and advancing the virtues of democracy in a society's political system. It however, decried the prevalence of tendencies relating to members-leadership gladiatorial relationship, leadership impunity and the flagrant derogation of the relevance of party ideology in Nigeria's internal democratic system. Thus, aggravating the gale of inter-party defections. The study relied on secondary sources like textbooks, journals, newspapers and internet materials for data generation. The institutional theory on which the study was anchored, emphasized the indispensable importance of values, norms and principles in determining the fortunes or otherwise, of institutions like the political party. The study further revealed that the lack of poor ideological base of political parties in Nigeria, selfish interests of members, inherent constitutional controversies, etc, constitute the major factors that heighten instability in internal democratic practice and hence, trigger the unbridled upsurge in inter-party defections. The study concluded by emphasizing that the problem would remain unabated unless there are among other things, a change in criteria for the selection of leaders of political parties and a constitutional amendment with regards to inter-party defections.

Keywords: Inter-party, Intra-party, Constitution, Decampment, Political Party, Ideology.

Introduction

In any functional democratic clime, the existence of political parties provides the platform on which eligible citizens strive to realise their varying ambitions of either occupying political positions or constituting membership of a formidable support group, for the purpose of sponsoring candidates to capture political power or win other sundry elective positions through the voting process. Therefore, to achieve the expedient objective of assembling and sustaining a viable and politically-relevant association of people, defined in terms of overwhelming population of membership and robust financial base, political parties sell the peculiarities of the values and norms they represent to the general public, with a view to attracting followership. Invariably, what comprises a body of values which a political party represents is usually reflective of the core tenets of democracy. Thus, within the realm of a political party, the internalisation and operationalisation of the fundamental precepts that give a distinct definition to the term, 'democracy', symbolises a miniature which is summarily descriptive of the expression of democratic countenance and attributes in the overall governance of a sovereign state or

society. According to Obazele (2017), “a genuine commitment by political parties, to the principles governing the practice of internal democracy, provides a template for assessing the level of workability of democracy in any society” (p. 102).

Significantly, some of the principles of internal democracy which are binding on the corporate existence of political parties include the following: a) inclusiveness in decision-making process; b) flexibility and fairness in power distribution; c) respect for the rule of law; d) respect and judicious incorporation of individual views and inputs of party members; e) viable, transparent and uncompromised internal mechanism for conflict resolution among party members; and, f) institutional recognition of the legal and constitutional implications of the various contending issues within the party.

According to Biezen (2003), a calculated disregard for the above highlighted principles by the leadership of political parties could degenerate into periodic wrangling, intra-party’s ceaseless power tussle and unending legal disputes which tell very negatively on democratic stability. In the opinion of Alexander (2015), several cases of party defections are usually traceable to situations where political party leadership deliberately flout the originating rules of conduct on which a political party is internally administered, and which also affect the common interest of party members.

In the Nigerian context, the administration of the values of internal democracy by political parties since the era of the re-democratisation of the country in 1999, has not yet projected the Nigerian state as a democratically progressive state. Ideally, a democratically progressive state is one in which there is a sustained translation of the dividends of democratic values to the day-to-day governance of the society. The manifestation of these democratic dividends of which attestation must derive from the members of the general public, can only be realised in an atmosphere of stability. The foundation of stability in these processes invariably originates from the stables of a political party. Hence, the processes involved in the selection of candidates that would contest for political positions in general elections, emanate from a political party. It is also expected that the choice of candidates by political parties should reflect the endorsement of the majority of party members, either through the direct or indirect primary voting process. Consequently, stability would be achieved when the selected candidate has the approval and support of party members, including their own rivals at the election, without dissent, rancour, rejections, disapprovals and objections to the credibility of the process.

In the opinion of Omotola (2009), “the continued rise in episodes of cross-carpeting of party members from one party to the other in Nigeria is mostly fuelled by the disposition, on the part of the leadership of the various political parties to exclusively impose candidates on the party for elective positions, against the ethos of due process” (p. 603).

In a different view, Omodia (2010) argues that the character of highhandedness, defined in terms of the pattern of managing the financial resources of the party, nepotism and sectionalism within

the confines of the party, unilateral decision making and favouritism, exhibited by the leadership of various political parties often lead to situations where some members of such political parties feel dissatisfied to the extent of defecting to other political parties where they feel that their relevance and worth will be appreciated. In the opinion of Alexander (2015), the cases of abuse of office by the leadership of political parties in Nigeria are linkable to the tendency for flagrant negation of the provisions of the constitution and electoral laws on political party administration.

In the contribution of Okoduwa (2019), there is an obvious display of lack of respect and belief in the sacrosanctity of party ideology by political party members in Nigeria, as well as their leadership. According to Okoduwa, on account of that fact, stiff-necked squabbles, in-fighting and disagreements on resolvable issues could lead to situations that might warrant the resort to indiscriminate defections. Still related to Okoduwa's position, Dode (2010) emphatically maintains that there is in existence, a brazen display of attitudes that are related to self-arrogance, selfish interest and excessive ambition by members of political parties. Hence, the fact that the loyalty of political party members resides more on their selfish agenda than the collective interest of the party, the probability that such persons will cross-carpet to other platforms, on realising that their exceeding personal ambitions might be hard to realise in their existing party, could be high.

Therefore, this study is poised to ascertain the relationship between internal democracy and the politics of defections in Nigeria's fourth republic era; it seeks to unravel the unhealthy political games which unfold in our political parties and which are responsible for the persistent cases of indiscriminate defections by politicians, from one political party to the other.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research method. Materials for the study were exclusively obtained from secondary sources like textbooks, journals and the internet. Since the generation of data for this study was literature-based, the study relied on the deductive method of analysis for data interpretation.

Conceptual Review

Democracy

The term, democracy, right from its inception in the 5th century, has been defined by several authors and scholars from diverse shades of opinions, perspectives, historical experiences and ideological standpoint. According to Simba (2011), democracy is a systemic pattern in which the narratives of respect for human rights, right to vote and be voted for, periodic elections, competition for assumption of political positions, right to belong to political parties of choice, transparent decision-making mechanism, rule of law and the existence of a viable civil society,

characterise the socio-political life and existence of a society. To Biezen (2003), Democracy is a governing principle which denotes equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law, as against the deployment of absolute exercise of power in the administration of the society. Presumably, Biezen's definition could have been inspired by Albert Dicey's conceptualisation of democracy and how it is applicable in the English system. Thus, according to Dicey (1950, in Efebeh 2015), democracy implies:

The absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power, and excludes the existence of arbitrariness, or prerogative or even of wide discretionary authority on the part of government. Englishmen (citizens) are ruled by the law and by the law alone. A man may with us be punished for a breach of the law, but can be punished for nothing else, (p.73).

By implication, both definitions by Biezen and Dicey on the concept of democracy, precludes the use of absolute force or coercive tendencies in the administration of the affairs of any corporate group, institution or society.

Furthermore, Dode (2010) affirms that democracy is a systemic principle which emphasises collective participation of members of an institution or group in processes ranging from decision-making to implementation. Defining the term from a developmental perspective, Efebeh (2015) views democracy as a system which encourages uncensored liberties given to individuals to discover, test and express their potentials and abilities in various capacities.

From the above standpoint therefore, it is convenient to submit that democracy is a system of government that does not only provide a platform for majority of the people in a politically organised society to determine, through the voting process, their representatives in government, it also entails a practice that guarantees the security of the constitutional rights, privileges and freedom of people, in a political environment that is devoid of threats, coercion, intimidation and administrative brutality by political office holders.

Internal Democracy

Internal democracy holistically denotes an all-inclusive mechanism which emphasis the deliberate involvement of party members in the whole processes of views' collation, articulation, decision-making and implementation within the fold of a political party (Scarrow, 2005). Also, Mbah (2011) conceives of internal democracy as an internal arrangement by the leadership of political parties which ensures that the administration of political parties with regards to the observance of party ideologies, decision making, conduct of primary elections, party funding and implementation of sundry party programmes are in agreement with democratic tenets and ideals. According to Godwin (2018), internal democracy entails the internal structural relationship within a political party. Godwin further explained that such relationship is emphatic about the symbiotic interplay between the three major elements in a political party, i.e.,

Party-in-government (PIG), Party-in- the electorate (PIE), and party-as-organisation. As the name implies, party-in-government presupposes political office holders who are elected under the platform of a particular political party. Also, party-in-government is descriptive of the ruling party in either a state or at the federal level. In the aspect of party-in-the electorate, this simply means people who identify with a particular political party as supporters, who also are prepared to vote for candidates who would be contesting for elective political positions during elections. Party-as-organisation comprehensively refers to the structural make-up of a political party. It could consist of a party's national secretariat, zonal headquarters, state offices, local offices, as well as the various bureaucratic organs and departments which comprise human resource elements that see to the day-to-day running of the business of a political party.

Therefore, this study categorically states that internal democracy entails a systemic observance and application of the creed of democracy within the ambit of a political party.

Politics of Defection

Politics as a concept can be defined as the demonstrative expression of activities that are associated with efforts aimed at acquiring and distributing state power and resources. Therefore, the definition or clarification of the term, 'politics of defection' has its substance rooted in the consequences of crisis of internal democracy. In other words, incidents where party members denounce their membership of a political party is a product of the condition of internal democracy being practised by the affected political party. Hence, the politicisation of the sanctity of democratic principles and practices by political parties ultimately degenerate into politics of defections.

According to Ikeolisa (2017), politics of party defection simply denotes a situation where "a card-carrying member of a political party dumps their party and joins another, for the purpose of realising their political ambitions" (p. 10). Similar to the above definition, Dode (2010) sees politics of defection as "the act of jumping from one political party to the other in search of political relevance" (p. 100). Analytically, Dode's definition of the concept of 'politics of defection' suitably fits into the Nigerian context where the frequency with which politicians, (both serving and aspiring political office holders) move from one political party to the other is incredibly high and alarming. By extension, Dode's definition intrinsically implies that such acts of defection may assume a condition where politician 'A' decamps from party 'x' to party 'y', and after some time, returns to party 'x'. Such situation summarily typifies experiences within the Nigerian system.

Furthermore, Adesua (2020) sees politics of defection as "the consummate fallout of the deepening crisis in party democracy, which is expressed in indiscriminate and distressed resignation of candidates as members" (p. 73). This definition sensitively portrays the fact that internal leadership crisis in the administration of political parties could render the latter vulnerable to

frequent and incessant cases of intra-party crisis- a situation that usually encourages decampment from political parties.

Therefore, it can be conveniently submitted here that politics of defection is fundamentally descriptive of a political condition where a duly registered member of a political party who in most situations may either be an occupant of a political office or aspiring one, dumps the platform on which they acquired a political position or bidding for one, for another party, probably on account of reasons bothering on dissatisfaction with the pattern of internal politics that plays out within their party or for strictly personal reasons.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on **Institutional theory**. This theory was propounded in the late 1970s by John Meyer and Brian Rowan. The conception of this theory was motivated by the belief in the idea that the existence of institutions is built on the platform of basic formative ideologies, norms, values and principles. Expectedly, the existence and observance of these institutional norms and principles, in practical terms, must invariably interact with the environment in which they exist. The impact or influence of the environment on the operational existence of institutions may be internal or external in nature. Internal impact in this context may connote the behavioural tendencies of the human resource composition of the institution. External influence on the other hand may involve the competitiveness of rival institutions, erratic social change phenomenon, government policies and the constitutional framework on which such institutions are established (McCarron, 2021).

Accordingly, Adesua (2020) observed some of the key assumptions of institutional theory, vis-a-vis their functional relevance to institutions, and they include the following:

- i. The fact that institutions are established on pre-existing norms and values.
- ii. Institutions represent a set of ideology and belief system which are binding on the functionality of the institution and guides its conducts. Thus, members, as well as the leadership of such institutions must condescend to the supremacy of the institution's body of ideology and belief system.
- iii. The leadership of institutions design policies, rules and regulations to preserve the sanctity of institutional norms and values, with a view to securing the interest and survival of the institution.
- iv. The institution comprises human elements with peculiarities in behavioural patterns, orientations, ideas and mission.
- v. The distinctiveness in the attitudinal differences and subjective goals of members of an institution usually infringe on the realisation of the corporate objective of the institution.
- vi. Pressures from the external environment also impact either positively or negatively on the projected fortunes of the institution.

- vii. The successes, longevity and survival of the institution are determined by the interaction of the forces of assumptions, 'v' and 'vi'.
- viii. The sustainability of the general wellbeing of the institution largely lies in the ability of the leadership of institutions to competently manage the above diversities and variants.

This study has strong relevance to the institutional theory as the latter's line of thought encapsulates the entirety of what the practice of internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties represents. With specific reference to assumptions, ii, v, vi, vii and viii, political parties supposedly should operate on existing body of ideologies, rules and standards which are considered superior to the peculiar interests of individual members. However, in the Nigerian context, the subjective interests and aspirations of individual members of political parties, especially the ones with ambitions to clinch elective positions, tend to sabotage and to a large extent, frustrate the ultimate realisation of the goals and prospects of political parties. In most cases, the relentless efforts made by members of political parties in Nigeria to impose their personal ambitions and aspirations on their political parties, with little regard to the overall interest of the party, usually fuel internal party crisis, thereby necessitating the decampment of aggrieved members to rival political parties. Again, as peculiar to the Nigerian situation, money politics, inter-party competition for relevance and the 'winner takes it all' syndrome constitute some of the external forces that interfere with internal democracy in Nigeria and also usually account for cases of indiscriminate defection of party members. Finally, the leadership of political parties in Nigeria, especially in this present fourth republic era over time, exhibit negative leadership traits which are counter-productive to the effective administration of internal democracy in our various political parties.

A Critical Overview of Internal Democracy vis-a-vis its Implication for Party Defections by Politicians in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, Nigerian political parties have been witnessing an uncontrolled gale of defection of politicians from one political party to the other. It is compelling to unequivocally state here that these situations have been largely attributed to the impact of internal party politics which defines the nature of internal democracy in the Nigerian political party system. Accordingly, Simba (2011) identified some internal governing structures and system of governance of political parties which have over time, been abused and misappropriated in the administration of political parties in Nigeria, and they include:

Distribution of Power: In the quest to ascertain where authority lies within a political party, Simba established that the exercise of authority within the fold of a political party should be well dispersed and evenly distributed among the various official ranks and should reflect strict concurrence with the laid down constitutional guidelines. According to Simba, it should not also be concentrated in the hands of a cabal, to avoid usurpation, arbitrariness and despotism. Again, Simba observed that the exercise of official mandate within a political party should be left exclusively to the discretion and determination of elected party officials without recourse to

unwarranted intrusions by serving political office holders. In the Nigerian context, the prevalence of power tussle between party officials and political office holders-the latter who are considered representatives of political parties in government, is always the consequence of undue interferences in the functions of political party excos by political office holders. Such scenario played out in the political rift between the former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo and the then chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Audu Ogbeh. That incident, it would be recalled had led to the forceful removal of Ogbeh from office as the chairman of the party. Consequently, Ogbeh's removal had birthed a serious overall intra-party crisis-a situation that gave rise to various cases of defections from the PDP, including that of Ogbeh and his numerous loyalists. More so, the politics of intra-party power distribution in Nigeria's fourth republic has been responsible for the creation of dual or multiple leadership structures within a party. As always, such situations are responses to external interferences, emanating from political office holders. For example, in the build-up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, the power tussle between two APC stalwarts in Rivers state, Rt.Hon. Rotimi Amaechi and Magnus Abe had led to the factionalisation of the Rivers APC into two groups, identifiable as Amaechi and Abe's loyalists. The internal party crisis of the APC in Rivers State had further degenerated into a situation where the two factions conducted parallel conventions and primaries. The constitutional implication of such a shenanigan intra-party arrangement had led to court's disqualification of the Rivers APC from participation in the 2019 governorship election. Even prior to court's ruling on Rivers APC's case with regards to participation in the 2019 governorship election, the then trending internal party crisis within the APC fold in Rivers State had caused the defection of many notable APC chieftains in the state like Barry Mpigi, Chidi Lloyd, e.t.c (Igbo, 2021).

Mode of Decision Making and Inclusiveness: In this context, Simba contends that inclusive involvement of party members in the process of decision making is a democratic obligation which fulfilment must be linked to leadership responsibility within the ranks of the party. In the Nigerian situation, preference for parochial interest, favouritism, elitist usurpation, tyrannical disposition and marginalisation are some of the political instruments deployed by the leadership of political parties to orchestrate and deepen internal party crisis. These variables are mostly demonstrated by the leadership of political parties in instances of preference for zoning and decisions for adoption of consensus candidacy. Such unilateral decisions in most cases, do not reflect popular choice and may hence, engender disaffections, distrust, disloyalty and ill-will among members of the party, most of whom may have felt marginalised, cheated or deprived of their rights. The ultimate consequence of such developments is usually demonstrated in circumstances where disgruntled party members cross-carpet to other political platforms. A typical example unfolded in Borno state during the build-up to the 2003 general election where the incumbent governor, Mala Kachallah was substituted by the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), with Ali Modu Sheriff as the gubernatorial candidate of the party for the 2003 governorship election in the state. Consequently, that development had led to the defection of Mala Kachallah from the ANPP to the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Again, intra-party leadership crisis, defined in the form of restrictive and undemocratic method of decision making

was responsible for the mass defection in 2014, of notable party members from the PDP to the APC, in the build-up to the 2015 general election. In a similar incident, Ojo (2022) observed that the tyrannical, partial and conspiratorial disposition of political party leadership in Nigeria constituted some reasons given by the former Rivers state governor, Rotimi Amaechi for dumping the PDP for the APC in 2013. In the aspect of politics of zoning of elective offices by political parties, Eze (2020) informs that the reason for Ebonyi state governor, Dave Umahi's defection from the PDP to the APC in 2020 was predicated on Umahi's perception of a calculated injustice on the part of the PDP leadership meted to the south-east region of the country with respect to the rotational zoning of the country's presidential slot among the six geo-political zones in the country.

Party Primaries: According to Simba, party primaries involve an internal democratic process where all legitimate card-carrying members of a political party are entitled by law to determine or choose through voting, candidates that would represent the party in general elections. Simba further explained that a political party may adopt three different methods or approaches to choose candidates for general elections. These methods include: direct primary, indirect primary and consensus candidacy. However, Simba observed that the direct primary approach remains the most democratic, credible, transparent and popular world over. In Nigeria, especially in this fourth republic era, methods of conducting party primaries by political parties have continued to occasion several cases of intra-party crisis which eventual outcome is usually expressed in inter-party decampments. It has been observed on several occasions that the leadership of political parties in Nigeria dubiously exploit the alternatives of indirect primaries and consensus candidacy to maximize parochial gains and interests. Over time, the resort to the adoption of indirect primaries by political parties in Nigeria has been used by corrupt-tending political party leaders to manipulate the choice of candidates as party's flagbearers in general elections. The delegate-inducement strategies used by candidates, with the consent and connivance of the leadership of political parties in Nigeria have always been known to produce unpopular candidates. This nature of development in Nigeria's party system usually result in situations where candidates who are not satisfied with such a process, decamp to other political parties to test their political relevance and probably realise their political ambition. Under similar circumstance, in 1998, the late Chief Evan Enwerem was denied ticket by the APP to contest as the senator representing Imo-East senatorial district. However, Enwerem switched camp to the PDP where he was given the ticket. He contested that election and won, and subsequently emerged as the first senate president in the fourth republic era. The most undemocratic and unpopular method which Nigeria's political parties adopt is the consensus candidacy approach. This process involves the act of prevailing on other contesting candidates for an elective position to step down for a particular candidate that would eventually fly the party's flag in general elections. This method has always resulted in the deprivation of the rights of election candidates and thus, has always been met with protests, politically-inclined resistance and legal confrontations. A typical example of this scenario was evidently witnessed in the 2002 national convention of the defunct All Peoples Party (APP). During the presidential primaries which was

indirect in nature, there was a covert arrangement orchestrated by the leadership of APP to persuade presidential aspirants, especially from the northern region to step down for Major. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. The implication of this strategy by the leadership of APP was specifically aimed at transferring the votes of majority of the delegates to Buhari. By virtue of the fact that the presidential aspirants who on the day of the presidential primaries withdrew from the race had majority of the delegates as their supporters, the latter's eventual votes would automatically be inherited by Buhari. Dissatisfied with that development, some of the presidential aspirants like Rochas Okorocha and John Nnia Nwodo with their supporters, walked out of the venue of the convention, and later resigned their membership of the party.

Above all, separate views from Dode (2010) and Adesua (2020) signal the impression that the structure, composition and operational existence of political parties in Nigeria lack formidable cleavages to existing laws and regulations. Particularly, Adesua (2020) observes that there is in existence, a seemingly constitutional lacuna with regards to strict adherence to the rules that govern the conduct of elected political party officials, as well as regulations on party members' admission, fellowship and exit. According to Adesua (2020), this issue has further contributed in complicating the crisis of internal democracy in Nigeria.

Major Findings from the Study

The findings from this study which emanate from the critical examination of the series of literature reviewed on the nature of internal democracy in Nigeria's fourth republic, will constitute the hypothetical factors that are responsible for the incidences of defections or party cross-carpeting attitude of politicians, especially in this fourth republic era. These major findings include the following:

- i. Intra-party leadership crisis
- ii. Weak ideological threshold
- iii. Overvaluation of individual interest over party interest
- iv. The supremacy of ruling party syndrome
- v. Inherent constitutional controversy over inter-party defections

Intra-Party Leadership Crisis

This study has exposed in-depth, the extent of leadership crisis in the administration of the affairs of political parties in Nigeria, and how such impacts negatively on inter-party defections by politicians. The trends in leadership crisis experienced in the administration of the affairs of political parties are usually evidenced in the appearances of:

- i. power tussle among the various ranks in the leadership structure of a party,
- ii. gladiatorial quest among members to capture elective leadership positions in a political party,
- iii. conflicts over fund acquisition, disbursement, distribution and accountability,

- iv. conflicting interests between party officials and elected representatives of the party at the government cycle, over the governance of the party and,
- v. expression of dissatisfactions by party members over resolutions or decisions reached by the leadership of political parties which affect the interest of members.

The above highlighted indices of intra-political party leadership crisis comprehensively depict the pattern of internal democracy witnessed in Nigeria's fourth republic. The consequences have severally led to cases of inter-party decamping of members. The highhandedness of party officials, as well as the preponderance of the influence wielded by serving political office holders in Nigeria's political parties have in most circumstances, ignited defection decisions by members. For instance, in the APC, the dictatorial propensity of the former national chairman of the party, Adams Oshiomole attracted serious criticisms and disapprovals by stakeholders. Similarly, in the PDP, party stalwarts like Femi Fani Kayode, the present governor of Cross River state, Ben Ayade and many others blamed the decision to resign their membership of the PDP on the domineering attitude of some powerful figures in the party who, though not occupying leadership positions at the party level assert strong influence on party activities and decisions. Accordingly, the so-called super-influential members of the PDP comprise currently serving state governors, legislators and very rich individuals who could buy off the loyalty of the leadership of the party, to their own selfish interest. The undue and indiscriminate influence of political office holders-the latter who are not part of party officials, on the decisions and activities of political parties in Nigeria can also be seen in the aspect of the determination and imposition of unpopular candidates. In 2007, on the orders of the then president, Olusegun Obasanjo, Yinka Akerele who clearly won the PDP governorship primaries in Ekiti state was surprisingly but unjustly substituted with Segun Oni.

Weak Ideological Threshold

Ideally, a body of doctrines or belief system should provide the mantra on which a political party is formed, exists and functions. Also, the interest to enlist in the membership of a political party should be fundamentally informed by the prospective member's preference, admiration and acceptance of the norms of the party which represents its set of ideology. The psychological and emotional attachment of members with the system of ideology which a political party represents and professes should be distinctive and sacrosanct. By extension also, it should define and determine a member's capacity of forbearance with the party's functional weaknesses or possible downslide of fortunes. According to Ikeolisa (2017), "a firm and uncompromising belief by members of a political party, in the ideals of the party's ideology can go a long way to determine the members' readiness to consolidate their unflinching loyalty to the party in spite of odds" (p. 30).

In the Nigerian scenario however, the opposite characterises the situation especially in this fourth republic era. Essentially, in this part of the world, membership of a political party is usually motivated by the mere desire to use political party platforms to secure political offices in

government. This trend is traceable to the poor system of political socialisation that is prevalent in the country's social system. Naturally, an average Nigerian with no prior motive of contesting any elective position at the government cycle does not see any need of being a card-carrying member of a political party. According to Godwin (2018), a study carried out in 2011 by the International Republican Institute indicated that only 37% of sampled respondents in Nigeria strongly agreed that registering with a political party as a member was a necessary civic obligation.

The politics of identifying with a political party based on satisfying the realisation of certain personal aspirations, and not on the veneration of a party's ideology has over time, reduced Nigeria's political parties to the abysmal condition of a porous and unguarded ballroom where politicians walk in and out at will, without recourse to fear of inhibition by certain institutionalised regulations. Since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, the spate of defections by politicians from one party to the other has majorly been symbolised by the disposition of political characters in the Nigerian system whose stock in trade is to identify with either currently successful political parties or switching to political platforms where they can gain easy access to the party's ticket for representation during general elections. This is what Ojo (2022) refers to as "food is ready politics" (p. 5). It is unfortunate to recall that in the October 2018 PDP presidential primaries in Port Harcourt for the 2019 general elections, it was only four out of the twelve presidential aspirants that could boast of not having decamped from the PDP platform since joining the party. In his bid to actualise his ambition of succeeding his boss to become Nigeria's no 1 citizen in 2007, former vice president Atiku Abubakar decamped from the PDP to the Action Congress (AC). When he could not realise that ambition in 2007, in 2011 he re-joined the PDP where he was adopted as the northern Nigeria's consensus candidate to contest against the then incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan in the party's primaries. Following his defeat, Atiku again left the PDP for the APC to contest for the 2015 presidential election. However, he lost in the primaries to Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. The man Atiku, again returned to the PDP where he was elected at the primaries by the party to fly its flag for the 2019 presidential election. A former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara left the PDP for the APC to contest elections in 2015. When his political value began to wane to the extent of an almost total collapse in the APC forum, he re-joined the PDP in 2018 where he was graciously offered automatic ticket to contest election into membership of the House of Representatives in 2019. Just a year on when the centre could no longer hold, Dogara again, returned to the APC.

In the overall, the mass defection of politicians from the PDP, in the aftermath of the comprehensive defeat of the party in the 2015 general elections provides convincing evidence to the weak ideological base in Nigeria's political parties.

Overvaluation of Individual Interest Over Party Interest

The desperate quest to acquire political power and the limitless yearning to satisfy strictly personal objectives constitute the major tendencies that characterise the attitudes of Nigerian politicians with regards to their loyalty and commitment to their respective political parties. According to Daramola (2018), over 90% cases of defection from one political party to the other in Nigeria have their core reasons invariably linked to the desire by politicians to gratify strictly individual aspirations, even at the cost of preserving the integrity and collective interest of the political party. A corroboration to the above view was explicitly captured by Adesua (2020). Thus:

In the Nigerian system, almost all the aspirants for an elective political position at the party level, go in for the primary elections with a firm conviction of eventually grabbing the party's ticket to represent the party in the general election. The excessiveness of their ambition most times, becloud their sense of giving consideration to the fact that elections must invariably produce winners and losers. The consequence of such tendency by Nigerian politicians always gives rise to ceaseless post-election rejections and litigations (p. 91).

In most cases, post-primary election reconciliatory efforts initiated at the party level by the leadership of such parties always fail to yield the expected result. This is because, the affected parties to the reconciliation would always expect that the decisions of such panels would tilt to their favour. Analytically, if the resolution of the reconciliation panel favours candidate A at the expense of candidate B, the latter being a typical Nigerian politician would reject that resolution to the extent of decamping from the party. In the build up to the 2019 Imo state governorship election, in spite of efforts made by the APC to resolve the post-primary election crisis between the two major candidates, Hope Uzodinma and Uche Nwosu, the latter never threw in the towel as he ended up defecting to another political platform, Action Alliance (AA), where he grabbed the party's ticket to contest the governorship election. On the 1st of March this year, one of the candidates that contested the Ekiti state PDP primary election for the forthcoming governorship election in June, Segun Oni publicly announced his defection from the PDP to the Social Democratic Party (SDP). His decision to defect was in defiance of the intervening pleas by the leadership of the party, both at the national and state level for him to reconsider his position in the interest of the party which major objective is to exert a united force within the ambit of the party and wrest political power from the ruling party in the state. However, in the Nigerian contest, such feat is difficult to achieve as prospective candidates for elective positions, even prior to purchasing the party's interest forms would have already sealed the conclusion in their minds that they will win the election.

The Supremacy of Ruling Party Syndrome

“The winner takes it all” ideology that governs the Nigerian political system has turned ruling political parties into sweet-smelling flower buds that attract insects. The interpretational

implication of the above maxim explains that the “sweet-smelling flower buds” in this context, represent political parties on which platform the President or Governors are elected, while “insects” as used in this context stand for vulnerable but willing politicians who desperately clamour to be counted as beneficiaries of the enormity of dividends which are attainable by dint of readiness to identify with such a political party as members. In Nigeria, ruling parties flagrantly abuse their statutory privilege of being in position to determine and direct the allocation of state resources to woo members into their fold. This situation is more pronounced at the national level where the ‘band wagon’ approach provides that when the executive president of the country is elected under any platform, it would automatically determine party-by-party composition of the national assembly membership. Under such circumstance, the door will be open with attractive conditions for defections so that the leadership of the political party in question in the executive arm at the national level be replicated in the national legislative arm. This situation was explicitly noticeable in the aftermath of the 2015 general election when the electoral victory of Muhammadu Buhari at the presidential election attracted an overwhelming gale of defections from the PDP to the APC.

The implication of the supremacy of the ruling party syndrome to inter-party defections by Nigerian politicians can also be expressed in the pattern of resort to politics of witch-hunting, intimidation and blackmail by the ruling party. This strategy is what Ikeolisa (2017) describes as a “mechanistic approach to wooing members into the fold of a political party” (p. 22). This trend was made the more popular by the APC-led federal government since assuming political power in 2015. The party has been known to deploy the instrumentalities of anti-graft agencies to harass, arrest, probe and prosecute past and present political office holders from the rival political party. Hence, past political office holders from the opposition party who have ‘an officially tainted past’ use defection to the ruling party as a means of escape from arrests and probe of official misconduct by anti-graft agencies. In fact, according to Nwafor (2019), a statement was once credited to a former national chairman of the party, Adams Oshiomole, to the effect that “once you join APC, your sins are forgiven” (p. 4). On the strength of the assurance by the leadership of the APC that the party would provide a safe haven for politicians with questionable past, with regards to their official conducts while in office, refuge-seeking politicians from the opposition through the ruling APC as decampers. It has severally been rumoured that the defections of several past state governors as well as ministers from the opposition PDP like Orji Uzor Kalu, Joshua Dariye, Godswill Akpabio, Sullivan Chime, Ken Nnamani, Femi Fani Kayode, Emeka Wogu, etc were occasioned by the desire, on the part of the decampers to be spared from the rod of justice, wielded by anti-graft agencies on behalf of the ruling party.

Inherent Constitutional Controversy Over Inter-Party Defections

The 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides a partial clarification on the position of the law with regards to defections and the eventual fate of defectors. Sections, 68(a) and 109 (a) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria

are explicitly of the position that a member of either the Senate or House of Representatives shall vacate their seats in the event such members of the National Assembly decide to join another political party. The condition as stated in 68(a) could have been inspired by the specification in the first clause of 68(g) which states thus:

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.

However, the second clause in section 68(g) establishes an exception to the first clause and states thus:

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;

It was on the enablement of this aspect of the constitution that 11 senators in 2014 decamped from the PDP to the APC. In a joint resignation letter, which was addressed to the then senate president, David mark, the defecting senators stated that:

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 are 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 (as amended) for your information, guidance and record purposes (Daily Post Editorial, 2014).

In this respect, the decision of the 11 senators to decamp to a different political platform could be justified on the grounds that in actual sense, there was in existence, a factional group within the PDP. It would be recalled that in 2014, a dissident group excised itself from the PDP and called itself the "New Peoples Democratic Party (N-PDP). However, the area of concern here is that section 68 (1) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) failed to provide a sub-clause that should determine the human and structural factors that generate factionalisation within a party and also, explain the circumstances for which factionalisation can justify inter-party defections. A separate clause in that section of the constitution should have also be provided to determine whether or not the facilitators of factionalisation within a party should be allowed to defect to another platform and still retain their seat. This insight comes on the heels of the awareness that the 11 senators who decamped from the PDP to the APC still retained their positions as senators.

Aside the obvious lacuna in sections 68(1) and 109(1) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) which were specific about defections of members of the Senate and House of Representatives, no part of the constitution made mention of the offices of the President and State Governors with regards to inter-party cross-carpeting. Until recently when Justice Inyang Ekwo of the Federal High Court, Abuja sacked Governor Dave Umahi of Ebonyi State and his deputy, Kelechi Igwe for defecting from the PDP to the APC, the law has been dormant on defections by state governors asr since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, there have been cases involving state governors in Nigeria cross-carpeting to other political parties and still retain their seats as governors. Justice Ekwo had based his ruling on the grounds that the electoral victory which placed Umahi and Igwe in capacities as governor and deputy governor of Ebonyi state respectively, belongs to the PDP. By implication therefore, on decamping to another political platform, Umahi and his deputy should relinquish the mandate given to them by the political party which sponsored their victory at the polls. However, criticisms have greeted the judgment that sacked Gov. Umahi and his deputy, Kelechi Igwe, on grounds that the constitution did not stipulate any penalty for Presidents and Governors in case they defect to another political party from the party that gave them political mandate. But, in contrast with the views expressed by critics, Justice Ekwo had said during his ruling that although he acknowledged the fact that the constitution was silent in that regard, however, “such a lacuna was not to be celebrated or even mischievously flaunted as failure of a remedy for situations of such nature. Also, a constitutional lawyer, Mike Ozekhome is of the opinion that Umahi only exercised his constitutional right of freedom of association as enshrined in section 40 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). According to Ejekwonyilo (2022), Mr. Ozekhome faulted Justice Ekwo’s verdict on the basis that the ruling contradicts “section 308 of the constitution which grants absolute immunity to the president, vice president, governor and deputy governor from being prosecuted against in any civil or criminal proceedings” (pp. 5-7).

The above illustrations on the constitutional and legal implication of the court ruling on Gov.Umahi’s defection explicitly reveals the extent of constitutional impairment on the politics of inter-party defection in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ideally, political parties should be seen as institutions in a democratic system which sets the pace for the thriving of democratic principles and values in a larger society. Therefore, internal democracy should project the values of transparency, accountability, fairness, equity, probity, selflessness and dedication- the virtues which are indispensably critical to governance. This study has unearthed cases and developments which demonstrate the dismal and unhealthy nature of internal democracy as practiced by political parties in Nigeria. Hence, the attendant consequences have led to incessant cases of inter-party defections. The present trend which has characterised politics in the fourth republic has severally been blamed on internal party crisis.

To come out of the woods, this study recommends that the leadership of political parties in Nigeria should be revamped and restructured strictly in line with existing constitutional guidelines and leadership ethics and principles. The overriding emphasis given to affluence and social popularity as key yardsticks for measuring the suitability of candidates for elective leadership positions in Nigeria's political parties has continued to compromise and frustrate the keen observance and application of the ideals of internal democracy. Consideration for qualification for leadership positions in political parties should be based on avowed possession of leadership qualities of integrity, honesty, transparency, team spirit inclination, managerial competence, selflessness, humility, and moderate temperament by candidates who aspire for leadership positions in a political party. Such leadership qualities, if applied in the administration of the affairs of political parties in Nigeria, will translate into a maximum realisation of the central objective of internal democracy-the latter which is hinged on exporting the gains, inherent in the virtues of democracy to the larger society for the purpose of sustaining an all-round systemic stability and progress.

In addition, the extant electoral laws should be reviewed, to reflect a deliberate inclusion of a well-defined autonomy to be granted the leadership of political parties in Nigeria. This should be aimed at curtailing to its barest minimum, undue interferences by non-officials of political party leadership, in the administration of political parties.

Finally, constitutional provisions on inter-party defection should be revisited and comprehensively codified to reflect a deliberate make-up to the existing lacuna. Accordingly, the position of the law on inter-party defection by the president or state governors should either be injected into sections 68 and 109 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria or separate sections be provided for that purpose.

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The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended)