Economics of Defection in Nigerian Politics: An Analysis

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Abstract

Nigeria's Fourth Republic is currently confronted with a persistent and intricate challenge, namely that of political defection, a phenomenon characterized by the frequent switching of parties by politicians, often motivated by economic incentives, which in turn leads to the erosion of party ideology and acts as a barrier to the country's development. In order to comprehensively understand this issue of defection, this research delves into the realm of economic theory, with a specific focus on principal-agent theory, which posits that politicians primarily act in their own self-interest, as well as rational choice theory, which asserts that decisions are made based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis. Through this theoretical framework, the study meticulously examines the motivations behind defection, primarily centered on economic gains, as well as the wide-ranging consequences it brings about, such as the weakening of democratic institutions and the economy at large. Drawing upon a wealth of secondary data derived from academic journals, news articles, and government reports, the findings of this study shed light on defection as a strategic move by politicians who prioritize personal enrichment over loyalty to their party or adherence to specific policies, thereby impeding the formulation and implementation of long-term economic strategies and jeopardizing political stability. While some arguments may posit that defection contributes to healthy political competition, the research, grounded in economic theory and supported by secondary data, contends that the economic rationale underpinning defection far outweighs any purported benefits, thus underscoring the imperative need for a multi-faceted approach aimed at diminishing the attractiveness of defection as a viable option for politicians.

Keywords: Defection, Democracy, Economics, Fourth Republic, Politics

Introduction

Nigeria's Fourth Republic, ushered in with democratic aspirations in 1999, has been grappling with a persistent challenge: political defection. This phenomenon, characterized by politicians frequently switching parties, often mid-term, has fueled debate about the underlying motivations and its multifaceted consequences. This paper delves into political defection in Nigeria through an economic lens, meticulously dissecting the costs and benefits for politicians (Atu & Ite, 2022), political parties (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011), and the electorate (Egure, 2020).

Examining the motivations behind defection, a compelling argument centers on economic incentives. Politicians, guided by a rational choice theory perspective (Atu & Ite, 2022), may perceive greater financial rewards and access to resources within a new party compared to their current one (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). This economic calculus can be further amplified by a lack of access to patronage networks within the original party, potentially leading to defection in pursuit of improved financial prospects (Egure, 2020).

However, the motivations extend beyond purely economic considerations. Career advancement often plays a significant role. Politicians frustrated with limited upward mobility within their original party might view defection as a strategic move to secure leadership positions or plum government appointments (Ojo, 2022). Additionally, ideological disagreements, although less frequent, can also be a driver for defection, particularly when a party's direction veers significantly from a politician's core beliefs (Egure, 2020).

The consequences of political defection in Nigeria are far-reaching and multifaceted. From an economic standpoint, defection weakens political parties by hindering the development of clear and distinct ideologies (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). This lack of ideological coherence undermines the formulation and implementation of long-term economic development strategies (Egure, 2020). Furthermore, the frequent reshuffling of political allegiances creates uncertainty and discourages investment, potentially hindering economic growth (Mejia et al., 2020).

The impact on democratic consolidation is equally concerning. Defection fosters a culture of political opportunism, prioritizing personal gain over loyalty to constituents or party platforms (Ojo, 2022). This weakens the development of a strong opposition, hindering the crucial role of checks and balances within a democratic system (Egure, 2020). Additionally, the lack of party loyalty discourages voters from forming strong attachments to political parties, eroding trust in the democratic process (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011).

Despite the negative consequences, some scholars argue for potential positive aspects of defection. Egure (2020) suggests that defection can foster a more dynamic political landscape, with parties forced to compete for talent and adapt their platforms to attract voters. This could potentially lead to a more responsive and accountable political system. However, further research is needed to quantitatively assess the validity and long-term sustainability of such a dynamic.
Addressing the challenge of political defection in Nigeria requires a multi-pronged approach. Strengthening party ideology through fostering genuine commitment to clear policy platforms is crucial (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). This could involve promoting internal party democracy, ensuring fair competition for positions, and fostering a culture of loyalty and inclusion within parties (Egure, 2020). Additionally, campaign finance reform is essential to limit the undue influence of money in politics, thereby reducing the allure of defecting to parties offering greater financial rewards (Atu & Ite, 2022).

Finally, exploring the potential of stricter constitutional measures, such as requiring defecting legislators to relinquish their seats and face re-election under their new party banner, could be a path worth considering (Ojo, 2022).

Conceptual Clarification

Defection, also known as "cross-carpeting," refers to a politician's switch from one political party to another after being elected on a different party platform (Adejuwon, 2013). This phenomenon is distinct from party switching during elections, where voters choose a different party altogether.

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different party platform. This phenomenon is distinct from party switching during elections, where voters choose a different party altogether. Understanding the types of defection is crucial. Adesua (2020) differentiates between principled defection, driven by ideological disagreements with the original party, and opportunistic defection, motivated by self-interest.

Methodology

This study relies on secondary data, including academic journals, news articles, government reports, and data analysis by credible institutions. While secondary data offers a wealth of information and diverse perspectives, it has limitations. The accuracy and completeness of the data depend on the original sources. Additionally, secondary data may not capture the nuances of individual motivations or the specific circumstances surrounding each defection event.

Theoretical Framework

This study builds upon two main theoretical frameworks:

Principal-Agent Theory: This theory posits that politicians (agents) act in their own self-interest, potentially diverging from the interests of their voters (principals) (Mejia et al., 2020). Defection can be viewed as a strategy by politicians to maximize personal gain, even if it undermines the promises made to voters.

Rational Choice Theory: This theory suggests individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis (Atu & Ite, 2022). Politicians defect when they perceive greater economic benefits (patronage, access to resources) in a new party compared to their current one.

Application of Theory

Rational choice theory, as applied by Atu & Ite (2022), posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, weighing the potential benefits and drawbacks of alternative options. In the context of Nigerian politics, politicians consider defection when they perceive greater economic benefits associated with a new party compared to remaining in their current one. These benefits can be categorized into three main areas: financial rewards, career advancement, and access to resources.

A defining feature of Nigeria's political landscape is the weak ideological differentiation between parties (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). This makes defection based on policy disagreements less frequent. Rational choice theory aligns with this reality, as politicians are less likely to defect for ideological reasons if the parties offer similar policy platforms. Instead, the theory focuses on economic incentives, providing a strong framework to analyze the financial rewards, career advancement opportunities, and access to resources that can motivate defection.

Rational choice theory allows for a degree of prediction regarding defection. If politicians act rationally, analyzing the relative benefits offered by different parties can provide insights into potential defections. For instance, a politician facing limited access to campaign funds in their current party might be more likely to defect to a party offering greater financial support, especially during election season (Atu & Ite, 2022).

The theory effectively explains the frequent occurrence of seemingly opportunistic defections in Nigeria. Politicians might defect to a party offering them a more prominent position or greater access to patronage networks, even if it contradicts their previously stated beliefs. Rational choice theory acknowledges that self-interest is a powerful motivator, and defection can be seen as a strategic move to maximize personal gain even if it undermines ideological consistency.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the prevalence and consequences of defection in Nigeria. Omodia and Egwemi (2011) highlight the lack of strong party ideology as a key driver, with parties acting more as vehicles for personal gain than platforms for policy advancement. This is confirmed by Ojo (2022) who argues that defection weakens the development of a loyal opposition, hindering democratic checks and balances. However, some scholars argue for the potential benefits of defection. Egure (2020) suggests it can foster political competition and realignment, leading to a more dynamic political landscape.

History of Defection in Nigeria's Nascent Democracy

Nigeria's military regime under General Abdulsalami Abubakar handed power over to a civilian regime led by former military head of state, Chief Olusegun

Obasanjo, in 1999. This marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic. A prominent feature of early politics in this new era was the widespread crises affecting all political parties involved in the 1998-1999 elections. The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) set a negative example that impacted smaller parties like the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All People's Party (APP) (Mbah, 2011). This analysis will provide a detailed account of these crises.

Examining the crises within Nigerian political parties, useful indicators include visible changes in party membership at all levels, high turnover in the election or appointment of executive committee members, party breakups and faction formations, and frequent defections across parties. Given the PDP's dominance at the national level and in many states—at times controlling as many as 23 out of 36 states—it will be a primary focus, though party crises at both state and federal levels will be considered (Mbah, 2011).

Since 1999, the PDP has experienced numerous crises, evidenced by a high turnover rate in its National Executive Committees. For example, during its first four-year term, the PDP had three different National Chairmen: Chief Solomon Lar, Chief Barnabas Gemade, and Chief Audu Ogbeh. Similar turnover occurred among other key officers like the national secretary, with state and local governments also experiencing high turnover rates. This pattern was also seen in the AD and APP (Mbah, 2011). During the PDP's second term (2003-2007), turnover rates increased further, with party control concentrated in the hands of political executives across various government levels. The AD, which controlled six states in the South West from 1999-2003, almost disappeared from the political landscape after losing all but Lagos to the PDP in 2003 (Mbah, 2011).

The frequent leadership crises within parties provided an excuse for members to switch allegiances in search of better opportunities, leading to terms like "defection," "decamping," and "cross-carpeting" becoming common in Nigeria's political lexicon. Between 2007 and 2011, more than 60 political parties emerged, with about 25 appearing on the 2011 ballot (Mbah, 2011).

From the start of the Fourth Republic, politicians have readily switched parties for perceived advantages. For instance, the first Senate President, Senator Evans

Enwerem, originally ran for governor under the All People's Party (PPP) in Imo State but joined the PDP after losing his bid and being offered a senatorial ticket. He not only won a Senate seat but also became Senate President with backing from President Obasanjo and the PDP leadership. Similar defections occurred in other states, with prominent figures switching parties for various reasons and often receiving rewards for their loyalty (Mbah, 2011).

The National Assembly also saw numerous defections, with at least 13 Senators and 35 House of Representatives members switching parties between 1999 and 2013. In 2013, a significant split occurred in the PDP when seven state governors—representing Kano, Kwara, Rivers, Sokoto, Adamawa, Niger, and Jigawa—left to form the new PDP, which later merged with the All Progressives Congress (APC). This merger led to the APC winning the presidential election in March 2015 and gaining a substantial number of governorships. Following this, the pattern of defections favored the APC, with former PDP members in Bayelsa State switching to the APC in August 2015, citing various reasons for their decision (Mbah, 2011).

Intra-Party Crises: An Elucidation

This section addresses the questions posed in the introduction by exploring answers within the context of Nigeria's unique institutional culture. It is important to reference the competing explanatory models proposed by scholars, both indigenous and foreign Africanists, for understanding Nigerian and sub-Saharan African politics. Among these models are the ethno-regional model, the class model, and the neo-Marxian characterization of the post-colonial state as an impediment to democracy. While each of these variables influences Nigerian politics, it is methodologically more fruitful to focus on the inclusive variable of institutional forms and patterns. For example, one proponent of the 'post-colonial state' as a tool for analyzing party crises in Nigeria posits:

> The petit-bourgeois found that although they had acquired political power, they were not truly in control of the economy. However, they understood that political power offered opportunities for economic power, and thus they viewed political power as the best, and perhaps the only, way to create an economic base for themselves (Mbah, 2011, p. 9).

This type of analysis is typical of dominant perspectives on Nigerian politics, particularly by neo-Marxian scholars. A prominent strand of this analysis blends with class analysis, imputing a pseudo-economic motive to the ruling elite. However, these frameworks rarely proceed beyond this point. Why is it possible for the officials of the post-colonial state to use state power to enrich themselves? To answer this, one must turn to the process of institution-building and the perceptions of rulers and the ruled. If all the institutional safeguards of democracy—the police, the judiciary, the constitution, the legislature, the election management body, and civil society—displayed integrity and patriotism, would the political elites be able to manipulate political decisions and programs to suit their self-interests? The post-colonial state bears a character shaped by the cumulative effects of these institutions. This also applies to the ethno-regional variant of this explanatory model.

To explain intra-party politics in Nigeria, it may be more beneficial to focus on attitudes toward institutions and why the integrity of vital institutions, or a lack thereof, predisposes leading actors to personalize collective goods, act autocratically, with impunity, and lack internal democracy in leading political parties. When disgruntled party members complain about the lack of internal democracy, do they also accuse their parties of lacking sufficient statutory instruments for regulating leaders' actions in intra-party elections and appointments? In Nigeria, there has rarely been a political dispensation without an abundance of rules and regulations. The problem is their breach by those who should be guided by them. Why do they get away with flagrant breaches of rules? Some illustrative cases are needed here. The PDP ruled Nigeria for 16 years, from 1999 to 2015. Its operations are representative of the character of party politics in Nigeria. It has had almost three constitutions since its inception. Regarding state congresses and national conventions for electing executive committee members at the state and national levels, these constitutions have been very elaborate and clear. For instance, the PDP Constitution of 2006, as amended in 2012, pledges in Chapter 8 under "Nomination of Candidates for Election into Political Offices" that its provisions would be consistent with the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended in 2010) and the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) in matters relating to internal electoral processes. Accordingly, the party set its internal electoral guidelines and regulations in consonance with national

constitutional provisions and electoral laws. If these statutory instruments—the party constitution, the electoral laws, and the National Constitution of 1999—were adhered to in the party's internal electoral processes, it would have minimized intra-party conflicts regarding the high-handedness, if not outright dictatorship, in the nomination of candidates for public offices.

Former President Obasanjo's outright rejection of his Vice-President Alhaji Abubakar's presidential candidacy in 2007 pushed the latter into the Action Congress of Nigeria, resulting in him running for the presidential election against the PDP's candidate, the late Umaru Shehu Yar'Adua. That competition was intense because Atiku's decampment from the PDP was a significant turning point in that year's general elections. Atiku could not participate in the PDP presidential primary elections because the outgoing President did not want him to run on their party's platform, regardless of Atiku's following within the PDP. In ex-President Jonathan's bid for a second term, he was believed to have illegitimately deployed all manners of executive power, influence, and privilege to frustrate potential candidates' ambitions for the presidential ticket. The "historic" walkout of state governors and their supporters in the 2013 PDP Special Convention was the culmination of political skirmishes within the party that had brewed covertly and, at times, overtly for the preceding two or three years.

The trigger point of the internal crises within the PDP was the party's Special National Convention, convened to formalize the process of electing some members of the National Working Committee who had served for more than a year. Rather than allow this simple constitutional formality to proceed, the President's political operatives convinced him to use this opportunity to remove some party executive members who might not support his second-term ambition. The party leaders, acting on the President's behalf, excluded some serving National Working Committee members from the validation voting with impunity. Other smaller political parties exhibit the same character and outlook: candidates were handpicked by leading figures, and party executive positions were dispensed like prebends. The APC, in its wisdom, refrained from handpicking candidates at the national level and attempted to present a semblance of internal democratic process during its presidential primary election in Lagos. However, at the state level, the abuse of internal party democracy principles was even more

egregious. The President (in the case of the PDP), the national chairman, and members of the National Working Committee, in collaboration with state governors, consistently hijacked the nomination of gubernatorial and national assembly candidates. For parties not holding power at the center, the NWC and the governor, especially the latter, almost single-handedly selected party flag bearers for general elections. This practice is a major culprit of intra-party crises. For example, the former governor of Rivers State, Barr. Chibuike Amaechi, clearly won the PDP's gubernatorial primaries held in early 2007 and received his certificate of return from the NWC. INEC witnessed and endorsed the process. However, the President, who is also the party leader, directed the outgoing governor, Dr. Peter Odili, to replace Amaechi based on unsubstantiated financial malfeasance allegations. Amaechi regained his candidacy through the Supreme Court, as the case was too clear to be manipulated by the judiciary.

It has become a norm in Nigerian politics for outgoing governors to anoint their political favorites to succeed them, disregarding the parties' constitutional provisions governing intra-party elections. In Bauchi State, this autocratic action forced Alhaji Isa Yuguda to leave the PDP for the ANPP, on whose platform he won the subsequent gubernatorial election, only to return to the PDP afterward.

In Benue State, the two leading gubernatorial candidates were once PDP members—a minister and a speaker of the House of Assembly. The former decamped to the APC when the outgoing governor, Barrister Gabriel Suswam, schemed him out of the PDP's nomination process. Ortom, who got elected under the APC, was indeed a leading member of the PDP a few months before the gubernatorial election. Currently, he is believed to be holding his position on borrowed time as the legal outcome appears almost predetermined. Yet, President Buhari of the APC is reportedly making efforts to save his seat, a scenario possible only in a system where the politician's personality significantly outweighs constitutional imperatives.

Ambivalence and contradictions define the constitutional orientation of Nigeria's political culture. Prominent political figures manage to get away with breaches of party and democratic processes due to the constitutional vulnerability to such actions. Nigerian parties are organized along caucus lines, granting undue

privileges to influential politicians. Once a person wins an election at any level—local, state, or federal—as the political chief executive, they automatically become the party leader, regardless of prior popularity. As the party leader, they exercise significant discretion, including initiating amendments to the party's constitution to suit their political preferences. The extant Nigerian constitution has an "immunity" clause that protects governors and their deputies, the president, and the vice president from legal prosecution on criminal charges while in office. This situation makes autocratic tendencies highly appealing. Potential party competitors are intimidated by the chief executive's privileges and often seek solace in opposition. The seven governors who defected from the PDP with over 40 national assembly members left the PDP due to President Jonathan's influence—a pattern replicated at the state level. The 1999 constitution conferred indefensible privileges to state governors, many of whom deployed these privileges to privatize democratic processes in their states. In the South East, numerous conflicts exist between state governors and leading politicians in their parties—examples include conflicts in Abia, Imo, Enugu, and Ebonyi states. These battles often culminate during election periods when the question of who picks the party's ticket arises.

A newspaper columnist notes the procedural and due process issues in Nigeria's party system:

> The reasons are greed, ego, power and above all, lack of internal democracy. All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) just patched up their differences because of the upcoming gubernatorial election in Anambra State (Eghosiube, 2013, p. 1).

Motivations for Defection: Beyond Ideology

While ideology can be a factor, the economic rationale behind defection in Nigeria appears significant. Omodia & Egwemi (2011) highlight the lack of strong party ideology as a key driver. Parties function more as vehicles for personal gain than platforms for policy advancement (Egure, 2020). This lack of ideological differentiation makes defection based on policy disagreements less frequent (Ojie et al., 2017).

Economic Incentives: A Central Motivator

A compelling argument within the economics of defection focuses on economic incentives. Politicians may be lured by promises of greater financial rewards and access to patronage networks within a new party (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). This economic calculus can be exacerbated by a lack of access to patronage within the original party, potentially leading to defection in pursuit of improved financial prospects (Egure, 2020). Corroborating this, Aderinoye (2022) finds a correlation between defection and increased access to government contracts for the defecting politician's associates.

Career Advancement: Beyond Financial Gain

Beyond financial gain, career advancement plays a significant role. Politicians frustrated with limited upward mobility within their original party might view defection as a strategic move to secure leadership positions or plum government appointments (Ojo, 2022). This highlights the potential for a self-reinforcing cycle: parties with high defection rates may struggle to attract and retain talented politicians, further hindering their internal development and attractiveness to voters (Ojie et al., 2017).

Ideological Disagreements: A Less Frequent Driver

While less frequent, ideological disagreements can also be a driver for defection. This is particularly true when a party's direction veers significantly from a politician's core beliefs (Egure, 2020). However, the high frequency of defection across the ideological spectrum in Nigeria suggests that economic factors often outweigh ideological considerations (Atu & Ite, 2022). Akpo (2023) supports this notion, finding limited evidence for principled defection based on policy differences in his study of Nigerian political defectors.

Consequences of Defection: A Multifaceted Impact

The economic and political consequences of defection in Nigeria are far-reaching and multifaceted.

Economic Impact

- Weakened Party Structures: Defection weakens political parties by hindering the development of clear and distinct policies for economic

development (Egure, 2020). Omodia & Egwemi (2011) argue that this lack of ideological coherence undermines the formulation and implementation of long-term economic development strategies.

- Investment Uncertainty: The frequent reshuffling of political allegiances creates uncertainty for businesses and investors. This discourages investment, potentially hindering economic growth (Mejia et al., 2020). Adenuga (2023) provides empirical evidence for this, demonstrating a negative correlation between defection rates and foreign direct investment in Nigeria.

Political Impact:

- Erosion of Trust: Defection fosters a culture of political opportunism, prioritizing personal gain over loyalty to constituents or party platforms (Ojo, 2022). This weakens the development of a strong opposition, hindering the crucial role of checks and balances within a democratic system (Egure, 2020). Adedoyin & Ojo (2022) find a significant decline in voter turnout in constituencies with high defection rates, suggesting a weakening of trust in the political process.
- Disengaged Electorate: The lack of party loyalty discourages voters from forming strong attachments to political parties, eroding trust in the democratic process (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). Voters become disillusioned with politicians who prioritize personal gain over party ideology and policy positions (Ojie et al., 2017). This disengagement can manifest in lower voter turnout and apathy towards elections (Adedoyin & Ojo, 2022).

Legal Framework on defection in Nigeria

The 1999 Constitution (as amended) expressly advanced anti-defection provision in sections 68(1)(g) and 109(g) so as to deter elected legislators from engaging in such, a crucial legislative measure aimed at maintaining political stability and party loyalty within the Nigerian legislature.

The constitutional provision stipulates that "A member of the Senate or of the House of Representatives shall vacate his seat in the House of which he is a member if – being a person whose election to the House was sponsored by a

political party, he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which that House was elected; Provided that his membership of the latter political party is not as a result of a division in the political party of which he was previously a member or of a merger of two or more political parties or factions by one of which he was previously sponsored" (LFN, 1999), embodying a strict legal framework to govern political defections among legislators.

However, in spite of the above provision of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) in section 68(1)(g), the law in section 68(2) introduces complexities that impede the immediate enforcement of section 68(1)(g), thereby creating loopholes that have been exploited by legislators to facilitate easy defections. The additional clause states that "The President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives, as the case may be, shall give effect to the provisions of subsection (1) of this section, so however that the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives or a member shall first present evidence satisfactory to the House concerned that any of the provisions of that subsection has become applicable in respect of that member" (LFN, 1999), thereby necessitating a cumbersome process for validating defection cases within the legislative chambers.

Consequently, the ambiguous language used in the law, particularly in section 68(1)(g), poses significant challenges and raises three critical issues of concern. Firstly, the phrase "as a result of a division in the political party" is open to interpretation and may inadvertently encourage defections rather than effectively controlling them, leading to a situation where politicians exploit perceived party divisions to justify their defections without demonstrating genuine efforts to resolve internal party conflicts through established mechanisms. Secondly, the practical impossibility for the leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives to declare the seats of defecting legislators vacant further complicates the enforcement of anti-defection measures, as defections in Nigeria predominantly occur from opposition parties to the ruling party, creating a political scenario where legislative leaders face constraints in implementing the constitutional provisions regarding defections.

On the basis of this therefore, it is crucial to introduce enhanced and more stringent measures aimed at facilitating the regulation of elected legislators' defections within the nation, mirroring the practices observed in several other nations. The primary objective here is not to outrightly prohibit defections but rather to establish mechanisms that effectively monitor and manage the tendency of elected legislators to frequently switch political affiliations, a phenomenon that has become increasingly prevalent in recent times.

As elucidated by Jinadu (2014), the Indian political system, for instance, deems a legislative seat vacant if an elected official decides to join another political party post the initial 6-month period, consequently facing disqualification from parliamentary service for renouncing their original party membership, regardless of the rationale behind such a decision. Similarly, countries like Namibia, Nepal, and Singapore have anti-defection provisions in place that mandate defectors to relinquish their parliamentary seats upon receiving notification from their respective political parties, signaling either the lawmaker's abandonment of the party or their expulsion/resignation from the party on whose ticket they were elected to parliament (LFN, 1999). In the context of Israel, the anti-defection regulations postpone the penalty for illegal defection until the subsequent election, where the defector is barred from participating in the electoral process for entry into the ensuing parliament. The implementation of such measures could potentially help mitigate this prevalent trend, especially considering the limited impact of existing regulations in addressing the issue adequately.

Findings

The quantitative data reveals a significant trend of defection in Nigeria's National Assembly. From 2003 to 2023, an average of 20% of legislators defect each electoral cycle. 2014-2015 Defections: Ahead of the 2015 general elections, several high-profile defections occurred. Notably, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar defected from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC). Many governors and legislators also switched to the APC, contributing to its victory in the presidential election.

Prior to the 2019 general elections, there was another wave of defections. Senate President Bukola Saraki and several senators defected from the APC back to the

PDP. These moves were partly in response to internal disputes within the APC. Several defections have continued, with notable figures like Governor Dave Umahi of Ebonyi State leaving the PDP for the APC, citing the need for more equitable development for his region.

Findings State that defection in Nigeria reveal a complex issue driven primarily by economic incentives and career advancement opportunities, with ideology playing a lesser role. This trend weakens political parties, hinders economic development, and disengages the electorate, posing a significant challenge to democratic consolidation.

- **Economic Motivations Trump Ideology**

Research by Omodia & Egwemi (2011) and Egure (2020) highlights the dominance of economic factors in defection. Politicians defect to parties offering greater financial rewards, access to patronage networks, and potentially, improved career prospects within the new party. Aderinoye (2022) strengthens this argument by finding a correlation between defection and increased access to government contracts for the defecting politician's associates.

The lack of strong party ideologies in Nigeria further amplifies the economic calculus behind defection (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). Parties function more as vehicles for personal gain than platforms for policy advancement, making defection based on policy disagreements less frequent (Ojie et al., 2017). While ideological disagreements can motivate defection, studies by Egure (2020) and Akpo (2023) suggest these instances are less common compared to the economic motivations.

- **Defection's Detrimental Impact**

The economic and political consequences of defection are far-reaching. Omodia & Egwemi (2011) and Egure (2020) argue that defection weakens political parties by hindering the development of clear and distinct economic policies. This lack of ideological coherence undermines the formulation and implementation of long-term economic development strategies. Adenuga (2023) further supports this notion by demonstrating a negative correlation between defection rates and foreign direct investment in Nigeria. The frequent reshuffling of political

allegiances creates uncertainty for businesses and investors, potentially hindering economic growth (Mejia et al., 2020).

Politically, defection erodes trust in the system and weakens the opposition by fostering a culture of political opportunism (Ojo, 2022; Egure, 2020). Voters become disillusioned with politicians who prioritize personal gain over party ideology and policy positions (Ojie et al., 2017). This disengagement can manifest in lower voter turnout and apathy towards elections, as evidenced by Adedoyin & Ojo (2022). Additionally, defection weakens the development of a strong opposition, hindering the crucial role of checks and balances within a democratic system (Egure, 2020).

- **A Vicious Cycle and the Need for Reform**

Ojie et al. (2017) suggest a vicious cycle emerges due to defection. High defection rates deter talented politicians from joining parties, further hindering their development and attractiveness to voters. This weakens the party's overall capacity and attractiveness to the electorate, potentially leading to further defections.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reinforce the economic rationale behind defection in Nigerian politics. Politicians prioritize personal gain over ideological consistency or loyalty to their constituents. This undermines the development of strong political parties with clear policy platforms, hindering the formulation and implementation of long-term economic development strategies. Furthermore, the frequent reshuffling of political allegiances creates uncertainty and discourages investment, potentially hindering economic growth.

However, the qualitative data also suggests a potential positive aspect. Some interviewees expressed hope that defection could lead to a more dynamic political landscape, with parties forced to compete for talent and adapt their platforms to attract voters. This could potentially lead to a more responsive and accountable political system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening Party Ideology:** Parties should develop clear and distinct ideologies that resonate with voters. This would make defection based on policy disagreements more credible and potentially beneficial for democratic competition.
- **Internal Party Reform:** Parties need to improve internal democracy, ensuring fair competition for positions and promoting a culture of loyalty and inclusion. This would reduce the incentive for defection based on career advancement.
- **Campaign Finance Reform:** Measures are needed to limit the influence of money in politics. This would reduce the allure of defecting to parties offering greater financial rewards.
- **Constitutional Review:** The constitution could be amended to introduce stricter rules on defection, such as requiring defecting legislators to relinquish their seats and face re-election under their new party banner. This would make defection a more politically costly decision.

Conclusion

Defection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic poses a significant challenge to democratic consolidation and economic development. The economic motivations behind defection weaken party structures, hinder policy implementation, and create political instability. However, fostering stronger party ideologies and internal reforms could potentially mitigate these negative effects. Ultimately, addressing the economics of defection requires a multi-pronged approach involving legislative reform, party modernization, and a shift in political culture towards prioritizing the national interest over personal gain.

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