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## Political Parties Defection and Good Governance in Nigeria: A Critique

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### Abstract

*This is an expository analysis of the phenomenon of defection as it is practiced in Nigeria by partisan politicians. The paper examines defection in contemporary era. Emphasis is laid on secondary data and analysis was routed in the Games and Functional theoretical models. The paper attempted classification of political defection and looked at defection as a characteristic of a non-mature parochial political culture which Nigeria depicts. The study also analysed and revealed that defection impacts negatively on good governance. It was recommended that the people should be re-oriented and politicians should be exposed to extensive socialisation process, coupled with the establishment of legal framework to control political defection and its associated vicissitudes like political instability and tension, which are both signs of poor governance system.*

**Key Words:** Political Defection, Good governance, Political Culture and Poor governance

## **BACKGROUND**

Political defection is a trend in contemporary Nigerian politics. It entails movement from one political party to another by party members. Defection as seen today was not rampant in the first, second and third republics politics of Nigerian society, neither was defection a political way of life among politicians in colonial Nigeria, and during the nationalists period where struggle for independence and self-governance was the focus of politicians. Contemporary political behaviour of Nigerian politicians shows massive and constant defection from party to party, mostly among elected politicians which is not prevalent in advanced societies as noted by Kamara (2012), that defection is outside the “wall of congress” and practiced by local politicians. This political defection which stabilised at a level of “constancy”, impact upon the body polity in terms of quality of governance. The yearning and aspiration of pursuing democracy is to have good governance. The impact of political defection on good governance in Nigeria, is the focus of this paper.

Good governance involves institutions of government carrying out public activities, by making and implementing decisions to the benefit of citizens and utilising public resources to the best benefit of all. It involves basic attributes like the existence of the rule of law, accountability, equity in utilisation, allocation and distribution of resources, consensus orientation, effectiveness and efficiency, responsiveness and transparency (United Nations Development Programme, 1997). The presence of these characteristics in anybody polity reveals the existence of good governance. The absence of these attributes posits the lack of good governance. This paper aims at establishing a link between political defection and good governance.

### Statement of the problem

The number of political defections in Nigeria between 2013 and 2018 is alarming. Politicians move out of a party and move back to the same party. Some keep moving from one party to another without returning to previous party. The direction of defection and the frequency of defection pose a serious danger to the sustenance of democracy and good governance as noted by Baffour (2018) as not being good for a nascent democracy like Nigeria.

### Schedule of Major Political Defections in Nigeria

S/N	Politicians	Party Defected from	Year	Parted Defected to	Remark
1	15 Senator	All Progressive Congress	24/7/18	Peoples Democratic Party	From ruling to opposition
2	32 House of Representative members	All Progressive Congress	24/7/18	Peoples Democratic Party	From ruling to opposition
3	4 House of Representative members	All Progressive Congress	24/7/18	African Democratic Congress	From ruling to opposition
4	5 Governors	People's Democratic Party	November 2013	All Progressive Congress	From ruling to opposition
5	3 Governors	All Progressive Congress	2018	Peoples Democratic Party	From ruling to opposition

**Sources:** Vanguard 24/7/18, Pulse Nigeria 24/7/18, Premium Times 20/5/13, Daily Post 1/8/18

The schedule above shows major defections in Nigeria between 2013 and 2018. Despite these major defections, others existed among deputy governors, State Assembly members, local government legislatives, other political office holders from federal to local government, like Ministers, Commissioners, Special Advisers and even elected and appointed political parties officials. This paper does not aim at providing occurrences of political defection in Nigeria chronologically, but looks at the effects of political defection especially on good governance.

What has been the impact of political defection on good governance, looking at the eight parameters of good government efficiency and effectiveness in decision making and service delivery, accountability, consensus orientation, responsiveness and transparency? Discussing and explaining the impact of political defection on good governance or otherwise in Nigeria is the sole focus of this paper.

The 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended provides in Section 68(1) thus:

“A member of the Senate or of the House of Representatives shall vacate his seat in the House of which he is a member if being a person whose election to the House was sponsored by a political party he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which that House was elected; provided that 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”.

This existing legal framework to control and regulate political party defection in Nigeria is weak to the extent of proviso above which permits defection on grounds of division in the party. Most politicians utilize this claim to support their defection. It is this situation and constitutional weakness that this paper examines to determine if it gives birth to the multiple political party defections in Nigeria.

### **Conceptualization of Political Defection**

Generally, defection is the process of abandoning a course, person or group to which someone has an obligation, allegiance or strong bond, to another. When politicians leave one party to another, it is considered as political defection. In politics, defection entails the act of switching loyalty from one party to another. In international politics, defection applies to act of changes in citizenship.

Political defection is the act of withdrawing allegiance from one political party and the transfer of such allegiance to another political party. Allegiance here involves duty, responsibility, loyalty and other ties. The politician who defects is seen as a defector. A defector is seen as a traitor, a saboteur by the party he or she is defecting from.

### **Types of Political Defection**

Though political defection dates back to 1880 when Liberal Party lost members of Parliament, Liberal National which emerged, eventually merged with Conservatives in the 1960s in United Kingdom (Wyburn-Powell, 2014). In India, defection politics started after the fourth general elections held in 1967 (Shubhangi, 2018). Despite the long existence of the phenomenon of political defection, there has been no serious attempt at its conceptualisation and classification in available literature. As political defection exists in present day Nigeria, the following can be clearly observed, namely: Individual defection, mass or group defection, spontaneous defection, legislative and executive defection and systematic defection.

*Individual defection* occurs when a particular person for whatever reason switches loyalty from one party to another. Mass or group defection is the opposite of individual defection. *Mass defection* involves many people or a group of politicians leaving a party at a particular time or in one event to another party which they automatically transfer their loyalty and allegiance to. The recent movement of fifteen Senators from All Progressive Congress to People's Democratic Party is an example of mass or group defection, while the movement of Senator Godswill Akpabio from People's Democratic Party to All Progressive Congress is an example of individual defection (Opejobi, 2018; Alechenuu and Ekpimah, 2018).

*Spontaneous political defection* refers to the process where politicians transfer allegiance from one party to another suddenly. Spontaneous defection is sudden and unplanned.

*Systematic political defection* on the other hand is well planned and strategized. Most of the current political defections like the recent movement of the Senate President, Senator Bukola Saraki, from APC to PDP is systematically planned and strategised. *Legislative defection* refers to the movement of a legislator currently serving as representative of a constituency in any legislative house, voted in, as a candidate of a particular party and moving to another party while still serving the term voted as a candidate of a party he or she is defecting from. The movement of Senators and House of Representative members also exemplify legislative defection. *Executive defection* is where a member of Executive branch of government defects to another party other than the party through which he was given the appointment. There is no watertight demarcation, but just an attempt at providing a classificatory scheme.

### **Causes of Defection**

There are many causes of defection. These causes even reveal whether associated defection will foster good governance or otherwise. Major causes of political defection include: financial inducement, political loyalty, sustenance of political structure, ego, marginalisation, ambition and its actualisation, low political culture, low level of political socialisation, and absence of legal framework to forestall defection.

- ***Financial Inducement:*** In a poverty driven society like Nigeria, where culture of poverty prevails and people are acting due to financial inducement and promises of appointment to break away from poverty. Defection is common. Financial inducement and promises of political position often gives birth to both individual and mass defection. When defection is due to inducement, it distorts governance process, as such people cannot perform efficiently, but are in public positions to satisfy their patrons.

- ***Political loyalty***: Politicians do defect as a result of ensuring political loyalty. For example, the defection of Senator Kwankaso from APC to PDP invoked his supporters to defect and follow him to PDP. Exhibition of loyalty is healthy in politics, provided the principal defector is acting objectively.
- ***Sustenance of political structure***: Some politicians defect from one party to another in order to remain in a particular group. Political structure represents power blocks, for instance recent movement of R-APC is a continuation of N-PDP block that previously defected from PDP to APC prior to 2015 election, and are now re-defecting back to PDP in anticipation of 2019 election.
- ***Marginalisation***; This is a major problem of multi-ethnic or plural societies, which Nigeria is one. It is not only ethno-linguistic or religious groups that may be marginalised, but political and interest groups may also suffer marginalisation, even individuals. This is one of the major reasons presented by R-APC as the reason why they have to defect from APC to PDP.
- ***Actualisation of ambition and ego***: The reason for defection may be in an attempt to actualise personal ambition. Some politicians defect from one party to another when they are not given ticket to contest a position; they cross to another party. For instance, when President Muhammadu Buhari in April 2018 declared his intention to re-contest in 2019 as President, strong members with presidential ambition like former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar defected to People's Democratic Party. Personal pride can also cause politicians to defect (Baffour, 2018), which is ego influenced.

- ***Low political culture and socialisation:*** Political culture refers to people's orientation towards the political system and their role in the system. In Nigeria, that is principally parochial, with low level of socialisation and awareness, people see themselves as political objects without consciousness of their rights. This situation increases the tendency to join the bandwagon. Thus defection from party A to B to C becomes the order of the day. In this situation, political defection symbolises a characteristic of parochial political culture. It is a mark of political immaturity.
- ***Absence of legal framework:*** This is one of the most important causes of defection, especially in Executive and Legislative defection. In countries like India where defection prevails in the 1980s, it is noted that when legislation was put in place, defection ended, especially among those holding positions elected or appointed on the basis of party membership (Shubhangi, 2018). Nigeria's constitution should be amended to put a clause that prevents defection. It should not be a matter of moral suasion. This will help to foster good governance.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Models**

This paper is an expository presentation. It attempts to provide deep knowledge of the independent variable being "political defection". It presents the significance of political defection on good governance in Nigeria. The researchers relied on secondary data from textbooks, newspapers, journals and other records. It also explores to bring out a deeper understanding of the dependent variable and demystify it.

Two major theories provide the framework for the expository discourse, namely Games Theory and Functional Theory. Games Theory is a model which explains strategic



decisions and logical action, with the aim of maximising payoff or benefits by participants. Politicians engaging in defection are seen as participants, acting to maximise their payoff in politics (political benefits), which may be appointment, elective/representative positions, etc. (Neumann and Morgenstein, 1944).

Functional theory is an outgrowth of general system theory. Merton (1936) pointed out that all part of the society has function to perform. Functionalism explains that society is a complex system whose parts work together to ensure its survival and stability. Merton (1936) identified manifest function which is expected consequence of action on society and latent function which is the unintended consequence. Some functions make for the sustenance of systems (eu-function) while other functions make for the destruction of system (dys-function).

### **A Discourse of Impact of Political Defection on Good Governance**

Good governance is critical to every society. Good governance is a desire and hope of the people. When there is good governance, citizens rejoice and live harmoniously with one another, but the absence of good governance brings distrust, hatred, corruption, wastage, lack of freedom, exploitation, marginalisation and brutality, which are anti-democratic. Good governance revealed the existence of democracy in any society. United Nations Development Programme (1997) identified characteristics of good governance to include: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and strategic vision. To understand the impact of political defection on good governance, it is pertinent to examine each indicator of good governance side by side political defection.

***Political defection and citizen participation:*** Good governance requires all men and women to have a voice in decisions affecting them. Politicians on the other hand argue that marginalisation is the cause of their defection. They claim to defect to political parties in which they will have a say. In this case, defection promotes good governance, as it fosters participation. But where politicians re-defect back to their former parties which they claimed did not guarantee their participation before proved that Nigerian parties do not promote participation of all and there is no internal democracy in political parties. A party without internal democracy can not give good governance to the society.

***Political Defection and Rule of law/equity:*** The principle of rule of law centers on the process of enforcing legal framework impartially ensuring human rights and guaranteeing freedom of individuals in accordance with the law. Politicians tendered political persecution as reason for defection, as it is contended with former governor of Akwa Ibom State defected from PDP to APC to escape prosecution by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), it does mean that defection performs dual function of protecting political allies from the law. In this case, defection undermined rule of law which is an indicator of good governance. Thus, political defection negates good governance.

***Political Defection and Transparency:*** This requires accessibility, free flow of information, access to institutions, understanding of governmental process and freedom by citizens to monitor public activities and goods. Where there are allegations that the party structure is not open to everybody, members defect because of dissatisfaction which indicates absence of transparency. Cyclical movement to and from political parties, is a clear indication of lack of transparency in all the parties; consequently, absence of good governance.

***Political Defection and Responsiveness and Consensus Orientation:*** When institutions and processes of public serve all stakeholders, there is responsiveness. The existence of general agreement, where interests are mediated, produces consensus. Political defectors claim that their inputs are not taken into consideration in decision making. Decisions are hijacked by cabals and government run by cabals cause defections. This situation is anti-good governance.

***Political Defection and Effectiveness, Efficiency/Accountability:*** the continuous and rampant defection hinders effectiveness and efficiency in governmental process. Current defection of National Assembly members caused delay in legislative scrutiny of 2018 supplementary budget and 2019 election budget. This delay is likely to bring governance to a halt if not resolved. The process of public accountability is distorted as public institutions are used as agent to fight or promote defection (being politicised).

***Political Defection and Strategic vision:*** Government spending time and resources to promote and fight defection is a deviation from good governance process. Resources are wasted, policy makers and implementers derail from focus. Legislators and executives loss their vision. Primary concern of all is to maintain strategic balance and control through political defection and management of defection.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Political defection is the current trend in Nigerian democratic experiment. Good governance is a goal and political desire yet to be achieved in Nigeria. Political defections in its various forms and manifestations negatively erode most of the indicators of good governance; where defection is beneficial in the short-run, it is negative in the long-run. Consequently,

political defection is seen as an impediment to good governance in Nigeria. Though defection provides avenue to escape marginalisation and absence of the rule of law, it must be checked for Nigeria to achieve good governance.

It is recommended that legal framework should be put in place to curtail executive and legislative defection in order to ensure stability in governance. Moral suasion alone cannot stop political defection which today in Nigeria is a political circle. Extensive socialization process should also be carried out by non-governmental organisations, mass media, social movements and governmental agencies like the National Orientation Agency, on the consequences of political defection in order to raise the level of political culture, and redirect political participation from defection in order to ensure good governance.

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