

**IMPACT OF POLITICAL CROSS-CARPETING ON POLITICAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA (1999-2023)**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **AUGUSTINE EKENEM** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**DATE**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This research work is dedicated to the Almighty God, Jehovah, for his mercies, guidance, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and benevolence and for preserving against all odds until the completion of this work.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

The political system of Nigeria has undergone significant transformation since the country's return to democratic governance in 1999. This period departed from years of military rule and political repression, ushering in a new era characterised by electoral politics, party competition, and a burgeoning civil society. The transition from military rule to civilian rule was the result of a bargain struck by an elite cabal over 1998 and 1999, following the death of the dictator Sani Abacha. As Nigeria navigated the complexities of democratization, various political dynamics emerged, one of which is the phenomenon of "cross-carpeting". The Nigerian democracy has witnessed a series of political defections in recent years with politicians moving from one political party to the other. This development, which is generally referred to as cross-carpeting, has been used interchangeably with concepts like party defection, party switching, floor-crossing, party-hopping, canoe-jumping, decamping, and party-jumping<sup>1</sup>. Cross-carpeting is a significant part of the political process and an international reality<sup>2</sup>. It is the act of changing party allegiance or moving from one political party to another<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, cross-carpeting is when politicians cross-carpert from one political party to another r due to numerous reasons such as personality clash, power tussles, crisis or division within a given party, disagreement on party's position on an issue, realization of one's political ambition, and divergent views on

the operations of a political party's philosophy or ideology<sup>4</sup>. Party defection is more present in the current democratic order more than any republics and no political party in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic that has not suffered from defection crises<sup>5</sup>. The trend has caught up with lawmakers [predominantly those in the House of Representatives], members of the House of Representatives and political parties fervently recruiting support to join their party, allowing their statutory duties of lawmaking and good governance to dwindle.<sup>6</sup> This has become a permanent feature of Nigeria's nascent democracy<sup>7</sup> although not an exclusive domain of Nigeria. The heightened wave of cross-carpeting at all levels of government is beginning to cause serious political tension, hostility and a source of concern among Nigerians. Defection or party-switching is where every elected party member in a legislative system such as a parliament embraces a different political or policy perspective which is not complementary to that of the party he or she represents<sup>8</sup>. Basically, the political actor defecting is dissatisfied with his/her former political party from which he/she is defecting from, without the defection necessarily reflecting any ideological bias. It should be noted that the phenomenon of cross-carpeting is no respecter of the age of a democracy. It occurs in both old and new democracies<sup>9</sup>. Issues have been cited as motivations behind party defection which includes; intra-party feud, selfish interest of the political class, deficient party ideology and internal democracy, leadership crisis amongst others<sup>10</sup>. However, the implications of this phenomenon extend beyond individual politicians. They have profound implications for political activism in

Nigeria. Political activism is defined as the organized efforts by individuals or groups to influence political outcomes or bring about social or political change through actions. Political activism often relies on trust and alignment with political parties that represent certain ideologies or causes. Political activism in Nigeria has a rich history, often rooted in social justice, anti-corruption, and the demand for good governance. Since the return to democracy, activism has evolved, reflecting citizens' frustrations and aspirations in response to political trends like cross-carpeting.

Under Nigeria's Fourth Republic, political activism has been deeply marked by politicians' fluid party identifications. Liberalizations of the party system that saw the registration of several parties, created an avenue for more political activities. Even though there was proliferation, not many remained significant, and some fought to become relevant. This is largely due to the persistent practice of cross-carpeting by political actors, who tend to switch from one party to another in pursuit of personal or political agendas. The pervasiveness of the practice has raised critical issues about its impact on the development of political activism in Nigeria. Specifically, it queries whether cross-carpeting solidifies or erodes political consciousness, grassroots mobilization, and issue-based politics. Addressing these questions is the primary objective of this study.

### **Aim of Objectives**

This study aims to examine the impact of political parties cross-carpeting on political activism development in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. The objectives include;

- i. To examine the historical evolution of cross-carpeting in Nigeria's Fourth Republic [1999-2023].
- ii. To investigate the factors motivating politicians to cross carpet and how the reasons influence public perception.
- iii. To explore the implications of cross-carpeting on citizens' political interest, participation, and activism.
- iv. To evaluate whether cross carpeting has strengthened or weakened political activism in Nigeria

### **Scope of Study**

This study will cover the impacts of political cross-carpeting on the development of political activism in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. The study covers Nigeria as a whole, analysing how cross carpeting has influenced political participation and activism across its different regions. The time frame, 1999 to 2023, is significant as it marks the return of democratic governance in the Fourth Republic, and it includes key political transitions and elections. The study will cover the evolution and motivations behind cross-carpeting and its impacts on citizens' trust, political engagement, and activism.

### **Research Methodology**

The method of writing this study will be historical. The study relied on data from primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources: The primary sources that will be used in the course of the research will be oral interviews. Oral interviews will be conducted with politicians, party officials, political analysts and scholars, journalists, media professionals, ordinary citizens, and voters.

Secondary source: Secondary sources used will be sourced from John Harris Library, University of Benin, Benin City. They include textbooks, journals, articles, and newspaper bulletins. Some of these may also be gotten from the internet. The information obtained from these sources will be to guide and supplement the materials obtained from the primary sources.

### **Literature Review**

To achieve the outlined research objectives of this study, relevant literature on the impact of political parties and cross-carpeting on political activism in Nigeria is reviewed. They include the following:

Olu Awofeso and Paul A. Irabor, work titled “Party Cross-Carpeting in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Cases and Causes<sup>11</sup>”. These authors' work is an exploratory study that focuses on party cross-carpeting in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria, identifying factors like ethnic and religious considerations, intra-party disagreements, self-interest, and weak party ideologies as primary drivers. The authors argue that indiscipline and lack of clear ideological foundations within political parties significantly contribute to the prevalence of cross-carpeting. While their work recognizes the destabilization caused by defections and recommends greater party

discipline, it does not address the influence of cross-carpeting on political activism. Their research focuses on political elites rather than mass participation and does not involve a consideration of changing patterns of defection over time or across space. My work, however, specifically analyses the impact of cross-carpeting on political activism development. Rather than focusing solely on politicians' intentions and consequences, my study will analyze defections' effects on grassroots political activism, voters' enthusiasm, and overall well-being of political activism in Nigeria. Based on an evaluation of records between 1999 and 2023, my research will follow how cross-carpeting has shaped political activism over the years, establishing if it has strengthened or weakened activist movements and citizens' involvement in governance. In addition, my study will investigate whether cross-carpeting is a cause of political apathy or induces new forms of activism, such as youth movements and civil society responses to party defections. However, I will be exploring how cross-carpeting influences political activism, particularly its impact on voter participation, activist groups and the general political awareness of the people.

political activism. The work also overlooks how defections influence voter trust, activism strategies, and long-term democracy. Also, weak laws allowing cross-carpeting without consequences are mentioned but not deeply analyzed. My research, however, addresses how cross carpeting impacts activism, voter participation and democracy and suggests ways to strengthen party loyalty and accountability.

Michael. B Aleyomi, work titled “Election and Politics of Party Defection in Nigeria: A Cue from Kogi State<sup>12</sup>”. The author examines the Nigerian political party defection phenomenon in the context of Kogi State. He aims to examine why politicians switch parties and its effects on democracy building. The author argues that while party switching per se is not necessarily a bad thing, the prevalence in Nigeria undermines accountability, representation, governance, and what it means to be democratic. Also, the author emphasizes the necessity of robust and trustworthy opposition to establish a pluralist political regime, which is crucial to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, specifically in Kogi State. The author’s work dwells on the period surrounding the May 4, 2013, Kogi State local government elections. As Nigeria's political landscape evolves constantly, switching parties must be analyzed in relatively more recent scenarios to discover trending dynamics and directions. In addition, the study is targeted at Kogi State only. While this is an in-depth analysis for the region, it could be unable to capture the broad national patterns of party jumps in Nigeria's diverse political environments. Lastly, while the study takes into account the causes of defections, it has very little analysis of the individual, economic, and ideological factors behind individual politicians' party jumps. My research will expand on the author’s work by expanding its time scale to cover party defections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, allowing for a longer-term analysis of evolving trends over time. In contrast to the focus on Kogi State, my project will examine defections in numerous states and geopolitical zones, taking a broader national perspective. Furthermore,

while the author reveals the implications of defections, my study will further explore underlying reasons, including personal, economic, and ideological motivations, why politicians defect. Lastly, my research will assess the impact of cross-carpeting on Nigeria's democratic processes in the areas of party stability, trust of voters, and policy continuity, which gives a more rounded view of the phenomenon.

B.T Badejo & N.G, Obah-Akpowoghagha, work titled “The Impact of Cross Carpeting and Multiplicity of Political Parties in Nigerian Democratic Process<sup>13</sup>”. seeks to examine the effect of the multiplicity of political parties and the prevalent practice of cross-carpeting (party-switching) on Nigeria's democratic development. The authors note that since Nigeria's democratic return in 1999, the emergence of various political parties has been a blessing of democratic progress and also a source of concern. The authors argue that a multiparty democracy can enhance democratic choice, but the excess of parties, without separating ideological differences, leads to instability and fragmentation. This environment facilitates cross-carpeting, where there is party-switching for selfish motives rather than ideological reasons, to the detriment of the integrity of the democratic process.

This study outlines several factors for the masked growth in the number of parties, as well as for the widespread occurrence of switching parties among their members. The author argues that these factors have led to political instability, which is expressed in new parties being formed by disgruntled members, the exit of powerful leaders of parties, and an increase in feelings of alienation among citizens. Such factors greatly

hinder Nigeria's democracy from progressing. The work reflects on how too many political parties and cross-carpeting influence Nigeria's democracy but not their effect on political activism and voting participation. It addresses politicians' but not voters' responses to party switching. Also, the work does not take seriously weak institutions permitting frequent defections and long-term consequences for democracy. This study bridges these gaps by examining how cross carpeting affects activism, voters' confidence and democratic stability and also making suggestions on how party discipline can be enhanced.

Ehiyamen Osezua & Omodunbi Olumidem, work titled "Cross-Carpeting and Party Alignment: Obstacles to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria<sup>14</sup>". The authors of this work examine cross-carpeting's effects on Nigeria's political system. They also emphasize how frequent party switching erodes democratic consolidation and presents politicians as self-serving. This work highlights how cross carpeting damages politicians' reputations, but it skips over how it impacts voter engagement and trust. By examining the connection between voter behavior and cross-carpeting, my research analyzes how party defections affect public confidence and political participation.

Olaolu S. Opadere & Julius O. Agbana, work titled "Cross-Carpeting in Nigerian Politics: Some Legal and Moral Issues<sup>15</sup>". The work explores the moral and legal ramifications of cross carpeting in Nigeria, emphasizing how indiscriminate political defections cast doubt on the moral principles of public servants and the laws

regulating party loyalty. The work doesn't examine how cross-carpeting impacts public trust in the political system; instead, it concentrates on the moral and legal considerations. This research will examine how political defections affect public confidence by examining legal ambiguities and politicians' alleged moral flaws that fuel voter skepticism and disinterest.

Moses M. Adagbabiri & Philips O. Okolo, article titled "Cross Carpeting and the Challenges to Democratic Culture and Political Stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic<sup>16</sup>". The article uses a cross-sectional research design, and data were collected from 300 respondents in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The authors' analysis reveals that cross carpeting negatively and significantly impacts democratic culture and political stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study enumerates some of the causes of cross carpeting, which are lack of internal democracy, ideology differences, lack of party discipline, get-rich-quick syndrome, unresolved differences, government financial grants, multi-party ethnicity, and political makings<sup>17</sup>. The defections are said to retard the development of stable opposition parties and thus erode democratic culture and encourage political instability. The authors suggest that parties develop clear-cut ideologies, programmes, and policies to guide party members and dissuade cross carpeting. In as much as the research establishes a connection of cross carpeting with political stability and democratic culture, it is silent on the impact that these defections have on the quality of governance and policy continuity. My research aims to fill this gap by looking

into how cross carpeting influences political activism development in Nigeria. Specifically, my research will explore whether such defections demoralize grassroots activists and supporters, leading to political apathy, or whether they galvanize political engagement and realignment in new and innovative ways. By focusing on the period 1999-2023, my research will also provide a comprehensive explanation of the manners in which cross carpeting has affected political activism over time, with discussion of what this bodes for democratic participation and consolidation in Nigeria.

Edet, L.I. article titled “Politics of Defection and its Implications on Nigeria's Democracy<sup>18</sup>”. The author discusses how recurring defections have led to political instability in Nigeria. To him, cross carpeting is associated with political instability, abandonment of democratic principles, and weak institutional foundations by the study. The author argues that Nigeria's laws against defection are a failure as politicians use constitutional loopholes to defect with impunity. The study fails to compare Nigeria's cross carpeting law to other democracies, which would be useful in suggesting better models. It fails to quantify voters' perception of political defections, which is an important aspect of democratic culture research. It fails to test media framing of party defection and its implications for public trust in democracy. My study however, can compare Nigeria's defection legislation with others to spotlight possible reforms. I can carry out surveys on voter attitudes towards political defections in order to value how they shape democratic involvement.

Ogundiya, I. S.” Party Switching and Defection in Nigeria: Implications for Democratic Consolidation<sup>19</sup>”. The author opines that party switching demobilizes opposition parties and weakens electoral competition. The study believes that democracy hinges on a strong opposition, and constant defections undermine the balance. The study does not research whether defections lead to policy change when politicians defect. Your study will look at whether defections lead to policy change when politicians defect from one party to another. I will analyze voter response towards defectors over various election cycles. My research will examine the implications of defections on party discipline and cohesion. It does not look at whether defector politicians are punished by voters in subsequent elections. There is minimal analysis on the effect of cross-carpeting on party discipline.

Nwanegbo, J., Odigbo, J. & Nnorom, K. work titled “Party Defection and Sustenance of Nigerian Democracy<sup>20</sup>.” The study is concerned with the ways in which party defections are weakening Nigeria's democracy by reducing political stability and promoting political opportunism. It is to the authors that party defections have been a tradition in Nigeria for a long time, in most instances occurring when politicians seek nominations or seats in more progressive parties. Specifically, the new trend is for ruling party members to switch to opposition parties between election cycles, which points to deeper inherent issues within party systems. It highlights the reality that the lack of ideology among Nigerian parties precipitates more defections because politicians have no such solid principles to hold them to a

party. The study does not analyze cross carpeting in the context of political realignments, such as coalition formations.

It does not examine how economic conditions influence defections (i.e., whether recessions lead to more defections).

There is no examination of how defections influence legislative effectiveness in Nigeria's National Assembly. My research can measure whether defections are precipitating meaningful political realignments or are merely opportunistic.

By examining economic conditions, you can determine if economic factors are involved in politicians' defections. My study can analyze whether defections destabilize legislative functions and policy implementation.

Robinson, F., work titled “Cross Carpeting; Not a Crime”<sup>21</sup>. The author of this work examines cross-carpeting as a legitimate aspect of Nigerian democracy rather than an anomaly or an offence. To the author, cross-carpeting is not a crime in Nigerian politics because there is nothing ideologically distinct in the manifestos of all Nigerian parties. In his words:

*“The word “cross carpeting” in politics can only be relevant in a situation where parties have distinct ideologies and manifestos. Every one joins a party where his interest can be better served. Why should one continue to remain in a party that does not have his interest at heart? Political parties in Nigeria are not driven by any ideology other than making money. They all claim to be democratic just to deceive the public. Yes majority carries the vote, but must it be a majority made up of zombies*

*or illiterates? It is obvious that one cannot play honest party politics in Nigeria unless he is ready to discard some principles that may not go well with his party. Unfortunately, there are some principles one cannot part with, even after becoming a member of a political party. One may have decided not to lie or be involved in rigging elections. How can one accept that because he decided to be involved in partisan politics he must descend to the lowest social, educational and intellectual level to be relevant?"* <sup>22</sup>.

The study shows that while cross-carpeting is condemned for being in favor of political opportunism and instability, it is not explicitly criminalized under Nigerian law. The author further argues that politicians cross-carpet because of shifting political allegiances, internal party conflicts, and ideological realignments. However, the study does not comprehensively address the root systemic determinants of recurring defections such as the absence of robust ideological foundations of political parties, 'winner-takes-all' politics, and political incentives' contribution to causing defections. The study also does not fully investigate the cross-carpeting patterns at the regional and temporal scales or the contributions of media and social media towards sensationalizing defections and shaping public opinion.

My research tries to fill these gaps by providing a broader analysis of cross-carpeting in Nigeria between 1999 and 2023. In contrast to Robinson's, which is also more biased towards political and legal explanations, my research will examine reasons for defection, including incompatibility of ideologies, politicking or survival mechanisms,

and personal agendas. Furthermore, my study will examine the spatial spread, timing, and media coverage of cross-carpeting and shed more light on its implications for democratic development and political activism in Nigeria.

## **Chapterization**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This chapter comprises the blueprint of the entire research work. This chapter covers the introduction of the research, aim and objectives, scope of the study, methodology, literature review and endnote

### **CHAPTER TWO**

#### **EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL CROSS-CARPETING IN NIGERIA**

This chapter will focus on the origin and development of cross-carpeting in Nigeria's political system, beginning with the period of military rule. It will explore how cross-carpeting has been a feature of Nigerian politics and discuss key events, political figures, and shifts in party allegiance. It will also analyze how cross carpeting evolved in the fourth Republic (1999 to 2023) and its increasing prominence over time.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **PATTERNS AND MOTIVATIONS OF CROSS-CARPETING IN NIGERIA FROM 1999 to 2023.**

This chapter will explore the reasons behind political cross carpeting. It will examine the patterns of cross-carpeting, such as the timing of defections and regions or political groups most affected. It will also analyze the role of media and social media in facilitating or amplifying cross-carpeting in behaviour.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

##### **THE IMPACT OF CROSS-CARPET BEHAVIORING ON POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN NIGERIA**

This chapter will examine the consequences of cross-carpeting on political engagement and activism in Nigeria. It will assess how part defection influences citizen trust, political participation, and public opinion.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

##### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter gives a general overview of the entire research work. The chapter also identifies the contributions of knowledge to the study

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL CROSS-CARPETING IN NIGERIA**

#### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of cross-carpeting, which refers to the migration of politicians from one political party to another has emerged as a recurrent characteristic of the political landscape in Nigeria. Although this phenomenon, also referred to as political defection or party switching, is not new, its current ubiquity and effects demand careful examination. This chapter examines the historical evolution of cross carpeting in Nigerian political parties, tracking its path from the early phases of party politics in the first republic to the current fourth republic. Examining the historical backdrop, this chapter will provide a better understanding of the underlying reasons, the motivations of the people involved, and the ramifications for Nigeria's political system.

#### **Cross-Carpeting in Pre-Independence Nigeria**

The origin of party defection in Nigeria can be linked to the formation of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) which was formed out of the Lagos Youth Movement in 1939 as an open party with national outlook and spread<sup>1</sup>. The party charter preferably acts in bringing together numerous ethnic communities of Nigeria, elevating their

collective awareness and establishing branches in the Eastern, Western and Northern part of Nigeria. Unfortunately the idea was shattered because, in 1941 the national character spirit succumbed to the ethnic pressures when Samuel Akinsanya and the Ijebu Yoruba withdrew from the movement for the sole reason that the non Ijebu-Yoruba and other ethnic groups, predominantly the Igbos, backed the victorious candidacy of an Ijaw, Ernest Ikoli, to the vacant seat in the Legislative Council over that of Akinsanya<sup>2</sup>. The incensed Eastern and Southern wings of the party that had sympathized with Ikoli were indignant at this display of ethnic chauvinism; in defiance of the party's cosmopolitan manifesto and thus persuaded Nnamdi Azikiwe to create a new political platform. The great Zik rose to the challenge by joining forces with Herbert Macaulay to form the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC)<sup>3</sup>. The most salient case of political porting in pre-independence Nigeria, which is notoriously christened as “the most celebrated” floor crossing escapade occurred in 1951<sup>4</sup>.

In 1951, those of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) defected to the Action Group (AG) during the Western Regional House of Assembly.

*“This was the most celebrated cross-carpet episode in Nigeria. The Yoruba members of the National Council for Nigerian and the Cameroon (NCNC) were lobbied to cross over to the Action Group (AG) to stop Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man, from becoming the premier of Western Region. When the House met, there was a red carpet, and the speaker’s bench was in the centre; the government side was on the*

*right whereas the opposition bench was on the left side. The NCNC, the majority party occupying the government side, had the red carpet separating them from the opposition. The Governor was then the Speaker or the Chairman of the House. He took his seat. Chief Awolowo got up and announced that he had a matter of urgency to raise in order to forestall a situation that could lead to riots and anarchy, and which many members of the House had decided to correct. One of the NCNC members got up and remarked “Your Excellency, I do not want to be part of a situation where Yorubaland would be set on fire”. So I am crossing over to the other side. Consequently, the gentleman crossed over to AG on the floor of the Western House of Assembly<sup>5</sup>”*

The drive for this change was almost entirely ethno-political, in the sense that the Yoruba components of the National Council for Nigerian and the Cameroon (NCNC) were being wooed to switch their loyalty to the Action Group (AG) so that Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man, would not be made the premier of Western Region. This consequently robbed Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe the chance to lead the government's business of Western Nigeria<sup>6</sup>. When the House sat, there was a red carpet, and the speaker's bench was in the center; the government side was on the right while the opposition bench was on the left side. The NCNC, the majority party that occupied the government side, had the red carpet to distance them from the opposition. The Governor was then the Speaker or the Chairman of the House. He took his seat. Chief Awolowo stood up and informed the House that he had an item of

urgency to present to the House in an attempt to prevent a situation that would lead to riots and anarchy, and which most members of the House had vowed to correct. One of the NCNC members got up and remarked “Your Excellency, I do not want to be part of a situation where Yorubaland would be set on fire. So I am crossing over to the other side”<sup>7</sup>. On this account, the gentleman cut over to AG on the floor of the Western House of Assembly. In these elections, the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, gained 37 seats, while the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe won 42 out of a total number of 80 seats in the regional assembly, leaving Azikiwe with a high chance to be the head of government. However, within 24 hours, 20 of its members decamped to AG under the pressure from Chief Obafem Awolowo.<sup>8</sup> It was Awolowo who persuaded some of the Yoruba elected members on the NCNC platform to cross-carpet in the House and merge with the AG, in order to deny Azikiwe the premiership, at the expense of Awolowo.<sup>9</sup> Azikiwe had succeeded in leadership of the NCNC after the death of Herbert Macaulay. It would not have been possible for carpet crossing had Macaulay a Yoruba man, and not Azikiwe was elected Premier of Western Region in 1951 on the NCNC ticket. As a result of this apparent infusion of ethnic rivalry into Nigerian politics, Azikiwe was compelled to “return home” to the East where he became the premier of the government.<sup>10</sup> The political history of Nigeria cannot be fully accounted for without recourse has been accomplished by this dangerous precedent, which set the stage for the development of Nigerian politics built on regional and

ethnic competition as well as the crisis and instability that followed afterward. These conditions gave birth to an increase in the spread of the number of ethnic based political parties in the country till today<sup>11</sup>. That was essentially how, in practical terms, the evolution of the term "cross-carpeting" became part of Nigeria's political landscape and has remained so to date, thereby reducing politics in Nigeria to a lamentable tribal level.

### **Cross Carpating in the First Republic (1960-1966)**

The First Republic of Nigeria (1960-1966) was a multiparty system where numerous political parties competed for power. This period was marked by large-scale cross-carpeting by politicians, which were predominantly driven by ethnic affiliation and religious preferences<sup>12</sup>. In the First Republic (1960-1966), personality battles between members and factions of the parties' leadership tended to have a significant influence on cross-carpeting among Nigerian party members. One of the most significant was the conflict between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Ladoke Akintola that led to the division in the Action Group (AG). Akintola, the Premier of the Western Region at the time, and Awolowo, the AG leader, had differences regarding the party's strategic alliances at the national level. During this period also, S L Akintola defected to the Action Group for more of what may be described as personality clash and principles, capped by his desire to lead his people to the mainstream<sup>13</sup>. To this event, Awolowo preferred a coalition with the Eastern-based United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), Akintola preferred being in coalition with the Northern-dominated

Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). The disagreement led to Akintola's defection from the AG and the formation of the United Progressive Party (UPP), which aligned with the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) to become the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). It could perhaps be argued that the bitter fight that took place between the two statesmen and their respective supporters throughout the early '60's led to fragmentation within the Action Group and its eventual splitting into separate and distinct parties and the unrestrained brutal violence which was wrecked by both sides against one another resulted directly to the first coup d'état of January 15th 1966<sup>14</sup>.

Even within the political faction of Azikiwe, Dr. K. O. Mbadiwe defected from the NCNC to form his own political party, the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) in the 50s because of his disagreement with party leaders<sup>15</sup>. This led to Mbadiwe's formation of the Democratic Party of Nigeria Citizens (DPNC), which sought a working relationship with the Action Group at the Federal Elections in 1959<sup>16</sup>. His defection was a reflection of broader tensions within the NCNC, as internal factionalism and leadership ambitions eroded party cohesion. The political alignments of the First Republic were thus characterized by these high-profile defections, which were more driven by ambition and convenience realignments than by ideological differences. The tendency of politicians cross-carpeting as a result of factional disagreements rather than ideological convictions set a precedent for future political instability in Nigeria.

### **Cross-Carpeting in the Second Republic (1979-1983)**

The second republic spanning from between 1979-1983, signified Nigeria's return to civilian governance following an extended period of military rule. With party politics coming back into prominence, cross-carpeting emerged as a prominent characteristic as politicians looked for tactical alliances to preserve or increase their political clout. This period witnessed its own share of defections by aggrieved members of the parties.

One of the most prominent defectors was Chief Akin Omoboriowo from the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) to contest as the Ondo State gubernatorial candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the 1983 election, along with his supporters including Chief Fagbamigbe<sup>17</sup>. His defection triggered large-scale political violence in Ondo State, as the NPN attempted to secure victory through manipulation of the elections, mass rigging, and tampering with election results. This event converted the State into a theatre of political violence because of the desperate action taken by the NPN to capture the gubernatorial election at all cost through massive rigging and falsification of election results<sup>18</sup>.

Similarly, during this period, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi defected from his initial political party, the People's Redemption Party (PRP) which was under the leadership of Aminu Kano in a bid to seek re-election under a new political alliance, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), which eventually he later lost to the PRP governorship candidate in the election<sup>19</sup>. Rimi's defection illustrated the factionalism within the

PRP, which had been founded by Aminu Kano as a leftist alternative to the dominant parties of the era.

Apart from individual defections, there were also broader realignments during the Second Republic. Some of those prominent political players who reassessed their political loyalties and defected to the NPN were Adisa Oladosu Akintola, Anthony Enahoro, Richard Akinjide, and S.G. Ikoku—all one-time loyalists of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the UPN. This pattern of defection weakened the UPN's fortunes and boosted the NPN's dominance. In addition, the misunderstanding between the Nigerian People's Party and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, who was a founding member of the party, forced the latter to guide a group of minorities in the northern part of Nigeria and a section of southerners in the formation of the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP)<sup>20</sup>. The defections within the Second Republic revealed the absence of deeply held ideological commitments on the part of politicians because party-switching was more often than not motivated by personal ambition, electoral advantage, and access to power and not by disagreements. But in the end, political unrest and growing party rivalry led to the second republic's downfall, which prompted yet another military coup on December 31, 1983, which brought about general Mohammadu Buhari to power and also the collapse of the second republic.

### **Cross-Carpeting in the Third Republic (1992-1993)**

Cross carpeting in the third republic (1992-1993) was a brief foray into civilian rule under General Ibrahim Babangida's transition program. The third republic was

aborted by the same military that birthed it and saw the consolidation of two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) with changing ideological plumes – “a little to the left and a little to the right” as they were identified<sup>21</sup>. Since both parties were founded by the military, many politicians joined for political reasons rather than doctrine.

While the republic was cut short before it could reach maturity, political maneuvering and initial signs of defection were evident. It was clear to political observers that the republic would have caused more drama of defection if it had survived for another election term, as some political figures of the NRC were already admiring Moshood Abiola, the presumptive winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election that was cancelled by the then military president, General Ibrahim Babangida<sup>22</sup>. This change meant that if the republic had survived for another term, there would have been enormous defections which would have likely taken place, particularly among those who were yearning for political survival in a power-grabbing atmosphere. The third republic was called the “Abiola Republic”<sup>23</sup>.

Politicians whose parties had lost governorship elections in various states were already dickering in the background, forming alliances, and plotting to defect to the winning party in their respective states in anticipation of accruing future political gains. The growth of money politics and patronage equally characterized the political loyalty dynamics at this period. Since all government office-holders use the state power for that purpose, cross-carpeting or defection becomes unavoidable from this

process, since the state is now a "means of production" and a "means of primitive accumulation"<sup>24</sup>.

Although fewer cases of sheer defections were witnessed due to the premature collapse of the republic, political pressures indicated that the country was on the verge of witnessing large-scale party-switching.

The annulment of the June 12 election prevented it from occurring on such a scale. Nonetheless, the basis of political opportunism and cross-carpeting established at this time would manifest more strongly in the Fourth Republic, where political defection would become a defining characteristic of Nigeria's democratic culture.

### **Cross Carpeting in the Fourth Republic (1999-2023)**

Since the re-inauguration of democratic governance on 29th May, 1999, the roll call of decamping has been rewritten, consciously or involuntarily : from smaller parties to larger and stronger ones; and from a losing party to the ruling party<sup>25</sup>. This period was re-introduced , after a military interregnum that lasted for about 16 years. The trend (that is defection) appeared more distinct on ideological ground, the nature of formation and decamping up to the set of parties between 1979 and 1983<sup>26</sup>. The 1979 National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was a shadow of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) of old; Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) like the NCNC before it; Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) like the Action Group (AG) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) wearing the cloak of Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) of the past, the three dominant parties birthed the old order of parties in the First Republic<sup>27</sup>.

The Fourth Republic saw the dethronement of morality, integrity and rule of law to political prostitution. The political institution was brought to a system of mockery, disrupted

an atmosphere characterized by anarchy. Self-control and service to the common good are substituted by indiscipline, self aggrandizement, and caution was thrown to the wind. Rather the legislatures and party leaders moved back and forward any hopeful or promising political party, while placing their individual benefits at the center of the movement. Party consolidation was negotiated for personal benefits like automatic ticket for a role of one's choice, especially to high-profile elites and personalities. The socio-economic development of the polity was cast into the sea for personal benefits and satisfaction.

The Fourth Republic has been the most unstable in terms of political defections, with cross-carpeting becoming the rule rather than the exception. Unlike previous republics when ideology had some influence on party membership, the Fourth Republic has been marked by political opportunism, personal ambition, and access to state power. In contrast to earlier republics where cross carpeting occasionally resulted in serious political instability, defections have been common in this era but have had less dramatic effects.

One of the predominant reasons for this era of defections has been poor party discipline and stable bases of ideology. Political parties of the Fourth Republic, primarily as a result of the military's decree, have experienced internal failures to

cohere and have had recurrent cases of factional crisis instead. Political party members have been inclined more towards their affection for charismatic party leaders than the party structures. This has led to instances of godfathers taking matters into their own hands, dominated party politics. In the All Progressive Congress for example, it is taken for granted that Bola Ahmed Tinubu, party National Leader directs and dictates the actions of the party affairs<sup>28</sup>.

One of the earliest instances of cross-carpeting was that of Chief Evan Enwerem's 1999 defection to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), after losing the gubernatorial primaries in the All People's Party (APP) in Imo State in 1999. His cross carpeting proved fruitful as he was elected the Senate President<sup>29</sup>. This illustrated how party loyalty was frequently determined by political survival. Similarly, Alhaji Alhassan Shaibu defected from the APP to the PDP in Plateau State, in 1999. He is currently one of the most important members of the Northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC). Also, in Cross River State, not less than seven prominent APP and AD members have cross-carpeted to the PDP so that today, Cross River State is PDP state in all ways<sup>30</sup>. The pattern of defections throughout the early years of the Fourth Republic was predominantly one-way, with politicians flocking into the PDP, which dominated Nigeria's political landscape for over a decade.

Another notable, yet controversial defection under the Obasanjo Fourth Republic was that of Former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. He was a founding member of PDP, who left the party after he had won the ticket on the platform of PDP, for the

Action Congress in 2006, following his internal political conflicts with president Olusegun Obasanjo. This later became an issue of litigation up to the Nigerian Supreme Court<sup>31</sup>. In 2007, under AC, he ran for president, but was defeated by the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. He rejoined the PDP in 2009 and ran for presidential primaries a few months to the 2011 general election, but President Goodluck Jonathan defeated him. With this, Atiku is said to be among the highest political defectors in Nigeria.

Defections in the Fourth Republic have not only involved state politicians and governors but also a common trend among members of the National Assembly. Senators, House representatives, and state house legislators have consistently defected and switched parties, sometimes for individual political advantage. Defections of these senators and representatives started in earnest after 2007, and has resulted in the change in the legislative balance of power. Some of the most compelling examples were the cross-carpeting of six senators who had run on the ANPP, Accord Party (AP), and Action Congress (AC) tickets but joined the PDP. They include Senators Sali Godwin(AC, Plateau state), Patrick Osakwe (AP, Delta state), Patricia Akawasike, (ANPP, Nasarawa state) and Sa'di Yauo (ANPP, Zamfara state)<sup>32</sup>. By the close of that parliamentary session, at least 13 senators and 15 members of the House of Representatives had defected to the PDP<sup>33</sup>.

Before Atiku's defection, Ondo and Edo States witnessed cross-carpeting of members of the opposition parties to the party of the incumbent governor. Edo State

experienced a massive defection of members of the PDP to the AC, which is the Governor's party<sup>34</sup>. Edo State witnessed the en masse defection of members of the PDP into the AC, the Governor's party, while in the case of Ondo state, there was an en masse political cross-carpet movement of members of the PDP into the Labour Party (LP) of which the incumbent governor is a member. In these two trends, cross-carpeting was as a result of political wars and in-fighting. There were other cases of defection to PDP, the ruling party. Firstly, was that of incumbent governor of Bauchi State, Isa Yaguda who was winner of the governorship election on the platform of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), but defected to the PDP in company with a massive number of his supporters<sup>35</sup>. Others include the Imo State incumbent governor, Ikedi Ohakim, who contested and won the governorship election on the platform of the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA) but eventually defected to the PDP, Aliyu Shinkafi of Zamfara State (ANPP) and Saminu Turaki of Jigawa state (ANPP) who all defected to PDP<sup>36</sup>.

Political cross-carpeting took a dramatic turn by 2013 with the formation of All Progressive Congress (APC) through the merging of four political parties- Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) - formed solely to gain more supporters over the Peoples Democratic Party in the run up to the 2015 general elections, which also coincide with the formation of New PDP (led by a former leader of the party, Kawu Baraje)<sup>37</sup>. This led to the defection of five

governors-Murtal Nyako (Adamawa); Abdulfatah Ahmed (Kwara), Rabiu Kwankwaso (Kano), Aliyu Wammako, (Sokoto) and Chibuike Amechi (Rivers), to the APC ahead of the 2015 general elections<sup>38</sup>. They were followed closely by the defection to the APC is the governor of Imo State, Rochas Okorochoa, from the All Progressive Grand Alliance and the eleven PDP senators; Senator Bukola Saraki (Kwara Central), Umaru Dahiru (Sokoto South), Magnus Ngei (Rivers South), Wilson Asinobi (Rivers West), Bindawa Muhammed (Gombe Central), Aisha Jummai (Taraba North), Mohammed Ali (Borno South), Mohammed Shaba (Kwara North), Abdulahi Adamu (Nasarawa West) and Ibrahim Abdullahi (Sokoto East), and thirty-seven members of the House of Representatives who cross-carpeted from the PDP to APC<sup>39</sup>. Also, at this time, several legislators defected in the parliament , including Abdulahi Balaraba (Sokoto State), Abudumin Jibrin (Kano State), Ali Ahumed (Kwara State), Alhassan Garba (Kano State), Aliyu Pategi (Kwara State), Ahmed Zerewa, Aishatu Ahmed (Adamawa State) Aiyedun Olayinka (Kwara State), Alhassan Garba (Kano State), Aliyu Madaki (Kano State), Aliyu Shehu (Sokoto State)<sup>40</sup>.

Following the APC victory in 2015, the motion of defectors continued to trend upwards. Politicians continued to desert their parties to join the ruling party so that they would remain in the limelight and be appointed politically. Former Kano and Sokoto governors Attahiru Bafarawa and Ibrahim Shekarau also defected from the APC to the PDP, earning themselves ministerial appointments for their troubles. The

trend of defection during the period has sometimes been accompanied by strategic success, adding to the perception that party switching is ultimately a tool of political survival. Some of the other political defections during this period of time are Aminu Tambuwal (Sokoto State) defected from PDP to APC, Aminu Masari (Katsina State) defected from PDP to APC, Dakugu Peterside (River State) defected from PDP to APC, Samuel Ortom (Benue State) who defected from PDP to APC and then back to PDP, Umar Genduje (Kano State) who also defected from PDP to APC, Nasiri el-Rufia (Kaduna State) defected from PDP to APC and Aisha Jummai Alhessan (Taraba State) defected from PDP to APC, and many more<sup>41</sup>.

During the 2019 elections, there were also recorded instances of defections, which were in the pattern of 2014. For instance, Senator Saraki and a host of other senators, including Senator Dino Melaye, defected from the All Progressive Congress (APC) to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Senator Godwills Akpabio, a Senate minority leader in the Senate and a chieftain of the PDP defected from PDP to APC<sup>42</sup>. Also in Akwa Ibom State, up to 20,000 former APC party members were reported to have switched allegiance to the State ruling party (PDP) in anticipation of the 2019 elections<sup>43</sup>.

In addition, following judicial declarations about the winner of the 2019 general elections, many politicians in the country abandoned their political parties for the ruling party at the national and state levels. The defections began from Ogun State after the Nigerian supreme court ruling affirming Dapo Abiodun as the validly

elected governor of the State<sup>44</sup>. Shortly thereafter, his main opposition candidate in the gubernatorial election, Adekunle Akinlade, announced that he was defecting back to the APC, which he had earlier dumped to contest the governorship election on the Allied Peoples Movement (APM) platform, alongside his supporters<sup>45</sup>. And another gubernatorial contender in the election, Prince Gboyega Isiaka, decamped from the Action Democratic Congress (ADC) along with some other politicians to the ruling APC. Other decampees in PDP were not left behind<sup>46</sup>.

This trend of cross-carpeting continued in other states. In Kano state, many of the loyalists of Rabiu Kwankwaso, the then state Governor, abandoned the PDP after the judicial verdict in favour of the incumbent governor, Abdullahi Ganduje against the PDP governorship candidate, Kabiru Yusuf<sup>47</sup>. Sokoto state lawmaker, Muhammadu Lili, and his supporters defected to PDP after the favourable apex court judgement in favour of the incumbent governor and member of PDP, Aminu Tambuwal<sup>48</sup>. Similarly, in Imo State, the judicial sacking of former State Governor Emeka Ihedioha by the Supreme Court and installing Senator Hope Uzodima in his place also brought about widespread defections in the State. For instance, the majority of members of the State House of Assembly defected from PDP and other minor opposition parties to the APC. Even PDP party leaders were caught in the whirlpool of political defectors to the dominant party, APC<sup>49</sup>. These defectors are welcomed into the new parties with open arms and celebrating without thinking about the consequences of their action.

It is on record that APC also experienced some losses, as some party bigwigs defected to the PDP. Among these were: Attahiru Bafarawa, Brigadier-General Buba Marwa (rtd.), Ibrahim Shekarau, Femi Fani-Kayode, Ali Modu Sheriff, Jimi Agbaje, Nuhu Ribadu and Tom Ikimi<sup>50</sup>.

Defections have usually been attributed to political survival and gain. For example, The former governor of Anambra State Mr. Peter Obi, a very important stakeholder of all Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and a Board of Trustee Chairman decamped to PDP having lost his ambition of becoming minister in the previous party APGA, at last he was compensated with Chairman of the Nigeria Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) in the new party PDP<sup>51</sup>. Also the former governors of Kano and Sokoto States in the persons of Ibrahim Shekaran and Atahim Bafarawa switched from APC to PDP and were rewarded with minister of education and prominent position in PDP respectively. In the same defection and compensation chase Tom Ikimi, the first interim national Chairman of the APC cross-carpeted from All Progressive Party (APP), ANPP, CAN and APC to (PDP), just as Femi Kayode dumped PDP to APC and back to PDP, and recently back to APC<sup>52</sup>.

The 2015 elections broke the defection trend because politicians kept streaming into the ruling APC, and with the political leadership baton passing to the APC after the 2015 general elections, politicians continued to abandon their parties and decamp into the APC in a bid to boost their political career. Headlining the list of defectors is a former National Legal Adviser of the PDP and the party gubernatorial candidate in

the 2012 election in Ondo State governorship election, Chief Olusola Oke, who led a delegation of the PDP party members, most of them who were from the South Senatorial District of the state, to decamp to the APC<sup>53</sup>. Rationalizing his defection, he explained;

“I resisted the wind of change that was blowing, until it was almost trying to blow me out. Now, I have surrendered; I can resist no more, and I have come. I have come over, not because the PDP lost the election, I have come over because the wind of change that is blowing across Nigeria must blow in Ondo State”<sup>54</sup>. Oke contested in the APC gubernatorial primary election but could not secure the party’s ticket after which he defected to APC to become the gubernatorial candidate of the Alliance for Democracy (AD)<sup>55</sup>

Senator Musiliu Obanikoro officially declared his defection to the ruling APC on November 25, 2017, but before he defected he was the PDP Lagos State gubernatorial candidate in 2007, and was the immediate former Minister of State for Defence. He also participated in the party's governorship primary in 2014 but lost to Mr Jimi Agbaje<sup>56</sup>

The APC also saw defections from high-profile members. Nuhu Ribadu, who was the PDP governorship candidate in Adamawa State, was formerly the opposition ACN's presidential candidate in 2011. Peter Obi defected from APGA to join the ranks of the dominant PDP Presidential Campaign Organization and was subsequently rewarded with a strategic appointment. Other ex-governors like Ibrahim

Shekarau and Attahiru Bafarawa joined the PDP, taking dominant positions in the party's structures.

The defection trend continued well into the early 2020s. The year 2021, was a year of high-profile defections that rocked the political landscape into chaos before the 2023 general elections. For instance, President Muhammadu Buhari officially received two PDP governors-Cross River State Chief Executive, Professor Benedict Ayade and his Zamfara counterpart, Bello Matawalle Maradun, who had defected to the APC, and they were handed APC flags by the president as a symbol of their membership in the ruling party<sup>57</sup>. Similarly, Nigeria's former minister of aviation Stella Oduah, joined the APC in August, she claimed she joined the party to change the political narrative in the South-East, Femi Fani-Kayode, a strong critic of the Muhammadu Buhari administration officially defected from the opposition to the APC in September, Shehu Sani the former lawmaker representing Kaduna Central in the Nigerian Senate, dumped the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) for the PDP after a fallout with Governor Nasir El-Rufa, Otunba Gbenga Daniel, the former governor of Ogun state and campaign manager for the Presidential Candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party PDP in 2019, Atiku Abubakar, ditched the opposition for the ruling party, and his decision to decamp became necessary following his support for Governor Dapo Abiodun, Ita-Giwa, a former Special Adviser to ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo again dumped the PDP for APC, and in 2017, she dumped the PDP for the APC, before returning a year later, describing the ruling party as the home of confusion,

Donald Duke a former Governor of Cross River State, returned to the PDP from the Social Democratic Party(SDP), where he contested the 2019 presidential election, and finally, Iyiola Omisore the former deputy governor of Osun state defected from the SDP to the APC. From being the servers of governors, legislators and other politicians both the ruling and opposition parties were blessed with acquiring useful members<sup>58</sup>.

The politics of Nigeria was revolutionized in 2023 by a series of critical events. It was also during this time that new political parties that changed the political face of the nation emerged. Prior to 2023, the Nigerian political landscape was dominated by the ruling APC and the major opposition party, the PDP. Politicians have in the past looked elsewhere for their ambitions whenever they perceived that their parties were threatening them, and hence defection has become a way of life. Some of those who decamped at this point are- Rabiw Kwankwaso, the former governor of Kano was among the leading personalities who made a strong statement in 2023 after leaving the PDP and contested on the platform of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)<sup>59</sup>. Since he defected to the NNPP, which he formed before the 2023 presidential election, Kwankwaso has been the face of the NNPP. However, this achievement has recently attracted controversy within the party, with initial founding members seeking to demonstrate that he was not the founder of the party. Similarly, Peter Obi's defection from the PDP to the Labour Party (LP) was one of the defections that shook Nigeria's political scene in 2023<sup>60</sup>. The former vice presidential candidate of the PDP

in the 2019 election made the jump after he discovered that he might not become the presidential candidate of the principal opposition party<sup>61</sup>. Peter Obi's Obedient Movement was boisterous in the general election that had such a significant impact on so many influential political actors and inducted so many new actors in Nigerian politics. Another defection story that rattled the 2023 election was Alex Otti's dumping of the APC and to join the Labour Party in Abia state<sup>62</sup>. He defected to the LP along with the Abia State factional chairman of the APC<sup>63</sup>. And finally, there is the defection of Senator Ifeanyi Ubah. He was the Anambra south senator and he declared his defection from the Young Progressive Party (YPP) to the APC ruling party on the senate floor, and besides joining the APC from the Peter Obi fortress, Ubah has been elected twice as senator on the platform of the YPP<sup>64</sup>.

The list of Nigerian politicians who defected during the fourth republic could go on and on even at the ward level, and this trend of politicians having to switch parties a lot of times, has now made it difficult to know which party they are currently in.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PATTERNS AND MOTIVATIONS OF CROSS-CARPETING IN NIGERIA (1999-2023)**

#### **Introduction**

Similar to any other major political phenomenon in Nigeria, cross-carpeting did not develop out of isolation; it has been shaped by historical development, political ambition, institutional weaknesses and socio-economic occurrences and conditions, with some players and political leaders making significant contributions to its course. Despite the prevalence of cross-carpeting, its trends and motivations are often informed by personal ambitions, party politics, and the prevailing political environment. In this chapter, we examine the dynamics of cross-carpeting in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2023), with particular emphasis on defection reasons. We also evaluate the timing and geographic scope of cross-carpeting, and media influence on perception. By doing so, we aim to provide a vivid image of how and why cross-carpeting has been a feature of Nigeria's democratic life.

#### **The Patterns of Cross-Carpeting in Nigeria (1999-2023)**

The patterns of cross-carpeting are recognized to occur in distinctive ways:

##### **Pre-primaries Cross-carpeting**

One of the most common patterns of cross-carpeting in Nigeria is the massive movement of politicians across different political parties to the ruling party towards

the time of general election to contest for the party primaries of the ruling party<sup>1</sup>. The greatest incentive for this movement is to join the leading party in order to gain access to party primaries and improve prospects for securing a party ticket for the general elections. Politicians see the ruling party as a gateway to power and influence, and this leads to waves of defection before every election season. This pattern of cross-carpeting can be seen before the 2007 general elections when Governor Ibrahim Saminu Turaki, along with most officials of his government, made a switch from ANPP to PDP in 2006. Similarly, the five PDP governors who switched to the APC in 2013 were before the 2015 general elections. Also, there was the switching of the three APC governors by the name of Samuel Ortom, Abdulfah Ahmed and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (at that time a former governor) to the PDP in 2018 in preparation for the 2019 general elections. Another example is the 2013 Kogi Local Government Election of Kogi State and switch later borrowed a leaf from the latter. Such that nearly in all the 21 Local Government Areas in Kogi State, the politicians who were cheated and short changed during the process of conducting the selection exercise defected to the ruling party and joined another alternative party<sup>2</sup>.

### **Post-primaries Cross-carpeting**

The second prevalent trend of cross-carpeting is the switching of politicians after the primaries especially by losers in the new party back to their former parties or to entirely new ones or form a new party of their choice under which they intend to contest the upcoming election<sup>3</sup>. Also, it is a movement that begins after the primaries

where aggrieved members who did not secure their respective parties' tickets defect along with their supporters to another political party or even form new political parties to resituate themselves in a manner that things will favour them. This defection also usually happens when a defector wins an election under an opposition party.<sup>4</sup> In latter scenario, the defector usually decamps to a ruling party in order to keep his office away from interference by the ruling party at the national or state levels; former scenario, the defector decamps to a party that wins in the elections in order to share in the spoils of office..<sup>5</sup> A good example where a defector defected to another political party after the election was the defection of many members of the PDP to APC in Jigawa State after the 2015 General elections. There also In 2015, the former Deputy Governor of Jigawa State, Alhaji Ahmed Mahmud, defected from the PDP to the APC after the Presidential election, but before the Governorship election. This movement is marked by personal grievances or the personal ambition of one or two apparently good politicians to rise as flag bearers and run in the general elections. Normally, such movements are gigantic as such politicians in their desire to be regarded as equal stakeholders will prefer to take their strong followership perhaps to the disappointment of their initial party. Also, it is a movement by politicians to remain politically relevant, access government patronage, and remain in the game. In Nigeria's extremely centralized politics, where the ruling party controls valuable resources and appointments, opposition politicians switch because they desire to remain powerful.

### **Executive Cross-carpeting**

Another clear pattern of cross-carpeting is where elected executive officeholders, especially state governors, defect from the political parties on whose platforms they were elected. This form of cross-carpeting is usually for the purpose of entering the ruling national party in order to have access to federal patronage, material resources, and political security<sup>6</sup>. Historical examples include Chief Ikedi Ohakim, who cross-carpeted from the Progressive Peoples' Party (PPA) to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) after the 2007 general elections<sup>7</sup>. Also, Owelle Anayo Rochas Okorochoa, who cross-carpeted from the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) to the All Progressives Congress (APC) after the 2011 elections<sup>8</sup>. Executive cross-carpeting not only centralizes power but also destroys opposition formations within the states.

### **Legislative Cross-Carpeting**

Cross-carpeting in the legislature is perhaps the most severe and frequent expression of political cross-carpeting in Nigeria, through which lawmakers in the National Assembly and state legislatures defect in large numbers to the party controlling the executive arm. It has been a recurring feature of Nigerian politics, where legislators frequently cross-carpenter rather frequently for political expediency, to secure re-election opportunities, or to protest intra-party conflicts<sup>9</sup>. An interesting aspect of legislative cross-carpeting is that even while defections hugely favor the ruling party, there have been sporadic cases where lawmakers defect to a rising opposition party. An example was the wind of defections from the PDP to the APC in the lead-up to the 2015

general elections, which was fueled by intra-party conflicts and disillusionment with the leadership of the ruling party.

### **The Role of Social Media**

Social media is a very powerful instrument employed in the political arena today to influence political behavior, including cross-carpeting. It does not affect defections, but it directs the how and when politicians defect from their respective parties, how the people perceive such, and the way political rhetoric is controlled.

Social media is now an effective tool used by politicians to convey political campaign messages<sup>10</sup>. It is a platform where citizens track political progress, engage in the political process, and access political information. However, it also facilitates the spread of distorted and unfounded information, leading to adverse effects such as influencing voting decisions, inciting prejudice, and supporting erroneous conclusions and actions<sup>11</sup>. Social media is an extremely useful vehicle for politicians to connect with voters, access skeptical groups and set the agenda for discourse in their favor. However, the validity and accuracy of online information may be lesser as there are no measures as yet to regulate or punish the spread of untrue or misleading information via social media, thereby making it even more difficult to put a stop to the spread of political propaganda<sup>12</sup>

With the age of the internet, the ability to reach large audiences quickly and cheaply has made social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube popular among politicians, political parties, and activists. The social media landscape

has become powerful tools for politicians to control the narrative of their defections. Unlike in the past when defections were received by mainstream media, politicians these days utilize their one social media account handles in order to make statements directly and communicate with their followers. Also, politicians usually try public opinion through social media interaction before going public. Through the gauging of reactions to their posts or conversations, they take the pulse of the probable approval or disapproval from their constituents.

Social media is a battleground upon which politicians and their supporters post materials to legitimize defections and annihilate opponents. Some politicians do this by employing 'Data Boys'-a group of young people on politicians' payroll who help to promote such politicians online and execute their bidding whether good or bad<sup>13</sup>

According to Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo:

*“Social media is something that you should watch out for in this day and age. Because of the very structure of social media, it's such that even an average citizen can put out information, and nobody can verify it . it plays a significant role in all fairness. That's why every significant politician has a consultant or somebody who now manages their social media page. Also, you can see from Akpabio and Natasha. It can lead to redeemed change, it is that vital, the problem is that we don't really see the depth of the influence of social media, particularly in this part of the world. The sad part is that it is open to everybody, so people can deliberately put false information out there to whip out sentiment and cause trouble. It is a tool everybody*

uses, the politicians are awakened to that realization, so as the average citizen. For instance, all The Obedience Movement, the social media played the most significant role in their mobilization, they didn't use the regular structure, even after everybody kept on saying there is structure, but they proved beyond every doubt that social media was a potent and valuable structure. Social media is open to all, so it could be used for positive or negative reasons, because it is not censored. Before you can put any information on ITV is censored, before you can go to Channels or Silverbird is censored, but in this case you can just whip out your phone as long as you have an internet connection and say someone did this to you, and that is. It is positive in the sense that the voiceless can actually voice out their oppression from social media. It's not like if you say you want to protest to ITV that something is going wrong, they can suppress it, they can make sure it doesn't feature, and even if it features, it doesn't feature in Primetime. There was a case where an Uber driver was insulted and beaten up by a federal legislator, he brought out his phone recording and it was taken to task, and people took it up. There were influencers who took it up. So it is a two way thing for the oppressed. Social media could be a tool through which the voiceless gets a voice, and it is taken up, when it gets viral. In this instance it is a double edged sword. But more often than not because it is not vetted as it were, you can put out any information and because it is not vetted, it tilts more to the negative, even though there is opportunity to use it on the positive angle of things.”

Mr. Temitope Aderinboye also had something to say on this:

*“Media is now a brown envelope which means media coverage hasn't helped matters. Most times, big media houses try to play a balancing role. They try to shape the mind of the public by framing the news to suit their status quo , using men with political powers. They'll almost never make an attempt to invite those concerned”*

### **The Motivations Behind Cross-Carpeting in Nigeria (1999-2023)**

Cross-carpeting by politicians has been frequent since the return of democracy in 1999. When we look closely at the issue of defection, we see that these defectors leave their original parties for several reasons. This study illustrates that people leave mostly because of personal and material reasons, as shown by the Elite theory. Hence, politicians defect only when they are not favoured. They succeed in most cases by slinging in party primaries, and others fail in inter-party elections and switching parties to join the ruling party to survive both socially and economically. These issues include:

#### **Political Linkages and Advantages**

Political linkages- connections among politicians, godfathers, and institutions of power are at the core of Nigerian politics. Politicians cross-carpet from one political party to another to increase their political connections and strategic advantages or secure personal or zonal gains. These include connections with political godfathers, closeness to federal or state power and affiliation with ruling or dominant political forces.

Cross-carpeting is a strategic move to form or maintain connections with influential politicians or political groups. Politics and governance in Nigeria are propelled by political relationships, which determine who gets party tickets, government positions, and funding. Politicians who get sidelined or marginalised in their party may cross-carpet to a party where they have more allies. For example, the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar defected from the PDP to the APC in 2014 under a grand coalition to overthrow the PDP-led government<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, in 2022, certain APC governors cross-carpet to the PDP due to intra-party conflicts and the need to reposition themselves with stronger political forces<sup>15</sup>.

Another aspect of political linkages and advantages as a reason for cross-carpeting is that it is also a means for politicians to gain access to federal and state government resources. Governing parties in Nigeria control key appointments, budgetary allocations, and government contracts. Politicians cross-carpet to gain access to these privileges so that they may continue to be politically relevant. For instance, in 2021, Zamfara State Governor Bello Matawalle defected to APC from the PDP on grounds of development<sup>16</sup>. The defection, however, according to analysts, was aimed at securing stronger federal government support for the state. Similarly, after the APC win in the 2019 presidential election, many opposition politicians poured into the ruling party to gain access to government contracts and other benefits<sup>17</sup>.

In an interview Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo, a Political Science lecturer in the University of Benin, Benin City, he contributed to this point by saying:

*“Political linkages and advantages could be from the economic, political, and social perspective. It is basically a situation where everyone wants to have connection or stake with the powers that be. A basic politician is an opportunist, so the moment you go out of power, the opportunities in the party become very limited and it is business for them. So they basically look for any and every excuse to move to where it is happening. It is the factor, you just want to be”*

According to Dr. Iro Aghedo

*“When politicians are desirous of a position appointment, soft landing, in their party, maybe nomination for governorship, and they are not able to get it, some of them tend to defect. It is more like the quest for greener pastures. To them is grievance, they are angry, but in actual fact it's greed, because they want to go and promote their personal agenda and their own personal interest. This is the biggest and strongest reason for cross-carpeting. People are so desperate to have one power or the other. If they believe that they cannot actualize that desperation in the political party were they are, they leave”*

### **Constitutional Ambiguity and Loopholes**

Constitutional Ambiguity and Loopholes are some of the serious reasons for cross-carpeting. Over the last decades of democratic governance in Nigeria, the country has witnessed a series of defections, with politicians cross-carpeting from one party to another, especially to the ruling party, the PDP and APC. This trend has brought heated debates on whether or not the constitution should allow cross-carpeting. The

1999 constitution serves as the country's constitutional mechanism for governance. However, the Nigerian constitution of 1999 was full of ambiguities because the salient feature of the period when the 1999 constitution was created did not allow Nigerians to participate and take part in discussion<sup>18</sup>. The 1999 constitution did not solve the national question and other ongoing questions of Nigerian federalism simply because Generals Abacha and Abubakar had no intention of putting in place a democratic state underpinned by popular consensus<sup>19</sup>. The process towards the drafting of the 1999 constitution avoided the structural issues that have hindered the country's ability to put in place a genuinely accountable, open and democratic political system.<sup>20</sup> The constitution has several provisions that are weakly enforced, allowing politicians to switch parties without incurring severe sanctions. These loopholes in the constitution have resulted in frequent political defections, destabilizing the parties and accountability.

The major constitutional provisions on cross-carpeting in Nigeria are Section 68(1)(g) for federal legislators and Section 109(1)(g) for state legislators. Section 68(1)(g) states that:

“(1) A member of the Senate or the House of Representatives shall vacate his seat in the House of which he is a member if...”

“(g)being a person whose election to the House was sponsored by a political party, he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which the 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”<sup>21</sup>.

Section 109(1)(g) states that:

“(1) A member of the House of Assembly shall vacate his seat in the House if:”

“(g) Being a person whose election to the House of Assembly was sponsored by a political party. He becomes a member of any political party before 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 merger of two or more political parties or factions by one of which he was previously sponsored”<sup>22</sup>

The concept of a ‘division’ has been most contested, and politicians have in most instances misused this provision as a loophole to justify defections on the grounds of crisis within their parties in the 1999 constitution. It is not conclusive of a crisis that would lead to defection or cross-carpeting. For instance, in 2014, five governors and several National Assembly members defected from the ruling People’s Democratic Party(PDP) to the All Progressive Congress(APC), citing an internal crisis in the PDP. Despite their defections, they were able to hold on to their seats, as courts viewed the PDP’s leadership intraparty disputes as a legitimate justification for defections<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, in 2021, Governor Ben Ayade of Cross River State defected from the PDP

to the APC without facing legal repercussions, highlighting the weaknesses in the conditional provisions.

The provisions of the above sections of the constitution were clear-out in matters concerning the legislature, who intends to switch to another party, should prove that such divisions exist in the party where he was holding membership, or that his party has been merged with other political parties. There is no ban or prohibition on members of the Executive i.e. president, vice-president, governor, deputy-governor, these members of the Executive can defect or cross-carpet at will<sup>24</sup>. The ambiguity of the constitution resulted in a series of defections among legislators, governors, deputy governors, party members and other political office holders. For example three AD senators, in the year 1999, Wahab Dosunmu, Yemi Brimoh and Fidelis Okoro who defected to the PDP utilized the constitutional provision] that provides an elected member with a right to defect if there is a division within his party<sup>25</sup>. The courts ruled that there was no constitutional clause mandating the governors to vacate office upon defection, reinforcing the perception that the executive arm is bound by a different legal standard than the legislature.

There also exist the inconsistent rulings of the judiciary as another loophole. The Nigerian judiciary has had a significant role in the enforcement of defection legislation. Nevertheless, the indecisive court judgments have generated more uncertainty, enabling politicians to use legal technicality to rationalize defections. Some court rulings have validated the ousting of defecting legislators, but others have

allowed them to stay in their seats citing the reason that party internal crises warrant their defections. In 2022, a Federal High Court in Abuja ruled that Governor Umahi and his deputy should vacate their offices following their defection to the APC. However, the Court of Appeal later struck down the judgement, stating that the Constitution does not allow for the removal of governors on the basis of defects<sup>26</sup>. This inconsistency of the judiciary has emboldened politicians to defect without repercussion.

Another loophole of the constitution is that there is no strict system of enforcement. Even if the provisions of the constitution are relevant, the enforcement methods are feeble so that politicians are able to violate defection legislation with impunity. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the election authority vested with the responsibility of conducting elections, usually possesses no capability to act against defector politicians directly except in a situation of judicial determination against them. In the same way, the State House of Assembly and the National Assembly do not infrequently sanction defectors for political reasons. The absence of a clear enforcement process leaves space for defectors to question any attempt to expel them.

### **Political prosecution**

Political prosecution has been the primary driver of cross-carpeting in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Politicians involved in activities regarded as being hostile to the trust of office reposed in them generally defect from their parties when their parties

lose elections to the ruling political party to avoid being called to explain some of their actions or inactions while discharging their responsibilities while in office. For instance, in preparations for the 2007 General Elections, Jigawa and Kebbi governors, after being threatened by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reports against them, had responded to PDP's advice and defected in a huge number along with their legislatures to the ruling party PDP<sup>27</sup>. The same trend was observed before the 2019 general elections, when there was a massive defection of some elected members from opposition parties to the APC. Such mass defection was no accident with the threat of being prosecuted, for the APC's incumbent National Chairman, Adams Oshiomhole, is quoted to have said, "Politicians' sins are forgiven when they join the ruling party"<sup>28</sup>. The statement disproved that joining the ruling party gives immunity against prosecution for offences committed while in opposition, thereby suggesting that one of the cardinal agendas of the APC, which was a fight against corruption, was not true.

Nigeria's anti-corruption commissions, particularly the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practice Commission(ICPC), are nothing but toothless bulldogs, better captured as instruments of the ruling government to victimize oppositions or government perceived enemies<sup>29</sup>. They have been accused of targeting opposition politicians but not those in the ruling party. The cases of former governors Joshua Dariye and Godswill Akpabio are examples. Godswill Akpabio defected to the APC in 2016 when he was being

prosecuted for corruption, which halted his prosecution. His defection was seen on the other side of the border as a strategic move to join the ruling party in power to escape prosecution. The fear of prosecution was also seen in the political battle between Governor Godwin Obaseki and Adams Oshiomhole, who was APC National Chairman at the time. Obaseki defected to the PDP in 2020, citing unequal treatment by leaders of APC. His deputy, Philip Shaibu, was politically persecuted for standing with him too.

In contrast, Dan Orbih, a PDP leader in Edo State, was accused of attempting to weaken Obaseki's control over the party, reflecting the political maneuvering that often accompanies fears of prosecution and loss of influence.

### **Lack of Internal Democracy**

Another salient incentive for party crossing in Nigeria is the lack of internal democracy in parties. Democracy signifies the active participation of all party members to contest any position both within the party and for public offices. Since 1999, when Nigeria joined the comity of democratic states, political parties have faced the problem of nondemocratic practices. The assumptions have long been that because the country has embraced democracy, its political parties must be democratic not just in appearance, in their objectives, but also democratic internally, in their organizational behaviors and practices<sup>30</sup>.

Political parties are critical institutions in any democracy because they facilitate political participation and governance. However, in order for them to be in a position

to play this role properly, they have to perform several institutional guarantees to effectively discharge what is expected of them in any democracy<sup>31</sup>. Unfortunately, most Nigerian parties cannot do so, leading to mass discontent and constant switching. Rather than allow a transparent and competitive process, party leaders undermine primaries by imposing candidates. Such impropriety in transparency and fairness has encouraged political godfatherism, where political kingmakers and gladiators manipulate the political system to crown their anointed political stewards<sup>32</sup>. This situation is further made worse by the national-level nominating of candidates despite the disregard of party members' choice at the grassroots level. This situation was exemplified in Kogi during the May 4, 2013 local government election. The majority of PDP defectors to opposition parties blame PDP's failure on the lack of party democracy, specifically choosing party candidates for election in their primary elections<sup>33</sup>. This trend is being repeated in some states, including Imo, Zamfara, Ogun, and Benue, where mass dissatisfaction with primary elections has led to large-scale defections.

Another reason for cross-carpeting is the way opposition parties employ internal party disputes, power tussles, and combative competitiveness to entice unhappy members. Political parties in the states take advantage of strife in opposition parties, internal rancour, struggle for power and bitter rivalries in order to bring in dissatisfied members to their fold, while others take advantage of a weak or nonexistent virile opposition to strengthen existing members and seize bystanders desirous of changes

and development<sup>34</sup>. This political poaching of dissatisfied members further weakens the democratic processes within parties since it assumes that loyalty is not immutable and party membership is flexible and not ideological.

### **Lack of Ideology**

Political ideology is the foundation of any party, dictating its underlying values, principles, and policy direction. In Nigeria, however, political parties do not have a strong ideological foundation, which has led them to cross-carpet very often. Nigerian politics was severed from the problem of ideology and social forces and prior to such, faced by these, as well as appearing visionless aggregations and merging of unusual bedfellows, it therefore goes without saying that parties formed in such condition would be characterized by intra-party crisis resulting in perpetual defectors<sup>35</sup>. Most political parties are not ideologically committed and hence are not vehicles for implementing some policies and programs but are mere platforms for conducting elections. The absence of ideological commitments makes it politically unstable because politicians switch parties as often as they switch sides based on what is most beneficial for their political and personal agendas and not for any established ideological position. Despite characterizations as "progressive" or "conservative," Nigerian political parties do not possess ideological inclinations. Whatever the circumstances, it is important for one to note that at the very heart of the success or failure of a political party is the important question of political ideology<sup>36</sup>. The absence of ideology makes it easy for politicians to decamp at will. Rather than

ideology on the part of the socialist, liberal, or conservative kind, politicians cross-carpet as a response to the political climate in the country, seeking more suitable platforms on which they may achieve their ambitions.

In the absence of robust ideologies, cross-carpeting becomes a survival strategy for the majority of Nigerian politicians. Between 2019 and before the 2019 General Elections, 84 legislators defected from one political party to another. Party officials of parties at the receiving end have argued that the defectors are politicians bereft of ideological convictions. None of them can be attached to ideas upon which economic or political arrangements are based but rather platforms under which elections are contested<sup>37</sup>.

### **Unfaithfulness of Politicians**

Among the underlying motivators of cross-carpeting in Nigeria is politicians' unfaithfulness to the philosophical foundation of their parties. In developed countries, the majority join one party or the other as students or as young professionals, trade unionists or whatever. And usually they continue to be members of the same party for the rest of their lives. They obstinately stick with their party in thick and thin. They stay on despite occasional or regular disputes with members of their party. They stay even when they feel that their party was wrong. They stay even if their party does not provide them with the advancement they feel they are entitled to. In developed countries like the US and UK where politicians would never even imagine switching over to other parties because other parties cannot match them on a philosophical

level<sup>38</sup>. Many stay on because they see their parties as the big picture and any frustrations or tensions that their parties give them as the smaller picture<sup>39</sup>. The opposite is the case in Nigeria. Nigeria is not a country that rewards good conduct or strongly held beliefs. This is a country where good and possibly useful people are oppressed and marginalized. People who try to stand on ethical codes are judged as mad, daft or suicidal<sup>40</sup>. Most Nigerian politicians are sore losers. Most are bad tempered individuals who always complain and feel entitled and relieved to high visibility positions for life. Cross carpeting is their second nature even when they are founding fathers of other parties they flounce off to be part of a new party. The truth is that most who have found it convenient to switch any party will opportunistically come back if the party they dumped wins the election. This is where politicians play politics with defection. In a way this turns politicians into political prostitutes, who are willing to trade their loyalty for power, whenever the political situation changes direction. “Politicians and prostitutes are two seemingly parallel professions. One supposedly displaying constitutional leadership virtue in governance is the latter revealing social vice – the fabric of a decadent society. Incidentally, one common denominator for both appears to be their loyalty, which stands on quick sand, shifting as mundane attractions glow in their adulterous eyes. The consideration, especially with the modern day politician, is where stakes may be lower and gains higher. It does not matter who is the offer. So, while the prostitutes switch beds, the politicians shift camp in this game of cross-carpeting”<sup>41</sup>. For instance, there were chairmanship

aspirants in the May 4, 2013 LG election in Kogi state who switched from their respective original parties as they didn't get the firm assurances they sought from the powers-that-be and wanted to improve their odds of becoming chairman<sup>42</sup>.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### IMPACT OF POLITICAL CROSS-CARPETING ON POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN NIGERIA

#### **Introduction**

Political cross-carpeting is a common practice in Nigerian politics that has become a significant trend, touching political activism and popular opinion since Nigeria transitioned back to democratic governance in 1999. Political cross-carpeting, whereby politicians change parties, has become so entrenched as to make profound changes in the political environment. Cross-carpeting has affected party organisations and membership and even touched the overall attitude towards political ideologies, party loyalty, and motives for political activism. By affecting political activism, cross-carpeting has raised questions about the purity of party ideologies, the role of individual ambition in politics, and the credibility of democratic institutions in general. The effects of the phenomenon are seen in the game of political campaigning, vote patterns, and politics and politicians' engagement with the electorates since it rattles pillars of political duty and allegiance. Cross carpeting from one political party to the other may seem grateful to those who are doing it, but it is more detrimental to their integrity but maybe profitable to their wives and personal aggrandizement which taints the future of democracy<sup>1</sup>

#### **Discouraged Political Participation and Civic Engagement**

Cross-carpeting harms political participation by inferring that political parties and leaders are not committed to public service and do not have integrity. When

politicians keep changing parties in pursuit of self-interest, citizens become disillusioned, perceiving elections as a game politicians play and not a democratic process for the sake of better governance.

In a recent interview I conducted with Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo, a lecturer from the Department of Political Science. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Benin emphasized how cross-carpeting has undermined political participation and civic engagement in the political process. When I asked him whether political cross-carpeting has discouraged grassroots political engagement or participation.

His words...

*"It certainly affects the political participation of citizens. So, citizens are told that PDP and APC are the same, so when it comes to election time, whoever wins, everybody moves there. For instance, if tomorrow you hear that elections are coming and that they have succeeded in convincing Peter Obi to move to PDP, the Labour Party (LP) supporters will believe that they are all the same; we thought that LP was a different party. So certainly when you see these movements from left to right, it just makes the average citizen take the average politician less and less seriously, and whatever he says less and less seriously. Take Atiku, for instance; one of the major criticisms against him was the fact that he has come and gone several times. And, of course, it brings political alienation because they are politicians; they all find a way of settling themselves at the end of the day."*

In another interview with a Political Science lecturer, also from the University of Benin, Dr. Iri Aghedo, he highlighted how cross-carpeting has negatively affected political participation. According to him,

*“First of all, there is no clear court ideology, so you don’t even know what party to vote for. People just say they are all the same. Even if this person is saying this today, tomorrow he might jump to another party.”*

Similarly, Silas Aghughu, a National Organising Secretary II, APC, Student Wing Nigeria, noted that:

*“Cross-carpeting can discourage political participation and civic engagement. The constant switching of parties by politicians may create a sense that politics is driven solely by self-interest and opportunism. When party loyalty appears to be flexible or inconsequential, grassroots activists may feel disillusioned and less inclined and less inclined to invest time and resources in supporting a party or political movement. If political leaders are not committed to their parties and constituents, it can lead to disengagement among grassroots supporters, who may believe their efforts will not bring about meaningful change.”*

.This is one area in many where cross-carpeting has impacted on the political sector in Nigeria.

### **Voter Apathy**

One of the direct consequences of cross-carpeting is increased voter apathy seen in recent elections. Politicians crossing to other parties for party survival or personal

reasons cause voters to lose confidence in the voting process, thus decreasing participation in elections and also the tendency to boost the rate of voter apathy within a populace. In extreme cases of cross-carpeting where the defected public representatives are quite high, such allegiance changes have led to the fall of democratically elected governments, such as in Lesotho in 1997<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, cross-carpeting of elected office holders who do not resign the first platform for coming to Political positioning does not aid the process of democratic consolidation. In general, voters who feel that their vote doesn't matter if elected officials can change parties for personal gain, and voters who see no genuine ideological distinctions between parties, are less likely to participate in elections, leading to declining voter turnout. Citizens avoid casting votes in subsequent elections if previous or current opinion polls are 'won' by using vile means like rigging, false declaration of losers as winners, and bribing of electoral officials. The general impression of Nigerian voters is that their votes are not going to count. Whether they voted or failed to vote, 'winners' must emerge through politics in Nigeria's style. This pattern is dangerous to the maturity of the Nigerian democracy.

Determined to further find out the impact of cross-carpeting has had on voter apathy , I was also in an interview with the Councilor in ward 01 , Akwukwu Igbo, Oshimili-north LGA, Delta State, Hon. Cyril Afagwu, he had this to say:

*“Cross-carpeting has absolutely contributed to voter apathy, in the sense that, when everyone is cross-carpeting to the party in power, then it is believed that any party in power would always work to win at all levels and at all cost.”*

On this same point i interviewed Mr John (doesn't want his other information to be shared) he highlighted how According to him,

*“Personally . I believe cross-carpeting in Nigeria has significantly contributed to voter apathy in the political system. The constant switching of parties by politicians creates a perception that they are driven by self-interest rather than commitment to any particular ideology or principle. Voters become disillusioned when they see politicians switching parties without any clear ideology justification. This disillusionment can lead to voter apathy as citizens feel their votes don't count and that the system is rigged against them”*

Also, an interview with Mr. Adeshina Osswemimo, a lecturer in the department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City. He supported this point

### **Commercialization of Political Loyalty**

Another severe consequence of cross-carpeting is the monetization of political loyalty, which promotes money politics at the expense of issue politics' political engagement.

A “mouth-watering” offers of money were outlined for the legislators that cross-carpeted to the APC in the build up to the 2015 general elections. The report indicated that the then ruling PDP was said to have promised US\$ 2 million for each of the senators who returned to the PDP, US\$ 1 million for each of the members of the

House of Representatives and US\$ 10 million for each of the 'leaders' who abandoned the APC for the PDP<sup>3</sup>. Although some label these reports mere rumors, the possibility of such financial inducements helps to highlight the extent to which political cross-carpeting is driven by economic rather than ideological considerations.

According to the Political Science lecturer Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo,

*“The entire essence of our politics is to acquire wealth. That is why it is the most valuable business. You could go into politics and in six months you become a billionaire, and you can go into business for twenty years and not own a hundred million.”*

To further support his point, he also said:

*“It is the lack of ideology that makes the average citizen alienated. They are really confused. What is the difference? It’s just going to make a new crop of billionaires”*

This undermines democratic institutions by making political loyalty a commodity for sale rather than a commitment to governance principles.

### **Weakening of a Formidable Opposition**

The weakening of a viable and formidable opposition is another impact of cross carpeting in Nigeria. One of the pillars of democracy is the existence of a strong and effective opposition to hold the government in office accountable, presenting alternative policies, and ensuring checks and balances in governance. The absence of a strong opposition party can drive the country toward a one party State that could be negative for Nigeria’s democracy and the greater good of the people. Cross-carpeting,

however, has gradually eroded Nigeria's opposition parties, rendering them ineffective watchdogs of the government.. In fact, following the unprecedented defection of members of the governing APC in the build up to the 2019 general elections and the subsequent invasion of the National Assembly by the State's owned security operatives, the Department of State Services (DSS), some of the people who were accusing were targeted at the presidency and viewed the shift as an interference with the work of an autonomous and independent arm of government<sup>4</sup>. After the 2015 general elections, some politicians have defected from the ruling PDP to the APC. They include the former legal adviser of the PDP and the party's 2012 Ondo governorship election candidate, Olusola Oke. The deputy governor of Jigawa state Ahmad Mahmud and Edo state PDP's governorship candidate in the 2012 governorship election, Maj.Gen Charles Airhiavbere (rtd)<sup>5</sup> In the absence of strong opposition, the governing party can become complacent, arbitrary and dictatorial. But the constant presence of a robust opposition will be a drawback to despotism because it offers well-informed critics because the opposition is ever ready to dig up the atrocities of the governing party and keep the government on its toes<sup>6</sup>

Linked to the fear that constant switches of politicians from opposition parties to the ruling party can lead to the establishment of a one party system is the fact such switches can also lead to the establishment of weak multi-party system which will not be able to provide effective opposition to the government in power even in the case of irresponsible governmental policies. For instance, in the 2019 general elections, some

91 registered political parties contested the elections. But among all these parties, many cannot actually be called effective opposition party (parties) aside from the PDP, which is not really doing much either in recent times.

### **Threatened the Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria**

Democratic consolidation is the process of making young democracies secure and enhancing their life expectancy beyond the short term, so that they become invulnerable to authoritarian threats<sup>7</sup>. Cross-carpeting has significantly weakened and threatened democratic consolidation in Nigeria. For instance, even though the pre-independence cross-carpeting of some NCNC Yoruba politicians to the AG in a bid to bestow political mileage on Awolowo vis-a-vis Azikiwe may have thrust the ethnic rivalry into the fabric of Nigerian politics, the political crisis that broke out in some western States of Nigeria which arose from the contentious cross-carpeting by some major UPN politicians like Chief Akin Omoboriowo and Mr. Fagbamigbe into the NPN might have had a decisive influence on the collapse of the Second Republic and the re-entry of military adventurism into the Nigerian political scene in December 1983.

Cross-carpeting indeed has unveiling consequences on the consolidating democracy, especially when it affects state and federal elected political office holders.<sup>8</sup> The trend is fast making caricature of democracy in the Fourth Republic and gravely discredits the essence of opposition parties. Democracies are consolidated when democracy becomes behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally institutionalized.<sup>9</sup>

Behaviourally, a consolidated democracy is when no major national, social, economic, political or institutional actors dedicate serious resources attempting to achieve their objectives by establishing a non-democratic regime or by seceding from the state. Attitudinally, a consolidated democracy is when an overwhelming majority of public opinion, even in the face of astounding economic crises and deep discontent with the ruling party, feels that democratic mechanisms and institutions are the most appropriate vehicle for managing collective life, and when support for anti-system adversaries is extremely marginal or outside of pro-democratic actors. Constitutionally, a democracy is consolidated when governmental and non-governmental players alike subject themselves to, and used to the resolution of conflict within the boundaries of the provided legislation, and creates institutions legitimized by the new democratic process.

One of the best things about democratic consolidation is free, fair and credible elections for transition from one government to another, however, this seems to be in short supply in Nigeria. This is because it has not internalized democratic principles and fails to exhibit them in behaviour and by constitution.

### **Weakened Political Activism**

Cross-carpeting has discredited political activism in Nigeria to a large extent by fostering a culture of political opportunism rather than ideological commitment. Political activism is dependent on holding politicians accountable for their actions. But when politicians change parties for convenience, they avoid being scrutinized,

and it becomes more difficult for activists to call them out on previous actions. In a situation where cross-carpeting is the norm among politicians for personal gain, it undermines the idea that political movements are a vehicle for effecting meaningful change. When the majority of political activists who are passionate about reform are appalled when politicians whom they once backed switch allegiance without consequence, it leads to political enthusiasm being broken down, leading to a decline in protests, campaigning, and street mobilization. Also, when leading figures in the opposition movements cross-carpet to government parties, activist parties lose strong voices that can echo their calls.

To further examine the impact of cross-carpeting on political activism, several other researches were conducted with a few individuals and few politicians. . The following contains an interview with Mr. John ( he didn't want to share his other name, and other necessary information)

***Interviewer:*** May I know you, please.

***Mr. John:*** My name is John

***Interviewer:*** In your opinion, has cross-carpeting has strengthened or weakened political activism in Nigeria?

***Mr. John:*** Cross-carpeting has significantly weakened political activism in Nigeria. This phenomenon, where politicians switch parties for personal gain or power, has undermined the country's democratic processes.

Even though that was impressive, I still needed to ask him to elaborate on more ways, cross-carpeting has negatively affected political activism.

**Interviewer:** In what ways has cross-carpeting affected political activism.

**Mr John:** Firstly, it has weakened political activism by eroding trust in politicians and the political system as a whole. Secondly, cross-carpeting has led to a lack of ideological clarity and consistency among politicians, this makes it difficult for citizens to hold them accountable for their actions and policies, as their stance on key issues can change depending on their party affiliation. Thirdly, cross-carpeting has contributed to the prevalence of “politics of the stomach” in Nigeria, where politicians prioritize personal gain and material benefits over the welfare of their constituents. Lastly, cross-carpeting has weakened political activism in Nigeria by promoting a culture of self-interest, eroding trust, undermining ideological clarity, and consistency.

Another interview was conducted with Mr. Ben Monday, a Unit 05 Chairman in Ward 07 Akoko-Edo LGA, Edo State. He supported the fact that cross-carpeting has weakened political activism. In his own words:

*“Cross-carpeting has weakened political activism in Nigeria because we have some other persons that are not very concerned about the masses who are holding positions in one party, once the party lose they cross-carpet because of personal interest and people that have been on ground will be forgotten and they will make them not to take development to the country or Nigeria.”*

To further explore more on this, I also interviewed Dr. Iro Aghedo, a lecturer from the department of Political Science, the University of Benin, Benin City. His word:

*“To me cross-carpeting has really weakened political activism. For instance, in the case of Timipre Sylva, the Civil Society Groups were campaigning and agitating against him for his prosecution. When he saw that the agitation will get to a level where he will be actually prosecuted, he just defected to the ruling party, and they told him all your sins are forgiven. Meaning no matter the level of activism, or opposition, that the Civil Society clamors for his prosecution, it will not work, because the ruling party were he defected to will not prosecute him.”*

I also went further to have an interview with Hon. Cyril Afagwu, a Counsellor representing Ward 01 in Akwukwu Igbo, Oshimili-north LGA, Delta State. His thought on this is:

*“Cross-carpeting has weakened political activism as a result of the favoritism to the party in power”*

From the interviews, it is evident that cross-carpeting has led to the decline of political activism in Nigeria. The phenomenon encourages political opportunism, destroys public trust in political movements, and promotes lack of accountability. Mr. John delineated how it has encouraged ideological inconsistency, making it difficult for citizens and activists to hold politicians accountable. Similarly, Mr. Ben Monday explained how cross-carpeting marginalizes committed party members and bars grassroots development. Dr. Iro Aghedo also made a repeat of this observation using

the case of Timipre Sylva, in which defection was employed as a shield against prosecution, showing how activism is rendered useless if party switching is to be used by politicians for personal protection.

The most major implication of cross-carpeting is that the citizens are rendered helpless, having witnessed through the lack of honour among the politicians on the one hand and the lack of ideology in the political parties on the other. The general assumption, therefore, is that the politicians and the parties are just there to scramble for spoils of governance; and when imposed by election victories, only spend government money in the interest of their own and that of their friends. This is the reason why Nigerians are unable to distinguish between a politician and another, one party or another, and that to this day 15 years post-democracy, the people are yet to benefit maximally from the dividends of democratic rule.

To support this particular point, Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo had something to say:

*To a very large extent, cross-carpeting affects the citizens, because they are beneficiaries. Whether they like it or not, anybody playing politics big time is already comfortable. His worries have gone beyond food and shelter. He is not struggling with the kind of economic situation the average Nigerian is struggling with, and so when they are moving from left to right, the more they drift in, the more the average citizen has to settle them for the national cake. Whatever it is that the political class is accumulating for themselves from the national cake is at the expense of the citizens.*

In conclusion, cross-carpeting has had a deep and long-standing impact on the political landscape in Nigeria. Through its influence on party stability, government, electoral processes, and democratic consolidation, cross-carpeting has shaped the nature of political participation and representation in Nigeria. The frequency of defections, which are usually motivated by ambition, ideological incompatibility, and the 'winner-takes-all' structure, has encouraged political instability, undermined party organizations, and detracted from public confidence in the democratic process. However, it has also enabled politicians to re-align themselves with parties that are more congenial to their strategic interests or political survival.

The media, especially social media, in magnifying cross-carpeting trends has further brought to the fore the pressing need for electoral and political reforms to hold politicians to account and promote ideological consistency. The long-term effect of uncontrolled cross-carpeting may undermine political institutions and retard democratic consolidation in the nation. Thus, policymakers, civil society groups, and electoral management bodies have a role to play in creating legal institutions that disincentivize opportunistic switching and encourage a more ideology-based and stable political system in Nigeria.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

Political cross-carpeting has been a significant and persistent feature of Nigeria's political sector, having an influence on party dynamic, governance and democratic consolidation. From the pre-independence period to the Fourth Republic, political cross-carpeting has structured Nigeria's political development in profound ways

One of the most important consequences of political cross-carpeting in Nigeria is its impact on party stability. Since the First Republic, the repeated defections have weakened political parties, and it has proved difficult to create firm, ideology-driven institutions. Political parties have not been able to remain intact internally because politicians continue to change sides for private, regional or electoral interest. The failure to enforce party discipline stringently has rendered politicians' defecting easy with no serious consequences. The consequence has been weak structures where party loyalty falls victim to ambition. The motivation behind political cross-carpeting in Nigeria has been relatively constant throughout politics. Among the primary reasons are political survival, access to power and resources or wealth, party leadership struggles and internal democracy. Defection in most cases is a response to shifting political opportunities, it could be the emergence of dominant parties or the decline of ruling parties. The Nigeria political landscape has made cross-carpeting a strategic move for politicians to gain relevance and power.

The cross-carpeting trends have also followed major notable patterns. In the First Republic, defections had been ethnic and regional politics in nature, while in the military regime, political affiliation changes happened because of the fragmentation and restructuring of political parties under military dictators. The return of democracy in 1999 also ushered in a more heightened pattern of party switching, particularly during election. The Fourth Republic [1999-2023] witnessed an increasing number of cross-carpeting cases, which are usually linked with power struggles between government and opposition parties. Social media also played an important role in elevating the profile of political switching, influencing public perception and shaping political narratives.

Cross-carpeting has also had a profound influence on governance and democratic processes. Even as sometimes it has provided politicians with new grounds for realignment and survival, it has also sown instability, eroded opposition parties, and decreased public trust in politicians and their fidelity to party principle. In addition, cross-carpeting has often led to legislative gridlocks and issues of governance, particularly when it brings about sudden shifts in political leadership.

Behind the negative perceptions, political cross-carpeting has had some positive effects. Political competition has been encouraged by cross-carpeting through the reinforcement of the opposition parties through defectors. In some cases, cross-carpeting has served as a safeguard against the exploration of power by the ruling parties because it has facilitated the restructuring of opposition power. It has also

facilitated readjustment in political alliances in response to alternations in political power.

To address the challenges of political cross-carpeting, reforms are required at the legal and institutional levels. Political parties should have an ideology under which the political system will be organized, and until we have this deflection will continue a common norm for us. Also, party discipline should be heightened, constitutional provisions relating to defections obeyed, and internal party democracy championed in order to reduce the incidence of opportunities for defections. In addition, voter education on political implications of defections and bring about increased accountability among politicians.

In conclusion, political cross-carpeting in Nigeria has been a multifaceted and complex phenomenon with both positive and negative impacts. Although it has provided political strategies and strategic benefit, it has also been a source of uncertainty and has weakened party structure. It is important to understand the motivations, trends, and implications of cross-carpeting in order to guide policies that strengthen political stability and democratic consolidation. In the future, resolving the underlying causes of defections and building party institutions will be essential in having a more stable and ethical political system in Nigeria

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S/N	NAME	OCCUPATION	AGE	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Dr. Iro Aghedo	Lecturer	55	University of Benin, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Art	11/3/2025
2	Mr. Adeshina Oswemimo	Lecturer	46	University of Benin, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Art	11/3/2025
3	Mr. Ben Monday	Unit 05 Chairman in Ward 07 Akoko-Edo LGA, Edo State.	48	Akoko-Edo LG, Edo State	13/3/2025
4	Mr. Temitope Aderinboye	An Activist	39	University of Benin	13/3/2025
5	Rtr. Woghiren Osama	President, Rotaract Club of University of Benin	22	University of Benin	13/3/2025
6	Hon. Cyril Afagwu	Councilor representing Ward 01, Akwukwu Igbo, Oshimili-north LGA, Delta State.	47	Akwukwu Igbo, Oshimili-north LGA, Delta State.	15/3/2025
7	Mr. John	An Educationist	26	University of Benin	17/3/2025
8	Comr. Silas Aghughu	Secretary II, APC Student's Wing	28	University of Benin,	20/3/2025



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