

Cross Carpeting in Nigerian Politics: Some Legal and Moral Issues Generated

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Abstract : The concept of cross carpeting is as old as politics itself. Basically, it entails an individual leaving a political party/group, to join another. The reasons for which cross carpeting is embarked upon are diverse: ideological differences; ethnic and/or religious differences; access to actual or perceived better political opportunities; liberty of association; rancor; etc. The current democratic dispensation in Nigeria has experienced renewed and rather alarming rate of cross carpeting, for reasons including those enumerated above and others. Right to cross carpet is inherent in a democratic setting as well as the political stakeholder; so does it also comprise of the constitutional right of 'freedom of association'. However, the current species of cross carpeting in Nigeria requires scrutiny, in view of some potential legal and moral challenges it poses for both the present and the future. Cross carpeting is considered both legal and constitutional, but the current spate raises the question of expediency, particularly in a nascent democracy. It is considered to have a propensity of negatively impacting political stability in a polity with fragile nerves. Importantly too, cross carpeting is considered a potential damage to the psyche of posterity with regards to a warped disposition to promises, honour and integrity. The perceived peculiar dimension of cross carpeting in Nigeria raises questions on the quality of leadership presently obtainable in the country, vis-à-vis greed, self-centeredness, disregard for the concern and interest of avowed followers/fans, entrenchment of distrust, etc. Thus, the study made use of primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources included the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended); judicial decisions; and the Electoral Act, 2010 (as Amended). The secondary sources comprised of information from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and Internet documents. Data obtained from these sources were subjected to content analysis. Findings of this study show that though the act of cross carpeting may not be in breach of any Statute or Law, it however, in most cases, breaches the morals of expediency. The morality thereof is far from justifiable, and should be condemned in the interest of the present and posterity. There is a great and urgent need to embark on a re-entrenchment of the culture of political ideology in the Nigerian polity, as obtainable in developed democracies. In conclusion, the need to exercise the right of cross carpeting with caution cannot be overemphasized. Membership of a political group/party should be backed by commitment to well defined ideologies and values. Commitment to them should be regarded akin to that found in the family, which is not easily or flippantly jettisoned.

Keywords : cross-carpeting, Nigeria, legal, moral issues, politics

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