

GODFATHERISM AND QUEST FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo*

Abstract

The choice of many countries of the world for a democratic system of government lies in the fact that it bequeaths power to the people. It gives the citizens a voice; the power to choose those whom they consider capable of leading them. While this system has worked in developed countries, leading to good governance and sustainable democracy, it has become a victim of perennial travail in most developing countries, especially in Africa, particularly Nigeria. This travail is predicated on several factors such as the foreboding presence of the military, which has incessantly stalled democratic governments; corruption, which has resulted in weak structures and institutions; and the chief of them all, godfatherism, which is a bane to the practice of a truly democratic government in Nigeria. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature, causes and impacts of political Godfatherism on sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria. To effectively do this the Elite theory advocated by Vilfredo Pareto in 1935 was employed. The Paper also adopts a qualitative research design, whereby descriptive analysis is employed to investigate the issues of godfatherism and democracy in Nigeria. The paper is theoretical. Hence, the data systematically reviewed in the paper were primarily derived from secondary sources such as internet sources, textbooks, journal articles, magazines, book reports, and archives.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, Godfatherism, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The choice of many countries of the world for a democratic system of government lies in the fact that it bequeaths power to the people. The power to decide how they are being governed. It gives the citizens a voice, a say in the governance of their country; the power to choose those whom they consider capable of leading them. While this system has worked in developed countries, leading to good governance and sustainable democracy, it has become a victim of perennial travail in most developing countries, especially in Africa, particularly Nigeria. This travail is predicated on several factors such as the foreboding presence of the military, which has incessantly stalled democratic governments; corruption, which has resulted in weak structures and institutions; and the chief of them all, godfatherism, which is a bane to the practice of a truly democratic government in Nigeria.

Godfatherism in contemporary Nigerian politics takes away the voice of the people. According to Ugwu & Ugwuja (2016) the people's power to decide the affairs of their state is wrestled off their hands and concentrated in the hands of a minority: a group of self-seeking individuals poised on using the government for the achievement of their

selfish purposes. The people no longer have the power to decide who rules them rather they become victims to the decision made by the minority, who are the new kingmakers and who decide who walks on the corridors of power or not. This is done regardless of the people's choice. Nigerian politics flies basically on the wings of godfatherism. The consequences of this situation on the country's nascent democracy are manifold. Firstly, it cripples good governance. These are those chosen by the minority, governed mainly for the benefit of the minority rather than the people. since they are primarily stooges of the powers that be, they are left with no option but to do the bidding of their masters; a breach of which, would lead to unimaginable severe consequences. This cripples democracy and good governance since the people have no say in the governance and those in power do not govern in their interest. Oghuvbu (2023) agrees with this when he noted that "With the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the nation has seen an increase in the politics of godfatherism, which has slowed the consolidation of democracy while also undermining efficient state governance and restricting rather than broadening democratic representation" (p. 58). This situation is well captured by Ugwu & Ugwuja(2016) when they cited the Transition lecture of Chimaroke Nnamani, a former governor of Enugu state, who in commenting on the negative implication of godfatherism in Nigerian politics stated:

The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined of course, though with limited resources, states in some noted cases get constrained by the ever increasing needs to attain even if minimally, growth and development. If this is embraced, the demand or greed of godfatherism will certainly not be met. When it is not met, it is definite that the godfather will serve the notice of reminder to contract a new negotiation for settlement (p. 58).

Secondly, this ugly situation breeds political apathy, as people become uninterested in the governance of affairs of their state. This stems from the belief that their voices are of little consequence to what happens in the government. Hence, they lose faith in the electoral system, democracy and political leadership which disenfranchises them to enthrone impunity, corruption and underdevelopment in the nation (Eke & Edosa, 2017)

The above situation clearly shows the grave impact of godfatherism on sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Aiyamenkhue (2010) cited in Okechukwu and Chima(2019) aptly summarizes this when he averred that:

There have been a lot of crises in Nigeria's politics and administration, a crisis of confidence in our elected officials, a loss of faith in our democratic government and an increasing frustration at the government, and more also, an increasing frustration at the irrelevance

of individual's vote in our political process. All these crises are caused by the unholy alliance of godfatherism (p. 346).

To have a clear understanding of what godfatherism is all about and its impacts on democracy and good governance, there is a need to have a panoramic understanding of godfatherism, democracy and governance. This will set the base for understanding its full impacts.

2. Clarification of Concept

2.1 Godfatherism

The term godfatherism like most concepts employed in the social sciences, for which a straightforward definition is problematic, does not lend itself to an easy definition (Igbini & Okolie, 2020). Therefore, in trying to understand the concept of godfatherism, Adeoye (2011) opines we must start by questioning the term. Hence, a pertinent question to be asked in trying to understand the concept is who is a godfather? Who is a godson? It is in answering this that we can easily graft the answer to the question, what is godfatherism? The term godfather takes its root in Christianity. In the Christian tradition, at Baptism which is a sacramental practice of the church, a godfather stands in as the child's sponsor. He serves as a role model whose lifestyle is worthy of emulation (Ugwu & Ugwuja, 2016). He performs the function of co-parenting with the parent of the child. He contributes primarily to the spiritual growth of the child, who is considered his spiritual son. He contributes to raising the child to become God-fearing, law-abiding and responsible in society. The godfather usually shows love and kindness towards his godson and sometimes practically expresses his love with expensive gifts, moral suasion and so on (Wenibowei, 2011).

Ugwu & Ugwuja (2016) goes further to trace the origin of the term godfather to the pre-Christian era to the time in Greek religion when Zeus and Homer were taken as gods who could grant favours. They cite Ogugua (2003) who opined that Plato spoke of the idea of good in his Republic and the Timaeus, he spoke of the Demiurge as fathers. However, the centrality of the purpose of embodying gods and goddesses or God with fatherly qualities lies in the fact that they care, guide, provide, love and protect. In other words, when human beings act similarly, they are seen as fathers doing similar acts as gods-hence, the name godfather.

It is in line with the above that Edigin (2010) avers that a godfather is a human being who plays god to his people. He provides their basic needs for them, protects them and assists them to secure and achieve their objectives. He further states that "his support could be seen as an investment, which he believes must yield some profits in the future" (p.175). According to Odion (2007), the idea of godfatherism finds practical expression in the traditional Igbo society of Nigeria. This involves a situation where the parents of a boy entrust him to the care of a man who is seen as an embodiment of success, courage, industry and perfection, to be mentored. The man assumes the role of a godfather and guardian to the boy and teaches him trade and other necessary economic skills over a period of time. It is like an apprenticeship,

whereby the boy refers to the man as *Nna m ukwu* (my master), while the child takes the position of *odibo* (servant), (Omotola, 2007) The godfather settles the boy (godson) by opening a business or trade for him and the godson is expected to be submissive.

The above definitions majorly paint a picture of godfatherism that is rooted in the cultural values of Nigerian. This brand of godfatherism, according to Asogwa (2017) is primarily socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for both parties. However, for this paper, we are going to focus on understanding the concept of political godfatherism, which given its notorious character in contemporary Nigerian politics, has become a knee on the neck of true democracy and good governance in Nigeria. This notorious character is aptly expressed by Wenibowei (2011) when he opined:

The phenomenon of godfatherism has become a plague in the body politics of Nigeria. There is an emerging trend in Nigeria which indicates that an intending contestant must have and depend on a godfather with the requisite wealth and power to get him into elective office. The implication is that contestants no longer rely on their popularity among the electorates but on their chosen godfathers to help them secure electoral victories. This whole process undermines the usual popular sovereignty and other attributes that make democracies often unique and preferable to other governmental systems. The dominant role of the political godfathers in Nigerian politics and the competition amongst godfathers to win elections for their godsons with the ultimate intention of controlling state apparatus necessarily encourage the adoption of varying methods to achieve electoral victory (p. 113).

It is in line with this that Igbinini & Okolie(2020) defined godfathers as powerful individuals in society who have built up the power to determine ‘who, what, when and how’ in the corridors of power. In support of this view, Adeoye (2011) attempts to clarify the tripartite concepts of godfather, godson and godfatherism. He defined a godfather as a kingmaker, boss, mentor, and principal, while a godson is the beneficiary and recipient of the legacy of a godfather. In his words:

A godfather is someone who has built unimaginable respect and followers (voters) in the community and possessed a well-organized political platform, and general acceptance from the electorate that could secure victory for candidates of his choice. The politics of godfathers involve the "anointing" of a godson who is expected to win an election by using the influence, wealth, political structure and political experience of the godfather. In return, the godson reciprocates through loyalty and regular consultations with the godfather (p.2).

He concludes by defining Godfatherism as a term used to designate or describe the relationship between a godfather and a godson. Abioye (2007) concurs with the above when he defines godfatherism as the relationship between a godfather and a chosen godson. It is a kind of politics whereby an influential person in a popular or ruling party will assist someone usually a godson, by all possible means, to emerge as the candidate of the party. He throws his weight about to ensure he emerges victorious at the polls, irrespective of whether he is a popular candidate or not (Alemika, 2007) Edigin (2010) cited Chimaroke Nnamani (2004), the former governor of Enugu State, who stated that the godfather is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his purposes. He likened the position of a godfather in any system to a virus, often out to create ill-will, but especially to subjugate the godson whom he planted and by the virtue of that constrained to always do his bidding, even when it will be detrimental to the general good. Therefore, the godson is subject to the puppetry of the godfather, who as a merchant has set out to acquire the godson as a client.

The above definitions mirror the lens through which this paper views political godfatherism. For more specificity the paper adopts the views of Chimaroke Nnamani as cited in Edigin (2010) on who a political godfather is and that of Abanobi (2007) cited in Omotola(2007) who in describing political godfatherism in Nigeria alluded to Louis XIV (1643-1715) of France who was quoted as saying ‘I am the state’, meaning that ‘his opinion and view, no matter how chauvinistic and narrow-minded, remains the opinion of the people he ruled’. Going further, Abanobi opined Louis VIX, with this mindset, ruled France in an authoritarian manner for 62 years. Contextualizing this view to contemporary Nigerian politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic, he opined that many politicians have seemingly approximated the state as their estate at different levels.

3. History of Godfatherism in Nigeria

Political godfatherism is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria; it has always been in existence. What seems to change is its mode of operation. Ugwu &Ugwu (2016) trace political godfatherism to the colonial period when the colonial masters played the role of godfathers. According to them, it started when they instituted warrant chiefs, and took sides with the hegemonic clubs in different sections of Nigeria, thereby erecting the cult of godfathers. However, as the colonial era drew to a close in the 1950s, the spark of the nationalist movement was at its peak and was led by a few educated elites, who Coleman (1963) cited in Igbini & Okolie (2020) noted were just about six per cent of the Nigerian population became the vanguard for the struggle for independence. It was these educated elites, Oluwale (2005) cited in Igbini& Okolie(2020) said, who later became the political godfathers in the first republic. They headed the regionally based political parties. In his words:

The political godfathers of this era included the then Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who led the NPC, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG and Nnamdi Azikiwe the NCNC leader. The other elder statesmen that fell into this category in Nigerian politics include Mallam Aminu Kano and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. These political leaders

up to the point of their death dictated who could occupy political offices in the geo-political regions they led. They are clearing houses for political opportunities (p.87).

Going further, Igbini & Okolie (2020), noted that during this period Awolowo was the godfather of personalities like Akintola, and Ogbemudia. Tafawa Balewa was the godson of Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, while Azikiwe was the godfather of the likes of Michael.I. Okpara and Mbazulike Amaechi. They however maintained that the role of the godfathers at this time was to show the way for the other Nigerians in a colonial system. It is this trend that trickled down from the first republic to the 4th republic when political godfatherism gained widespread negative influence and connotations in the Nigerian polity and equally gained its notoriety. Hence, according to Igbini & Okolie (2020), godfatherism has currently transmogrified into a situation that offers political heavyweights “unlimited powers to dominate the political scene, influence the victory of candidates (the godsons/daughters) and dictate the direction of policies and programmes, remained a major factor of the political culture of Nigeria” (p.98).

However, examining the contemporary godfatherism in Nigerian politics, Gambo (2007) strongly averred there are lots of significant changes between the philosophical godfatherism of the First Republic and the contemporary unpolished form. Egboh (2009) confirmed this when he opined that Sir, Ahmadu Bello of the NPC, Dr, Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC and Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the AG were solely motivated to carefully and meticulously cultivate godsons that they were convinced would advance the well-being of the citizens not to use godsons as surrogates to promote parochial interests, but to promote the developmental aspirations of the people. Okechukwu & Chima (2019) agree with the above view of the sharp contrast between the political godfatherism practised by the nationalist and that practised in Nigerian contemporary politics. He expressed this when he averred that:

Nigerians have willingly at different fora exaggerated the achievements of the likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Aminu Kano, Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello and a host of others to the extent that their persons were made to look more than ordinary. But then, the fundamental fact remains that their brand of godfatherism added value and experience to governance. By extension, they were altruistic, highly respected, revered and deified by others. In addition, they were indeed the significant other in their different constituencies as their views were generally accepted unquestioned. They were regarded by their constituents as the conscience and custodians of all moral values and ideas. As minorities, they command overbearing influence on the majority and, as innovators; they were also believed to possess requisite knowledge and expertise in the relevant societal spheres of interest to set appropriate standards (p.344).

The above clearly shows the reason for the continual reverence bestowed on the post-independence godfathers both when they lived and even at death. The deference chiefly stemmed from their full understanding of their mission of liberating the people and setting them on the plains of true democracy to bring about good governance and socio-economic growth. This is an a far cry from the present crop of godfathers, criminally minded politicians, who are masquerading as agents of change, yet through their activities beleaguer the operation of true democracy in a bid to selfishly cart away the commonwealth thereby hindering the achievement of the common good (Okechukwu & Chima, 2019)

However, it is important to note that every society is made of three groups of people the progressive, the anti-progressive and the indifferent (Okechukwu & Chima, 2019). The progressives are usually not keen on participating in politics, by contesting for political positions, although they command a lot of respect among the people. However, they are interested in seeing that the best candidates for political post win in order to help the people. The second group is the opposite of the first. They are made up of anti-progressive elements, who try to secure political positions, usually by proxy, as a means to an end. They circumvent communal and collective good for their ulterior motives (Okechukwu & Chima, 2019). It is this inordinate ambition and activity of the second group which, of course, presses down on the neck of democracy which in turn hinders good governance. To have a deeper understanding of the activities of this group, this study adopts the Elite theory.

4. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Elite theory in its examination of the negative impacts of godfatherism on Nigerian democracy. This is because the theory specifically mirrors how power is concentrated in the hands of a minority (political godfathers) in Nigeria, who impose their will on the rest of the populace, by imposing their loyalists (godsons) who will advance their selfish interests. Hence, the masses have little or no say in the governance of the country as power is only circulated among the elites who ensure that non-elites or those not chosen by the elites do not join the elite political class. The central point of the elite theory as propounded by Vilfredo Pareto in 1935 is that power is rotated among the elites; this means the elites are substituted by another group of elites, meaning that the masses are unavoidably ruled by the few elites at the expense of the masses. Phinos & Kennedy (2020) cite Pareto in support of this argument, who argued that the political elites insulate and isolate themselves from their society and try as much as possible to reproduce themselves from within. They do all possible within their reach to ensure that non-elites do not join their membership. To ensure this, the political elites maintain a safe, functional distance from the rest of society. They reproduce themselves on an individual and selective basis in a process, which Pareto specifically referred to as the ‘circulation of elites’.

The criteria for such elite recruitment are often parochial and the process is usually done in a manner that does not in any way compromise the traditional integrity of the dominant elite class. Pareto further argued that the dominant class often tries to

frustrate any efforts at the 'collective circulation of elites' and would rather support individual recruitment (Phinos & Kennedy, 2020). In the context of the elite theory, elites are conceived as players governing the state and national resources, and occupying key positions related to power networks (Yamokoski & Dubrow, 2008). According to Phinos & Kennedy (2020) a major distinctive feature of the elite is the tendency to influence, control and superimpose their ideas, beliefs, values and practices as acceptable and ideal in the management of societal affairs. Therefore, in the study of power configuration and processes in society, the following observations are noticeable:

- A minority group controls major decisions in society particularly as it has to do with power ascendancy.
- Masses are presumed by the minority group to lack qualities of leadership and high responsibility motive.
- There is a regular circulation of elites between the "governing elite" and "non-governing elite" in elective positions in society.

This perception of elites is more carefully connected to the Weberian knowledge of power understood as the competence of executing one's will, even against the will of the general populace (Weber, 1922). The elite theory's relevance to the paper is based on the fact that it underscores that elite action has a causal effect on the relationship between the state and society since the elites have greater influence/control of the state than the masses. Given that Liberalism, as experienced in Nigeria, promotes extreme elitist democracy and a money-inspired electioneering system, leaving the masses as 'onlookers' and keep denying Nigerians the much-needed institutional, socio-economic and political advancement, the elite theory points to the concentration of power in the hands of a minority group which 'perform all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings' (Mosca, 1939). It is this that cripples democracy in Nigeria and in the long term entrenches underperformance in governance. This is because the people no longer have a say in choosing those that will govern them, and public policies made are according to the preferences of the elites. Hence common good is sacrificed on the altar of the selfish interests of a few politicians and their mentors (godfathers). The resultant effect is the impoverishment of the masses, who in a desperate bid to survive, become victims of the puppetry of politicians, who easily manipulate them at the polls to vote for those that will advance their selfish interests, even when it is against the collective wish of the people. What then causes the politics of godfatherism in Nigeria?

5. Major Causes of the Negative Dimension of Political Godfatherism in Nigeria

The politics of godfatherism is birthed by many factors. Ahmed and Ali (2019) contend that some of these factors are the power of incumbency, influence, political thugs, money politics, lack of political awareness, selfishness, greediness, lack of exposure, over-ambition, nepotism and politics of regionalism, etc. Beyond these factors, we are going to focus on exploring the major factors that engender the negative turn of politics of godfatherism.

Poverty: One of the politics of godfatherism in Nigeria is poverty. Ekhaton (2003) defines poverty as:

a dynamic process of socio-economic, political or other forms of deprivation, which affects individuals, households or societies and usually brings about a lack of access to elementary requirements of human survival (p.75).

The fact that a preponderance of the Nigerian population is poor, which widens the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor, sustains the knee of political godfatherism on the neck of democracy. Edigin (2011, pp. 178-179) cites Nnamani (2004) who confirmed this when he strongly opined:

Poverty makes it possible for the emergence of godfathers, the prevalence of this makes it easy for godfathers to rise and pervade the environment of the not well-structured polities. In addition, the election is manipulated through the financial inducement of electoral officers, thuggery or outright rigging of votes. The activities of political godfathers in Nigeria's fourth republic are even more challenging and daring to democracy and democratic stability (p.28).

Poverty makes the masses vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation. This is seen when the voters are bought with tomatoes, onions, bowls of rice or money, they sell their rights out-rightly and contribute to the corruption of an unfair and un-free electoral process, and suffer the consequence too (Ogbonna &Ufomba, 2020). Given the poor economic trajectory of the country, politics have become the new oil well. People begin to see politics not as a means of delivering good governance but as a means to fill their pockets. It is this crop of the people that the rich use as pawns in their chessboard; primarily driven by poverty into politics, they are willing to do anything just to get into power. Hence, they can make promises and even take oaths to play according to the rules of their bankrollers and paymasters. Such people can negotiate with drug barons, fraudsters and even kidnappers for election sponsorship under the agreement of sharing the loot with this promise; the political godfather is willing to fight tooth and nail to get them into office.

Military Incursion in Politics: The current dimension of political godfatherism in Nigeria cannot be weaned from the incursion of the military into the country's political scene at different points in the country's history. Adeoye (2011) gives credence to this when he noted that:

The military incursion into politics aided the consolidation of godfatherism in Nigeria. High on the list of their misrule was the promotion of political and economic centralization, corruption, the concentration of wealth in the hands of few, and allocation of much power to the chief executive at all levels, making the position more attractive. General Babangida's regime (1985 - 1993) formalized and made corruption very enticing, while Abacha's regime (1993 - 1998) made it worse. State's wealth found its way into the hand of a few

apologists of the military. These individuals were financially equipped to bankroll any candidates of their choice (para.4, Socio-Economic and Political Forces in the Evolution and Consolidation of Godfatherism in Nigeria)

The above clearly shows that the military's foray into politics contributed to the consolidation of Nigerian godfatherism. It enabled the political and economic centralization, corruption, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, and the transfer of much power to the chief executive at all levels, making the role more desirable, were all high on their list of misrule (Igbini & Okolie, 2020). The rippling effect of this incident is that in contemporary Nigerian politics, power is still concentrated in a few hands that still call the shots and determine who walks into the corridor of power. Aderonke, Awosike & Olanrewaju (2013) quoted in Dele et al., (p. 98, 2022) opines that: "The consequence is that participants are not dependent on their acceptance from the electorates but on their selected godfathers to support them in securing elected positions" (p.70).

Insufficiency of Party Funds: Parties mostly depend on donations from wealthy individuals who end up dominating the party structure. This is because of the inability of members of the party to generate the needed fund to run electioneering activities. The failure of organisational funding built around members of the party gives the outside donors a huge stake in the affairs of the party (Odion, 2007). The insufficiency of funds often leads to the emasculation of the party. Going further, Odion (2007) cites Dickerson (2003) who noted that the huge sums of money that are required by candidates to participate in the electoral process, propel them to leech onto the godfathers to be sponsored. This leads to the continual entrenchment of political godfatherism in the country. Having had a panoramic view of the major causes of godfatherism in Nigerian politics. There is a need to explore how the rippling effects of these causes hinder sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

6. Godfatherism as a Knee on the Neck of Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

Democracy is meant to be a people-led government, a government where the voice of the people matters. However, the strange turn which godfatherism has taken in the Nigerian political environment, especially in the fourth republic has made it a knee on the neck of the practice of democracy. It has become a menace pulling down the foundations of masses-driven governance, thereby denying Nigerians the much-deserved dividends of democracy (Adeoye, 2011). The concentration of power on a few hands, who sometimes consider themselves "gods", manipulating power to their whims and caprices defeats the sole aim of democracy. This was aptly captured by Chukwuemeka & Orji (2013) who aver that:

In Nigeria's fourth republic, the emergence of godfatherism posed a great threat not only to good governance but also to the socio-economic stability of democratic governance. Perhaps one of the most disturbing and damaging influences of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic

was in the domain of making nonsense of a truly free, fair and credible electoral process in which the electorates by right are expected to freely elect people of their choice into public office to represent their interests. Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice into public office was denied given the situation in which godfathers foisted candidates of their preference on the generality of the people. This is, to say the least very inimical to the tenets of democratic rule (p.214).

The above clearly shows that political godfatherism has far-reaching negative impacts which plague the practice of true democracy. A few of these negatives include:

Erosion of Public Trust: Trust is an essential social capital in democracy. According to Uduji (2009), trust is an essential normative element. It is the umbilical cord; the essential attribute that binds government and the governed. Godfatherism brings about the erosion of this vital element. A situation where the electoral process is compromised and the electorate are emasculated of their power to choose their desired candidate but rather foisted the candidate the godfather has anointed. This kills trust in democracy as the people become aware that their vote is of little or no consequence to the outcome of the election. Chukwuemeka & Orji (2013) spells out the full implication of this when they opined that:

In a polity where prescribed rules guiding the electoral process are frequently disobeyed with impunity, the basis of citizens' trust in government was compromised. If the situation is not decisively addressed with the urgency it deserves, the resultant effect is that trust as a vital social capital is lost, and when there is no trust between the government and the governed, interaction would only take place based on mutual suspicion and this does not augur well for the healthy development of democratic governance (pp.214-215).

With this situation, the electorate loses faith in the government. This leads to political apathy.

Lack of Governmental Accountability and Transparency: It is said that no one serves two masters at a time. Hence, a politician who rode on the wings of a godfather to public office will always be accountable to the godfather before the people. His loyalty will always be tilted towards the godfather. He sees no need of being accountable to the people since it was not their votes that got him into office in the first place. This is a knee on the neck of democracy given that one of the essential features of democracy is responsive and transparent government. This equally hinders good governance and political stability, as the public servants who serve the people become a stooge to his godfathers. This is confirmed by Phinos & Kennedy (2020) who noted:

Perhaps one of the most disturbing and damaging influences of godfatherism in Nigeria's democracy was in the domain of making nonsense of a truly free, fair and credible electoral process in which the electorates by right are expected to freely elect people of their choice

into public office to represent their interests. Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice into public office was denied given the situation in which godfathers foisted candidates of their preference on the generality of the people. This is, to say the least very inimical to the tenets of democratic rule. When public office holders would not be accountable to the people, who at any rate did not count in their elections into public office. Invariably, the loyalty of such public office holders would be tilted towards their godfathers, and this in itself negates one of the critical attributes of democracy which is responsive and transparent government (p.149).

Therefore, godfathers hinder the entrenchment of sustainable democracy anchored on the rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public business.

Absence of the Dividends of Democracy: One of the sinister effects of godfatherism on democracy and governance in Nigeria is that it cordons off democratic dividends from trickling down to the common man. Given that they (godfathers) invested heavily to see that their preferred candidates walk into the corridor of power, once they (the godsons) assume office, like Shylock, they try to recuperate every dime they spent in the election. The long-term effect is that little or nothing is left for the masses in whose interests they were supposed to rule. This situation was aptly captured by Ugwu & Ugwuja (2016) who cited Chimaroke Nnamani (2003), a former governor of Enugu state, who in commenting on the negative implication of godfatherism in Nigerian politics stated:

The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined of course, though with limited resources, states in some noted cases get constrained by the ever-increasing needs to attain even if minimally, growth and development. If this is embraced, the demand or greed of godfatherism will certainly not be met. When it is not met, it is definite that the godfather will serve the notice of reminder to contract a new negotiation for settlement (p.58).

Chukwuemeka & Orji (2013) confirm this when they opined that the privilege of enjoying the dividends of democratic governance has been denied to the citizens due to the advent of godfatherism. This situation cripples the elected officials and makes them reluctant in advancing the well-being of the generality of the citizens through the initiation and implementation of policies. Going further, they state that the reason for this is that godfatherism in Nigeria is primarily predatory in nature. Therefore, the lean financial resource accruable to the state from the federation account which was meant for the improvement of the living standard of the citizens are diverted by the godsons to assuage the greed of their godfathers.

Gross Electoral Malpractices: Nkwede et al., (2014) contend that one of the most damaging influences of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic lies in the fact that it withered the electoral process, ripping it off every credibility. Since the godfathers' primary motive for venturing into politics is more often than not birthed by the need to have full access to the coffers of government manned by their godsons (Chukwuemeka & Orji, 2013) the godfathers have turned elections into a do-or-die affair. Winning elections becomes their meal ticket. This is one of the major factors responsible for electoral malpractice in Nigeria, as the godfathers assure their godsons of electoral success only to advance their social, political and economic influence. As a result, elections, especially in Nigeria's fourth republic, have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates (Igbini & Okolie, 2020). In a bid to achieve their selfish goals, the philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet goading the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government (Ohiole & Ojo, 2016).

According to Igbini & Okolie (2020), this unbridled desperateness to claim power is most evident in 2003, 2007, and 2019, *and even 2023* (italicized words mine) general elections were adjudged to be the worst elections in the history of the fourth republic. They note that this was evidenced by the massive rigging, monetization factor, corrupt practices of electoral officers and security personnel, judicial injustice, the assassination of political opponents, political thuggery, deliberate disfranchisement of the populace, outright disregard for the rule of law, political rivalry, hate speech, mobilization of religious sentiments, youth restiveness, political propaganda, multiple voting, under-aged voting, the addition of unofficial ballot boxes to official ones containing already thumb printed ballot papers, chasing of voters away from constituencies where their candidates are likely to have few votes, falsification of results and forgery of the figure both at polling units and collation centre's, forcing some party agents at gunpoint to sign forged election results among others which characterized the election. For Igbini & Okolie (2020) "What this implies is that the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded" (p.101). These incidents practically mirror how godfatherism is a knee on the neck of sustainable democracy.

Loss of True Patriotic Leaders: Political Godfatherism has made it exceedingly difficult for the emergence of good patriotic leaders, who have the heart for public service. Kolawole (2007) cited in Omotola (2007) affirms this when he cited a student of Nigerian politics, who described this predicament thus:

The influence of money on our politics is a constraint on the evolution of credible candidates into public office. One may have the best ideas on governance, impeccable academic credentials, and a sustainable history of tendency towards public-spiritedness. But it would amount to nothing in our society if he seeks public office without a corresponding deep pocket (p.16).

The muddy waters of the Nigerian political environment have been structured in such a way that new faces in the political arena that do not have long legs that stretch to the

house of a godfather or do not have the oil of anointing on their forehead that screams the name of a godfather makes no way in government. This points us back to the elite theory, where power is circulated only within the elite class or those recruited by the elites. Since godfathers are always after godsons that can be loyal and do their bidding while in power, they throw their weight around to make sure that anyone whom they perceive or suspect will go contrary to the norm does not step a foot into the corridor of power. This situation dissuades individuals, especially individuals who have a genuine interest in making positive change and are unwilling to dance to the tune of the godfather from contesting for elective positions. This withers true democracy as the same crop of unscrupulous political leaders is recycled even as they grossly underperform, thereby trapping the country in a vicious cycle of bad governance: a bane to sustainable democracy. Omotola (2007) aptly summarizes this when he noted that:

The role of the godfathers in the electoral process has serious negative implications for sustainable democracy, which requires that the game be played according to the rules, with people with a democratic mindset calling the shot at all levels of governance. The actions of the godfathers impede the emergence of true democrats in governance (p.148).

Having carefully examined the causes and implications of godfatherism on the practice of true democracy and governance. The next question is what is the way forward? How can the impacts of political godfatherism be cushioned to enable the growth of democracy and ensure good governance?

7. Cushioning the effects of the Menace of Godfatherism in Nigeria

Since godfatherism has already been entrenched in the polity, it is practically impossible to stamp it out. However, its rippling effects can be mitigated to give room for the continual growth of true democracy, which will birth good governance. This paper suggests ways the menace of godfatherism can be cushioned. They include the following:

- i. There is a need to strengthen the country's political institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Strict laws should be made to prevent interference of any sort with the activities of the body, for it to be truly independent and free from undue influence. The body should also be adequately funded to get all materials needed to conduct transparent and credible elections in Nigeria. The workers of the body should be well remunerated to enable them to execute their duties conscientiously.
- ii. There should be a reformation of the country's electoral laws aimed at reducing the financing of political parties and their candidates by individuals and corporate organizations. The law should place a limit on the amount an individual can donate to a party. And this amount should be paid directly into the coffers of the party and not the individual. The electoral law should equally

emphasize proper conduct of primary elections into various positions to improve the rights of the voters in the choice of their aspirants or representatives. The laws should guarantee the freedom of the electorate to vote for their preferred aspirants during elections without compulsion from political brutes that are part of the devices of godfathers. It should ensure proper sanctions are meted out to those who will falter at this. This will go a long way in clipping the grip of godfatherism on political parties, thereby enabling the growth of democracy.

- iii. To dissuade godfathers and other politicians who see politics as a means to enrich themselves, elective positions in Nigeria's context should be made unappealing, through the cut down on the humongous salaries paid to those in elective posts, which ossify the desperateness in the vying of such positions. Hence, the impression of paying huge allowances and salaries to elected leaders should be stamped out.
- iv. Since the youth are the accessible go vessels of political godfathers in the pursuance of their do-or-die affair game, which is clothed with violence, the best practical remedy to this is to empower the youth. If the youth are actively empowered through the creation of jobs and access to quality education, they will become less susceptible and more resistant to the ugly machinations of godfathers.
- v. Poverty alleviation strategies should be put in place. This will go a long way to water down the influence godfathers have on the electorates. But when the masses are hungry, they are easy prey to the manipulation of anyone who is with cash. When poverty is alleviated through good governance, the problem of greed and avarice which makes the people willful pawns in the chessboard of politicians and godfathers will be mitigated. This will help individuals to effectively participate in the developmental and democratic process.
- vi. Before the start elections campaign a provisional government should be employed to substitute the incumbent president, governor and local government chairmen shortly. This will be effective in controlling the Power of incumbency. This will stamp out the practice whereby the public officeholders oversee the elections in which they are contesting and collaborate with godfathers to rig the outcomes.
- vii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should introduce electronic voting for all elections in the nation. This will go a long way to give each contestant a level ground to contest. It will also encourage interested individuals to vie for political positions since there will be a drastic reduction in electoral malpractices.
- viii. There is a need for adequate political sensitization of the masses. This enlightenment campaign enlightenment campaigns will go a long way to open their eyes to the dangers and the negative effects of political godfatherism on the political development of the nation. This will also encourage political participation.

8. Conclusion

This paper was able to show that godfatherism is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian politics; it has always been in existence. Godfathers have always flooded the Nigerian political space right from colonial times to the first republic. In the first republic, the function of political godfathers was defined. The godfathers the likes of Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello and Awolowo understood their purpose as godfathers and so added value to governance through their close mentorship of those coming after them. The strong impact they made is echoed in continuous posthumous reverence of their names and works because they were considered to have laid the foundation of sustainable democracy. However, in the fourth republic godfatherism in the Nigerian political space has taken a different turn, which is a far cry from what it was in the first republic. A situation where godfathers are self-seeking individuals who hijack the state and manipulate it to suit their whims and caprices, even at the expense of the masses. It is this negative trend of political godfatherism that this paper tried to explore. It focused specifically on exploring the causes of the negative turn of political godfatherism, and its impacts of on the country's nascent democracy and made recommendations on how to cushion the effects of political godfatherism. Therefore, the paper has established that the current trend of political godfatherism is an aberration and a clog in the wheel of the true practice of democracy.

***Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo, PhD**

Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
Email: ratzingerjunior2020@gmail.com

References

- Abioye, O. (2011). "*Bombing: Foreign Airlines Planning Boycott of Abuja Airport,*" The Punch, September 5
- Adeoye O.A (2011). *Godfatherism and the Future of Nigerian Democracy*. African Journal of Political Science ISSN 3461-2165 Vol. 5 (3), pp. 001-005, March 2011. Available online at www.internationalscholarsjournals.org © international scholars journals\
- Ahmed, F. and Ali, A., (2019). *Politics and Godfatherism and its Implication on Socioeconomic and Political Development of Nigeria*. American International Journal of Social Science Research.
- Aiyaemkhue, E. (2010). *Godfatherism and the Compromise of Internal Democracy in Nigeria Politics*. Paper Presented at Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria, Benin, 16th October
- Alemika, E.O. (2007). "*Nigeria Security Agencies and the 2003 Elections: Lessons for the 2007 Elections*" in Isaac Albert, Derrick Marco and Victor Adertials (eds.), *Perspective on the 2003 elections in Nigeria*. Abuja I. Dasa
- Asogwa, J.O (2017) *Politics of Godfatherism in Nigeria*. Online Journal of Arts, Management and Social Sciences (OJAMSS); Vol.2 No.1, March 2017, pg.261 - 272 (ISSN: 2276 – 9013)
- Chukwuemeka E.O and Orji R.O(2013). *Give them their Rights: A Critical Review of Godfather and Godson Politics in Nigeria*. Review of Public Administration and Management
- Dele. I, Wakil, M and Ikpi, A.K(2022). *An Assessment of the Influence of Political Godfatherism on Nigeria's Politics: Implications for Socio-Economic and Political Development*. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research. Volume 5, Issue 2, 2022 (pp. 89-104) DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-GLPOISTF>
- Edigin, I. U(2010). *Political Conflicts and Godfatherism in Nigeria: A Focus on the Fourth Republic*. An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 4 (4), Serial no. 17, October 2010(pp. 174-186)
- Egboh, E. (2009). *Niger Delta Youth Restiveness and Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria*. International Journal of Sustainable Development, 1(1) 55-61
- Eke, G.F and Edosa, E. (2017). *The Problems and Implications of Godfatherism in Nigeria's Electoral Process*
- Ekhaton, Y.E.(2003). "*Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: An Overview of Efforts by the Past and Present Administrations*" in International Journal of Governance and Development, Vol. 1, No.1, March 2003. Institute of Governance and Development, A.A.U, Ekpoma. p. 75.

- Gambo, A. (2007). *Godfatherism and Electoral Politics in Nigeria*, (ed) Bernard, O. D (2009) *Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics and the Impact on National Development*. Lagos: Centre for Management Development, Shangisha.
- Igbini D.M and Okolie U.C (2020) *Godfatherism and its Threat to the Nigeria's Nascent Democracy*. Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law
- Mosca, G.M(2003).*The Ruling Class*. Ann Arbor Publishers, New York, 1939.
- Nkwede, J. O., Ibeogu, A. S and Nwankwo, O. U. (2014).*Political Godfatherism and Governance in a Developing Democracy: Insight from Nigeria*. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 3(4), 137–144. <https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2014.v3n4p137>
- Odion W.E (2007).*Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Implications for Development*. The constitution, volli':iq,2, June 2007
- Ogbonna E.C, and Ufomba E.E(2020).*Discourse On Religion And Political Godfatherism In Nigeria*. Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.3 No.4 December 2020; p.g. 75 – 83; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)
- Oghuvbu E.A. (2023).*Godfatherism and its Effects on Nigeria's Democracy*. Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, Vol.11, No.2, pp.58-71: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol11n25871>
- Ohiole, K. and Ojo. S (2016).*Political godfatherism and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Empirical evidence from Oyo State and Kwara State*. Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review, 5 (8), 1-12.
- Okechukwu, O and Chima C.C(2019).*Godfather Politics and Nigeria's Democracy: The Proliferation of Arms and Tomorrow's Future*. Gsj: volume 7, issue 7, July 2019 ISSN 2320-9186
- Omotola J.S(2007).*Godfathers and the 2007 Nigerian General Elections*. Journal of African Elections Volume 6. No.2
- Phinos N.A and Kennedy C.K(2020).*Politics of Godfatherism and Sustainable Development: A Study of Delta State Politics*. Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities Vol.18. No.4 December 2020 www.ichekejournal.com
- Uduji, P (2009) *Introduction to Political Science*. Enugu: Wayas Publisher
- Ugwu S.C. and Ugwuja, D. I. (2016).*Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Implications*. International Digital Organization for Scientific Research ISSN: 2579-079x IDOSR Journal of Science and Technology 1(1): 58-62, 2016.
- Weber m. (1922). *Economia Sociedad*. Mexico df: Fondo de Cultura Econmica, 696.

Wenibowei M.C(2011).*Political Godfatherism, Violence and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. International Journal of Advanced Legal Studies and Governance, Vol.2, No.1, April 2011

Yamokoski and Dubrow J.K. (2008). *How do Elites Define Influence? Personality and Respect as Sources of Social Power*. Sociological Focus, 41(4), 319–36.