

## Personality Influence and Democratic Challenges in Nigeria: A Case of Godfatherism and the 2015 Election

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### Abstract:

*The study examines the concept of political god-fatherism in Nigeria's forth republic with specific reference to political events and happenings in some states in Nigeria such as Oyo, Anambra and Kwara State from 1999-2011, and in relation to 2015 general election to date. It is a political philosophy and practice that denies Nigerians of their inalienable rights to enjoy democratic dividends. The ideology and its practice have rapidly transformed politics from civil engagement to an enterprise that benefits few individuals in the society. The godfathers use public wealth and power at their wish to sponsor candidates and influences his actions and decisions in their favor. This paper tends to discuss on the negative impact of godfatherism by negating the political aspirations of the people resulting to poor governance and institutions of authority, and the changing pattern in 2015 general election in Nigeria. It examines the previous cases and the challenges of posed on the practice through popular votes, commitment and discipline of the people against the godfathers influence in 2015 election. The study recommends among others that political godfatherism should be discarded and democrat institutions be strengthened to avoid godfatherism and money-bags politics.*

**Key words:** Godfather, Gladiator, Citizen, stakeholders, Politicization, Dividends.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Africa and other developing countries of the world, godfatherism has become the central point of political gangsterism (Azeez, 2014). The concentration of power and wealth of politicians explains the scramble for the control of political institutions by the political class in society. This struggle and the consequent values have impacted greatly on society in a diverse way. In the emerging democratic experience of our nation, the power tussles among the members of the political class have resulted to violence in varying forms of intensities. Nigeria's politics has been characterized by godfatherism, party politics, tribal and religious as well as money-bags (Amana & Ogwu, 2014). Though, Godfatherism in Nigeria's politics is not a new phenomenon, it gains more prominence in the fourth republic as it had served as intent instrument that helped many to ride into political power (Majekodunmi & Awosike, 2013). More so, the political mafias cut across party line and even thought it became more pronounced and celebrated in some states of Nigeria such as; Anambra, Enugu, Kwara and Oyo states. However, in recent time it has become a common phenomenon in the entire country and has threatened good governance and thereby undermining the sensitivity of the system and the wishes of the populous (Attah, Audu & Haruna, 2014).

The handiwork of godfathers was visible at the return to civil rule in 1979, but military regimes that characterized the 1980's obstructed its activities. The 1999 civilian rule ushered in another dimension of godfatherism, which reached its apex during the disputes that led to destruction of lives and properties and violent confrontation between a mafia of

Anambra state godfather (Chris Uba) and the then formal governor in the State (Chris Ngige). This singular act brings to the fore a new dimension to the practice of godfatherism in Nigeria. This contrasted with the roles played by godfathers in Nigeria's democratic practice between 1958 and 1983 (Wenibowe, 2011 & Etim 2015). The Nigerian Nationalist leaders and some of the builders of Nigerian federation such as the likes of Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello, who become godfathers after independence, were lionized, respected, idolized and worshipped (Bello, 2011 & Ifenyei 2017). Although people tried to exaggerate their impacts, and their persons were made to look more ordinary. But their brand of godfatherism added value and experience to governance. Nigeria joined the comity of democratically governed countries, it has continued to experience an unprecedented rise in political violence ranging from increases crime wave, armed robbery, political assassination, and religious riots because of crisis loomed between godfather and godson. The grave political development crisis has generated a growing body of analyses and prescriptions on what has gone wrong and what should be done (Ifenyei 2017). The dominant strands of analytical expositions have appeared that prominent in the political and intellectual circle, giving rise to diametrically oppressed interrogation of the injection of godfatherism in Nigeria's political dispensation. Godfatherism is one of the most important factors responsible for poor democratic institution in Nigeria, the fact that godfather assure their clients on winning elections when reaching agreements with them using the word "do or die". Should money and influence be the only determinant of an election in Nigeria's political content? Most politician join any confraternity or go into feeble and illegal agreements with powerful rich mobile Nigerians before they could context for an election?

Experiences has however shown that, the application of this concept has mostly resulted to democratic failures and disasters in electing credible candidates to imposition of mediocrity into political and appointive positions, and the whole experience has been that of pains, misery, penury, squalor and damnation arising from poor performance and poor service delivery among godsons. Thus, the whole scenario has been the promotion of political follow-follow mentality and at the detriment of the electorates. The point that needs to be reinstated here above all is that, it is impossible to understand the character of political godfatherism in the past and its contemporary forms in Nigeria's fourth republic.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Political Process of Nigeria prior to the 1999 democratic rule has been dominated by military dictatorship after several years of political subjugation or hostage in the hand of military rulers. The political process started in 1999, seem to be under threat by the emergence of political gladiators (Akande, 2013). The phenomena can be generally seen as a practice which entails the sustenance of a kind social and political relationships existed between the subordinates and the superior for the propagation and fulfilment of certain roles, desires and interactions which binds both together or in which both have equal stake but with the superior determining what the subordinate gets in the process (Nkwede & Ibeogu, 2014). In the realm of politics, godfatherism portrays a power-based relationship. For instance, Wenibowei (2011) emphasizes that the implicit feature is godfatherism in power. He stated that, power is the determinant or fundamental feature of godfatherism and the power could be economic, political or spiritual etc. Oarhe (2010) also sees Godfatherism as power relationship often skewed in favour of the godfather who can

afford to lord over the godson, if, he so wishes owing to his super ordinate influence and affluence. The godfather settles to dictate "who gets what, when and how" in the distribution of scarce resources after the election have been contested and won. Therefore, the role of godfathers goes beyond the election of one having the abilities and capabilities to manipulate the electoral process to the favour of his chosen godson (Alumona, 2010).

Political godfatherism also connotes sponsorship of contestants in an election by a wealthy and influential individual or group of whom in return expects protection and other forms of reward and privileges. Edigin (2010) therefore, sees godfatherism as "an institution of political king making through which certain political office holders of tenuous political clout come into power". Hence, it is a relationship based on political surrogacy involving financial and moral assistance where the godfather is the major donor and the godson the primary receiver. Godfatherism, in its simple form is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and godson. Godfathers are slightly different from mafia and election sponsors. Mafianism in politics consist of formidable powerful blocs that have tremendous influence in the society (Ifenyei 2017). It comprises of coalition of strong socio-economic and political elites that share similar value system, and under an organized structure. In most cases, there are always godfathers who control the affairs of the mafia. Godfathers are powerful individuals who determine "who, what, when and how" in the corridors of power. Many godfathers in the present-day Nigeria operates like the mafia by displaying similar violent scheming and aggressive "politicking", coupled with manipulating devices of having their way by any means. They rely on Machiavelli's slogan, "the ends justify the means" (Onubi, 2002).

Election sponsors, on the other hand are rich individuals that volunteer to donate generously towards the electoral success of a party or sponsor candidates during election. He might be less bothered about the active politics or supervision of government business but expects friendly policies from government. Nigeria's godfathers in the 21st century sponsors election, but not all election sponsors are godfathers. Godfathers reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, and religion environment (Ishaku, Jatau & Badung, 2014). The relationship between godfather and godson in politics claims the monopolistic use of the term godfatherism makes it political. Godfatherism thrives across the globe. There is hardly any state devoid of the existence and influence of godfathers, though the level of such influence varies. In America, the political candidates wiggle around, seeking group and individual endorsements for their candidacy. Also, in other advanced societies, group influence and endorsement could be more valuable than a powerful individual (Chukwuemeka, Oji & Chukwurah 2013). The fact remains that prominent member of the society still influence the society in their voting behaviours.

The concept of democracy as a system of government originated from ancient Greece, (Athens). According to Abdullahi & Sakariyau (2010) Democracy refers to "rule by the people" thus; it is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Therefore, it means government of the majority. Democracy can also be described as an idea, process of leading to change or course of action of system of government (Agbaje, 2012). Attah, Audu & Haruna (2014) added that democracy entrenches and expands, or seeks to entrench and expand, rights, ability and capacity of the citizens in a given society.

Ademola (2009) contend that the difficult in the concept is in its divergent approach in attempt to give it a meaning yet, there is consensus on the original attributes of democracy

which encompasses; people, freedom and authority. The concepts have been misconstrued in Nigeria with mere civil rule because the practice has not witness freedom of choice, constituted authority, rule of law, sagacity and service delivery to the citizenry (Azeez, 2014). Consequently, even the military government that is mostly criticized world over also provides basic facilities for its citizens therefore, the clear distinction between military and democratic rule is freedom and people-oriented government (Caradonna, 2010).

## **THEORETICAL INSIGHT**

It has become a universal phenomenon in social and management sciences for facts to be investigated or examined precisely within a theory, rather than in an isolated manner. For Goode and Hatt (1952), theoretical orientation functions mainly by bridging the range of facts that are to be investigated. In an empirical theoretical base, it is necessary to develop a sound theory, which can explain the wise concepts and relationships of variables in the study. The essentiality of theoretical insight in a study is also pigeon-hold in the fact that social science research is theory based and its operations are guided by relevant principles of human behaviour (Goode and Hatt 1952).

Consequently, this study is anchored on elite theory. The major assumptions of elite theory are that in every society there is and must be a minority which rules over the rest of society, and this minority forms the political class or governing elites composed of those who occupy the posts of political command and more regularly those who can directly influence political decisions. They undergo changes in its membership over a period, ordinarily by the recruitment of new individual members from the lower strata of the society, sometimes by the incorporation of new social groups, and occasionally by the

complete replacement of the established elite by a counter-elite. Scholars such as Saint Simon, Hippolyte, Ludwis, Marx Weber (1864-1920), Vilfredo Pareto Gaetano (1848-1923) opined that in every branch of human activity everyone is given an index which stands as a sign of his capacity, very much the way grades are given in the various subjects in examinations in school (Nkwede, 2014). According to Nkwede who is the leading proponent of this elite paradigm, an elitist correlation to the understanding of godfatherism is very apt. He sees godfatherism as being synonymous with the elites. As much elites in the political spheres are known in Nigerian context as godfathers. They are the ones who govern, and are known as the kingmakers, the notables and often seen as strongmen who control politics in their different domains. Apparently, in a political environment where godfatherism is in vogue, individuals are colonized by the godfathers. In order words, godfathers rule by proxies (Joseph, Ibeogu & Nwankwo, 2014). The relevance of this theory is the interconnectivity that exists in the explanation of political godfatherism and Democracy.

## **GODFATHERISM AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS**

Godfatherism has become a scary phenomenon in Nigerian politics. As rightly observed by Bello (2011), Godfatherism in Nigeria Democracy particularly in its current system of administration is distributive. It is historically deeply rooted based on cultural values of Nigeria society, where it is purely socio-economic in nature and mutually productive for the beneficiaries. Its politicization would appear to have contributed to the criminalization of politics. For instance, Hausa and Yoruba have a well-institutionalized and centralized traditional system where the godfather is well known and respected as emir, chief or Oba as the case may be. Godfathers

reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, and religion environment (Oji, Eme & Nwoba, 2014). Therefore, the clamour for true democracy in Nigeria is to improve the political and socioeconomic situation of the country through massive participation in the policy formulation, but reverse is the case as those that attained political corridor in both legislative and executive arms of government manipulate governance to serve the interest and desire of political godfathers. Thus, the political office holders from top to bottom such as the Governors and Legislators boards, Secretaries to the various government institutions as well as Local Governments, hold on to power as a mechanism to influence the allocation of developmental projects into various localities within the state and the centre (Oji, Eme & Nwoba, 2014).

Meanwhile, the impact of the godfathers on Nigeria's general elections recently concluded in May 2015 was unprecedented. Godfathers are those who possesses the power to ascertain the security connections, extended local links, enormous financial weight to plot and determine the success of a power seeker at any level of a supposedly competitive politics however, the 2015 general elections reverse the case where the incumbent President i.e. (Formal President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan lost the election to opposition, Mohammed Buhari who is now the current President of the Federal republic of Nigeria. Through commitment and discipline, Nigerians have restored their democratically high-jacked rights by the so-called godfathers and have now become the employers of their representatives at various level of governance and can dispose the trust when betrayed.

The violence and money-bag politics often used by the political godfathers and their godsons against free and fair election for decades was defeated by popular votes in the 2015 polls. It is a success against the presumed impossibility of the godfathers that electorates have demonstrated their sovereign

power through election. Godfatherism resulting to poor governance could be challenged through poll. The value of popular votes and waiting behind to ensure votes count with the aids of technological devices used during 2015 polls has yielded a positive result of popular voting against the godfather's interest. It is important to note that various attempt was made by the opposition parties prior to the 2015 polls to unite and form a formidable coalition to challenge the then ruling party PDP, but the political godfathers have made the effort fruitless. The godfathers through the ruling party were so arrogant to believe that it will rule for sixty years.

It is believed by many average Nigerians that the main heroes of 2015 general election were the Nigerian people through their commitment to come out for voting, wait to monitor and escort their votes from polling units to the last process of declaring winners. This shows that the popular wishes of Nigeria are greater than incumbency factor and hitherto political godfathers interest. Going by this event, Nigeria has recorded for the first time where godfathers has not work against the wishes of the electorates and has proven that popular votes have come up age against the desire of few godfathers through strong and sustaining opposition.

## **THE EXPERIENCES OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA**

This phenomenon of godfather is not totally new to Nigerian politics as some of Nationalist and freedom fighters such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, etc., are somehow related as typifying the modern-day operations of the political godfather. The fourth Republic in Nigeria has witnessed these phenomenon rights from inception as soon after the Governors were swear-in in 1999. The political actors and their political godfather were in the verge of contending "who is who" in their state. Prominent among the kingpins in

the states are Modu Ali Sheriff(Senator) vs Governor Mala Kachalla of Borno; Olusola Saraki vs Late Mohammed Lawal governor of Kwara State; Jim Nwobodo (Senator) vs Governor Chimaroke Nnamani (Enugu State); Emeka Offor (Chief) vs Governor Chinwoke Mbadinju (Anambra State); Abubakar Rimi (Alhaji) vs Governor Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano State and Lamidi Adebibu vs Governor Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo State to mention a few. These are various political godfatherism climaxes down the democratic institution of their state to wars. Prominent of which are emphasized below:

### ***The Kwara State Crisis***

The Kwara State crisis started between 1999 - 2003, the battle line in Kwara politics was pervasive where Saraki, former senate leader and political kingpin, was in contest for relevance with his former protégé, Mohammed Lawal, a retired Navy Commodore, who was the Governor of the State then. Saraki, who has installed not less than four (4) Governors in the State, including Lawal himself, fell out with Lawal on the sharing of political benefits and commissions. But Lawal did not compromise and these led to a serious crisis between the godfather (SARAKI) and godson (LAWAL) which culminated into the expulsion of SARAKI from the then All People's Party (APP) now All Nigerian People's party (ANPP) and SARAKI teamed up with People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the State. Then, the 2003 elections to both men were the ultimate battle to determine the political grandmaster of the State. They deployed their vast resources to prosecute the "war". During this "war" bomb blast shattered the peace of Ilorin, this happened at the premises of National Pilot owned by the SARAKI'S. Lot of people were assassinated, maimed, injured, etc, during the imbroglio. Notable among those assassinated was the Chairman of PDP in the State, Ahmed PATIGI, who was brutally murdered in August 2002. Supporters of the two

(2) camps openly confronted each other with dangerous weapons with the police turning into spectators. But this was put to an end when the junior SARAHI won the Governorship election in the State in 2003 and the rest becomes history.

### ***The Oyo State Showdown***

The battle line in Oyo State was drawn between Lamidi ADEDIBU - the kingpin of Ibadan Politics (godfather) and the (godson) governor of the State, Rashidi LADOJA. Adedibu claimed to have contributed financially in "installing" LADOJA as the governor, with an agreement that the governor will be loyal and submissive, taking orders from him and to subject public resources, to his private whims and caprices. However, LADOJA reneged and refused to play according to the rules of the game. This culminated into the mayhem witnessed in Ibadan after 2003 elections till January 2006. Many lives and properties were lost, the State House of Assembly was also polarized along the two (2) divides and led to the suspension of fourteen (14) members out of thirty-two (32) - members Assembly. Subsequently, LADOJA was impeached within 25 minutes in January 2006 to pave way for his deputy, Alao AKALA, another willing godson, who is eager to serve the godfather better. The status quo was maintained till December 7th, 2006 final ruling of the apex court (Supreme Court) that his removal was illegal and was reinstated after eleven (11) months out of his office. His coming back to the office was faced with serious resistance from his former godfather's (ADEDIBU) camp, which led to break in law and order of the State capital for few days and living many innocent citizens with various kind of injuries.

### ***The Anambra state fracas***

This is another state that experiences politics of godfather and godson in Nigeria in 1999-2003, the then governor godson had

refused to dance to the tune of his godfather, which led to a fight between them. The situation has led the godson Nbadiniju to politically cross-carpeted and decamp from the then ruling party (PDP) to one of the opposition party (AD) while in power in order to recontest for the second time in 2003. The dirt raised by these politically heavy-weights in the state and the subsequent emerging power tussle between Ngige and Uba in same Anambra state, where Uba became the political father of Ngige who bankrolled his campaign to emerge victorious. Soon after the election, Ngige the governor and the political son refused to honour the agreed propositions reached with the political godfather. At that moment, what was done in cover between the duo became a public war followed by the abduction of the sitting governor and purported his resignation. Since then, the state has not experience peace until when court nullified the election on the bases of irregularities.

### **EFFECT OF GODFATHERISM ON NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY**

The emergence of godfatherism in Nigeria fourth republic (1999-2017) posed a great threat to democratic dividends, socio-economic development and stability of good governance. Perhaps, one of the most disturbing and damaging influence of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic was canvassing for a truly free, fair and credible electoral process in which the electorates by right are expected to freely elect who govern them and represent their interests.

Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice to govern them was denied given the situations 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 (Chukwuemeka, 2013).

When public office holders would not be accountable to the people, who at any rate did not count in their elections into

office, invariably, the loyalty of such public officer would be titled towards their godfathers and this negates one of the critical attributes of governance and democracy which is responsive and transparent government. This scenario is also inimical to good governance and political stability which are predicated on the rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs. The emergence of godfatherism has also robbed the citizens the privilege of enjoying the dividends of democratic governance in the sense that government has become reluctant to initiate and implement policies that would advance the wellbeing of the generality of the citizens. This was a result of the fact that godfathers in Nigeria were basically greedy in nature. The primary motive of venturing into politics was born out of the need to acquire wealth and enrich themselves from the coffers of government to which their godsons held sways (Chukwuemeka, 2013).

Therefore, the financial resource accruable to the state from the federation account which was meant for the improvement of living standards of the citizens was paramount interest to them. In case godson's refuses to settle their godfathers as agreed, hell will let loose. The experiences recorded in Abakaliki Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, between the former Chairman, Hon. Emma Uguru and Mr. Matthew Uguru (Incumbent), 2007 - 2011, Senator Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo State and Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu between 2003 and 2007, Alhaji Olusola Saraki and Rtd Navy Commodore Mohammed Lawal between 2003 - 2007, and Chief Chris Uba and Dr. Chris Ngige between 2003 - 2006 were awful and devastating (Ikpe, 2012).

The end and consequences of these (godfatherism) in our politics is that economic activities are brought to a halt, especially education sectors, health, security (political wrangling), agriculture, housing and infrastructural

development etc. It then implies that godfatherism is responsible for poor democratic Institution and governance as in the case of Oyo, Kwara and Anambra State of Nigeria. These godfathers in the states exemplified in this study are not simply financiers of political campaigns, rather they are individuals whose power stems not just from wealth but from their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate central, state or local political systems in support of a politicians they sponsor. Kura, (2014) observed that godfathers demand a substantial degree of control over the government being not in order to shape policy for good will, but to exact direct financial return of government resources stolen by their protagonist

## **REMARKS**

The analysis of findings as generated by the foregoing discussion shows that political godfatherism in Nigeria has become one of the greatest threats to democratic consolidation. The study reveals that political godfatherism has hampered good governance in Nigeria; Revenues allocated to other tiers of government i.e. states and local councils are often mismanaged with unjustified and ridiculous number of contracts awarded to godfathers and other political associates (Ojebuyi & Ekania, 2013) under one disguise or another for fear of been removed from office. Some are paid monthly allowances from the state purse for jobs not done, all to satisfy godfather at the detriment of the people. The study also reveals that godfather is responsible for poor democratic institute in Nigeria, which added that political godfatherism is based on political surrogacy involving financial and moral assistance where the godfather is the major donor and the godson the primary receiver as a result, masses are being undermined with no dividend of democracy. Meanwhile godfather has threatened the survival of Nigeria blossoming democratic experience. For instance, the

unconstitutional removal of a sitting Governor as in the case of Ladoja (Oyo state) in 2006 could lead to political instability in the state.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study has established that democracy in Nigeria has not been fully institutionalized and phenomenon of godfatherism has threatened democratic process and the socio-economic lives of the citizenry. Political godfathers are a syndrome in our political process militating against democratic institution to satisfy their selfish interest, they are even ready to a simile dons of mafia organization to their modus operandi, subjugating public office holders like governors and council's chairmen to their dictates. The activities of these political gladiators have denied the citizenry from electing preferred candidates as their leader. The responses of the political gladiators can also be seen in the context of one preferring patronage at the expense of policy (Asogwa 2017). The occupant of political office is expected to use his position personally to maintain their political gladiators. In fact, the godfather depends on state resources as his contribution to the political success of a government leader thereby opposing democratic dividends. Godfathers involved in election malpractices, using security agents to intimidate electorate during election (Akande, 2013).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings and conclusion from this study the author recommends that democratic institution should be strengthened to eschew godfathers and politicization of core government policies and programs. Political parties should promote party's discipline with rules and regulations strictly

adhered by members of the party. More so, there is need to sensitize citizens on the importance of participating in election, and citizens' consciousness should be arousing on demanding proper accountability from political office holder. Finally, stakeholders in Nigeria electoral process such as the government, Judiciary, electoral body, civil society, and religious institutions should vigorously be committed to strengthening the democratic system.

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