

GODFATHERISM AND ITS THREAT TO THE NIGERIA'S NASCENT DEMOCRACY

D. M. IGBINI

Department of Political Science
Delta State University, P.M.B. 1, Abraka, Nigeria
igbinidaniel@gmail.com

U. C. OKOLIE

Department of Political Science
Delta State University, P.M.B. 1, Abraka, Nigeria
ugookolie3@gmail.com

Abstract: *Democracy has promoted political and socio-economic development far more effectively than any other political system across many countries and centuries of history. In Nigeria, it has been characterized with political corruption, ethnic politics, politicking of core government policies and programmes and politics of godfatherism. Since the return of democratic rule in 1999 to date, the country witnessed a heightened tempo in the politics of godfatherism, which has not only retards the process of democratic consolidation but also undermines effective state governance and restricts rather than broadens democratic representation. Godfatherism is one of the greatest glitches facing the Nigerian political system. This paper therefore, attempts a reflection on the nature, causes and effect of godfatherism on Nigeria's nascent democracy. We anchored our investigation on some basic propositions arising from the elite theory and argue that politics of godfatherism negates peaceful coexistence, law and order and poses a threat to the Nigeria's nascent democracy. This paper which is theoretical in nature draws its argument basically from secondary data which include journal articles, textbooks and internet sources. Requisite conclusion and recommendations were provided in the light of the theoretical findings.*

Keywords: *democracy, godfatherism, politics, corruption, development*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's democracy has remained grossly unstable since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, politics becomes personalized and patronage becomes essential to maintain power. Democracy as the moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered has spreads to many parts of the world and it has hardly taken root, especially in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. The introduction of what would otherwise be considered irreducible minimum conditions for democratic rule, namely, multiple political parties, periodic and competitive elections have not led to a corresponding flourishing of basic liberal values that are critical to the survival of democracy. If anything, it has brought about a transmutation of authoritarianism instead of democratic consolidation in Nigeria due to the politics of godfatherism, which negates peaceful coexistence, law and order, and all tenets of democratic process by obstructing candidate selection and even executive selection once government is installed.

Politics of godfatherism is not a new phenomenon in the political movements of Nigeria, but since the return to democratic rule, the country witnessed a heightened tempo

in the politics of godfatherism that continues to reduce the legitimacy of government and void the electoral value of the citizens (1-2). Godfatherism according to Oke (1:36), “has come to assume a dangerous dimension as a consequence of the monetization of politics. Godfatherism is one of the biggest dangers to democracy today and paradoxically, it only survives with government support and produces an unresponsive leadership”. Ohiole and Ojo (3:11) averred “democracy in Nigeria has not been fully established and the phenomenon of godfatherism has endangered democratic process and the socio-economic lives of the citizens”. This is the hiatus that this paper aspired to fill. The paper therefore, attempts a reflection on the nature, causes and effect of godfatherism on Nigeria’s nascent democracy.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts qualitative research design. The researchers used descriptive analysis to examine the issues of godfatherism and democracy in Nigeria. The paper, which is theoretical in nature, draws its argument basically from secondary data which include journal articles, textbooks and internet sources.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Like any other terminology employed by social scientists, the concept of godfatherism is a term that does not lend itself to easy definition. To fully understand this, some related concepts like godfather and godson need to be defined. Godfather is a kingmaker, boss, mentor and principal. 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 electorate that could secure victory for candidates of his choice” (4:269). The Hausa’s as ‘Maigida’ (master of the house) popularly knows a godfather. The word Maigida goes beyond its literal meaning. Polly, 1966; Abner, 1971 and Pally, 2004 cited in Attah, Audu and Haruna (5) used the term in their works to refer to those who provided brokerage services to Hausa traders in transit in different parts of West Africa. These traders, at the various transit centres where they have to stop to do business rely on a maigida to facilitate their economic activities. The maigida provides them with accommodation, storage and brokerage services. In the Yoruba society, godfather is referred to as ‘Baba Kekere’ (the small great father), ‘Baba Isale’ (the father of the underground world) or ‘Baba Nigbejo’ (a great helper in time of trouble). Historical of these terms is ‘Baba Kekere’. It was used to depict community leaders with whom people of less social status identified as a way of providing physical, social, political and economic security for themselves. For example, most of the Yoruba refugees who came to settle in Ibadan in the early nineteenth century settled with the ‘baba kekere’. Dickson (6) also noted that the philosophy of godfather is grounded in the sociology of traditional Igbo society. He further showed evidence to the popular relationship between ‘Nnam-ukwu’ (my master) and ‘Odibo’ (the servant) in the Igbo traditional concept. A younger person is entrusted to a more mature and experienced person for training in social, economic and moral adulthood. The role played by the man in this kind of relationship is akin to that of a godfather. Thus, the triple cases showcased above shows those persons of lesser social status attaches themselves to another person of higher

social integrity usually for economic benefits. Though, this practice is not alien to Nigeria but is strange in the replication of this practice into our political system (5).

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. Olawale (7) observed that politics of godfather has far-reaching negative effects on the democratization process in Nigeria. This argument is still plausible today. Therefore, godfathers in the context of this paper are powerful individuals in the society who determine ‘who, what, when and how’ in the corridors of power. Many godfathers in the present day Nigeria operates like mafia by displaying violent scheming and aggressive ‘politicking’, coupled with manipulating devices of having their way by any means possible. They rely on Machiavelli’s slogan, ‘the ends justify the means’. They reign across all spheres of the society: academics, legal, political and religion environment (4). Godson on the other hand referred to the beneficiary and recipient of the legacy of a godfather.

The term godfatherism have been defined by several academic scholars based on their perception and understanding of the concept. According to Abioye, 2007 cited in Eke and Osaghae (8:65-66), godfatherism is “a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and a chosen godson. It is a kind of politics whereby influential person in a popular or ruling party will assists someone usually godson to emerge as the candidate for the party by all cost either by hook or crook. He will assist him to emerge victorious in the election irrespective of whether he is a popular candidate or not”. In the view of Scott (9:92), godfatherism is “a special case of dyadic (two persons) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron or godfather) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits or both for a person of lower status (client or godson) who for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron or godfather”. Olawale (7) noted that the present-day godfatherism is a primordial tradition taken to a criminal extent. However, Ajayi(10) observed that 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. In addition, in other advanced societies, group influence and endorsement could be more valuable than a powerful individual could. The fact remains that prominent member of the society still influence the society in their voting behaviour. Notwithstanding, the features of patron-client politics remain constant. It is based on imbalance of power, existing in the context of face-to-face personal relationship, incorporation of wide range socio-political and economic forms of exchange, display of kickbacks and consideration of cost-benefit theory and availability of vote-giver and vote-accepter (4). The relationship between godfather and godson is not free floating, it is contractual and the contract is sometimes written and even sealed spiritually with an oath, or at the extreme, in a ‘shrine’ in Nigeria (11).

At this point, it is necessary to give a brief insight into the concept of democracy. Democracy just like godfatherism, is a concept that is not amenable to definitional unanimity, more so as there exist several versions of it. Common among the versions are the Athenian classical democracy, Marxists-Leninist democracy, Liberal democracy, and lately, Radical democratic conception to mention a few. Democratic discussion is often embroiled in controversies, over which ideally is true democracy, given scholars’ divergence of views on the concept and practice of democracy. For the sake of this paper

however, we are concerned with liberal democracy otherwise known as representative democracy and how it is impeded by politics of godfatherism in Nigeria. Democracy, in liberal perspective, is “government by popular representation; a form of government in which the supreme power is retained by the people, but is indirectly exercised through a system of representation and delegated authority periodically renewed; a constitutional representative government” (12:29). Therefore, democracy is good of the people by the people and for the people. It is accepted that liberal democracy has some universal values such as, free press, openness and transparency of government, respect for the rule of law and constitutionalism, accountability, equity and inclusiveness, participation, consensus-orientation and effective and efficient service delivery. In Nigeria, the concept of democracy has been misconstrued with mere civil rule because the practice has not witness freedom of choice, constituted authority, respected for the rule of law, sagacity and service delivery (13).

El-Rufai, 2003 cited in Eke and Osaghae (8), noted that the central concern of Liberal democracy is to provide the framework for the aggregation of long-term interest of the majority and the channeling of public resources in the pursuit of that interest. However, where corruption by the custodians of the aggregate interest exists and persists, the chances are that development targets will be missed and the ‘Hobbesian’ society would emerge. Consequently, societies that have adhered to minimum liberal democratic principles have raised guaranteed living standards by observing and complying with simple rules, which include private sector led growth, macro-economic stability and fiscal discipline, investment promotion, deregulation of financial markets and anti-corruption measures, especially when these are backed by a stable and predictable judicial system and internal security.

POLITICS OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW

The political godfathers consist of some rich Nigerians who see sponsorship of political candidates as a source of upward social and economic mobility. Every political transition programme in Nigeria is started with the formation of new parties. The founders of many of these political parties often have agendas, positions, interests and needs that are in most cases kept secret. Those who later come to join the parties thus have to depend on what the ‘godfathers’ in the party say or do. Those who want to do well in the parties thus have to attend secret meetings in the house of their godfathers. This provides them with access to privileged information about party processes and how to navigate them. To enhance their own positions in the party, the godfathers ensure that party officials are over-regulated. The regulations in the system are themselves devices for making the political process become easier for manipulation of both state and party officials. This goal becomes easier to achieve in a society that contains an army of unemployed youths willing to be used to attain criminal objectives. Things work better where the political environment in which all these are taking place consists of a docile ‘anything-goes’ society. The last but not the least important factor for godfatherism to flourish in Nigeria is a malleable criminal and social justice system (7). Thus, for godfatherism to flourish as witnessed in today’s Nigerian polity, a number of factors are responsible. The first is a profit-motivated political patron, a pliable political process that serves the interest of just a few in the society, a weak

civil society and electoral system, some do-or-die office seekers and a greedy mass media willing to serve the interest of the highest bidder in the society.

Historically, the operationalization and the attendant dynamics of political godfatherism in Nigeria predate the political independence of Nigeria. This is because, the social and political features of pre-colonial Nigeria has always resembled the phenomena of what Richards (14) defined as prebendalism, clientelism and patron-client transactional relationship. In his description of this pre-colonial patron-client prebendal relationships in Nigeria, Olawale (7:85) did posit that the word “godfather” appears in parenthesis in many western political studies. The situation is different in Nigeria; the patron-client relations that popularized the term in Nigerian politics have cultural roots among many Nigerian peoples. It is not a totally new experience in the sociology of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbos, for the people to have one or other type of “godfather”, for example, the word “godfather” has a local equivalence in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages and these words have been in use since the pre-colonial era”. However, the pre-colonial patron-client prebendalism was easily carried over to the post-colonial political arrangements in Nigeria. Olawale (7:87) in support of this claim affirms that “the founding fathers of party politics in Nigeria were godfathers of a sort. They were preceded by the first generational Nigerian elites who establish contact with the Europeans in late 1800s. The leading figures were the traditional rulers who later became the hub of the indirect rule policy of the British in the country”.

As the colonial administration was coming to an end in the 1950s, with nationalist activities holding sway, the few educated elites of just about six percent of the Nigerian population (Jame Coleman, 1963) became the vanguard for the struggle for independence. Political parties that were regionally based were formed in the categories of Northern People’s Congress (NPC) for the North, the Action Group (AG) for the Yoruba-dominated South-West and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) for the Igbo-dominated eastern Nigeria. The role of the godfathers at this time was to show the way for the other Nigerians in a colonial system. Olawale (7:87) in reporting on the political patrons of this period did maintain that “the political godfathers of this era included the then Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who led the NPC, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG and Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC leader. The other elder statesmen that fell into this category in Nigeria 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”.

Ugwu, Izueke and Obasi (15) noted that the above stated political godfathers of the three major regions of Nigeria produced enormous political godsons in the later political dispensation who occupied various political positions. Some of these are Sir Ahmadu Bello’s political godsons known in Nigeria as the ‘Kaduna Mafia’, the chief Awolowo’s political godsons known in the South-West as the ‘Afenifere’ (those who wish others well) among whom are Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lateef Jakande and Chief Bisi Onabanjo (all former state governors, 1979-1983) and Nnamdi Azikiwe’s political godsons in the Eastern Igbo region of Nigeria like Chief Nwobodo and Chief Sam Mbakwe (both former governors of states). All these godsons of the first generation patrons later became godfathers in subsequent Nigerian politics. However, politics of godfatherism became widespread in the Nigerian polity from 1999 to date, when those in power became the political godfathers in states politics. Godfatherism, which is a phenomenon that allows

political heavy-weights 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. In addition, discussing the dynamics of godfatherism in Nigeria, Adeoye (4:270) argued that “it got so bad under the watchful eyes of Obasanjo-led government that godfathers assumed different names: gangsters, mafia and criminal. The worse manifestations of godfatherism in Nigerian history came to life under president Obasanjo’s democratic rule for one simple reason, he promoted and allowed it. Some of the godfathers truly possessed all characteristics of mafianism, many of them behaving like ‘Al capone’ in a criminal world; but these set of godfathers perpetuated their criminality in endearing political environment”. For example, in Lagos State, former governor Ambode is the victim and Jide Sanwo-Olu is the beneficiary of politics of godfatherism. Thus, the contemporary godfatherism in the country is one of the ruinous legacies of the Babangida (1985-1993), Abacha (1993-1998) and Obasanjo (1999-2007) regimes.

CAUSES OF POLITICS OF GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA

The cause of politics of godfatherism in Nigeria is not far-fetched. Former governor Chimaroke Nnamani, 2003 cited in Adeoye (4:82) affirms that godfather is “an impervious guardian figure who provided the lifeline and direction to the godson, perceived to live a life of total submission, subservience and protection of the oracular personality located in the large, material frame of opulence, affluence and decisiveness, that is, if not ruthless...strictly, the godfather is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes”. The political godfathers in Nigeria build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence which is often tied to monetary considerations to manipulate the rest of the society. Ahmed and Ali (2) posit that there are numerous factors that led to the politics of godfatherism in Nigeria, among which 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. It is understood that corruptive tendencies intensify the economic base of the godfathers by making a wide diversity of difficulties in the politics and rule because the godfathers use their influence and money to place their godsons and wards in several position of power. So also, those in power use their position to decide the next to represent the interest of the citizens at all cost (16). For example, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa turns Delta state to family business and gives four hundred million naira (₦400, 000,000) to daughter’s office at the expense of the people. Also, 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; concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, allocation of much power to chief executive at all levels, making the position more attractive.

GODFATHER AND GODSON CRISIS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

Godfatherism is an ideology which is constructed on the belief that certain individuals possesses considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets party ticket to

run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest. However, it is the intention of the godfathers to rule by proxy. Thus, they dispense violence freely and fully to those who stand in their way including their godsons. Godfathers are merchants of fear and power brokers in Nigerian politics. People throng into and out of their houses on a daily basis, running errands or seeking one favour or another. Olawale (9:76) noted that “the relationship between political godfatherism and their adopted sons is usually transactional in nature; it is a case of ‘you rub my back, and I rub your back’, as Nigerians say. Like every businesspersons, godfathers invest in their ‘godsons’ and expect returns after elections. This is often through juicy ministerial appointments, contracts, land allocations, sharing of political influence and power with incumbents, and if the accusations against some of them are to be taken seriously, unjustified demands for allocation of state financial resources”. The favours a godfather demands and get from his godson are for strategic reasons. In most cases, he asks the right to nominate about eight (8) percent of those to serve in the cabinet of his godson. Many godfathers also ensure that they control the majority of the members of state houses of assembly in Nigeria and they readily use these people to threaten the governors with impeachment any time there is a disagreement. Nigerian political godfathers make more money from the political process than any other persons. As the principal godsons bring monthly ‘kola’ (ransom fees) to their godfathers, those they imposed as commissioners, permanent secretaries, board chairmen, etc., make similar monthly payments.

However, most godfather-godson conflicts in Nigeria surface immediately after elections. This is when the ‘arrange governor’ is expected to begin to implement the agreement reached with his godfather. The crisis starts when the godfather becomes overbearing that the godson is unable to fulfill his mandate to the people. The godson becomes rebellious when it becomes obvious to him that the godfather would not allow him to enjoy anything from the instrumental relationship. The godfather on the other hand becomes apprehensive when he realizes that the godson does not want him to have all he wants from the government, such as jobs and contracts. Commenting on the difficulties godsons soon find themselves in after getting into office, former governor Chimaroke Nnamani, 2003 cited in Olawale (7:96) observed that “the godfather wouldn’t take please on leanness of resources nor would he take the prayer of the godson for alternative personnel in recruitment in the high level and strategic positions in government because he must extort his ‘pound of flesh’, or power of influence in all cases”.

The Nigerian styled godfather-godson relationship nearly truncated Nigerian puerile democracy in June 10th, 2003. A self-confessed godfather, Chris Uba employed thugs and Nigerian police to abduct his godson, Chris Ngige, who was the elected governor of Anambra State. Ngige’sin was his refusal to allow Chris Uba, his godfather to nominate all political appointees, take the largest share of state’s allocation and instantly pay him a sum of N2.5billion the claimed cost of installing Ngige as the governor. Their loyalties embarked in a battle of ‘iron’ and ‘steel’, the state became a war zone, innocent lives were lost, houses were set ablaze and Anambra state became ungovernable for weeks. The only solution the federal government proffered was the threat to declare a state of emergency in the state (17). The dust had nearly settled, when the self-declared ‘strongman of Ibadan politics’, Adedibu formally declared war against his godson, Ladoja, former governor of Oyo state (the Punch, April 15th, 2007:16). The cause of disagreement has always been disagreement over allocation of money, political appointments, and the resulting

consequences were similar with the Anambra state saga. Similarly, in Ilorin, the 'institutionalized' godfather of Kwara state politics, Olusola Saraki confronted his godson, Lawal Mohammed who he installed as the governor of Kwara state in 1999. In a similar vein, Sale, 2018 cited in Ahmed and Ali (2) disclosed that same thing applied to Yobe North Senatorial District where the godfather of the ruling party in the state fielded the longest-serving senator in the state, Senator Ahmed Lawan, the Senate President. Presently, there was a serious political crisis between the present Senate President and his godfathers, Adamu Maina Waziri.

GODFATHERISM AND ITS THREAT TO THE NIGERIA'S NASCENT DEMOCRACY

Godfatherism in Nigerian politics is a contest between elitism and democracy (7). Elitism, as Welsh (18:10) argued, is "a system in which the exercise of political control by a few persons institutionalized in the structure of government and political activity. The typical godfather in Nigerian politics seeks to manipulate state officials and institutions for his own interests. Godfatherism led to the collapse of the second republic in Nigeria. The problem also led to the demise of the third republic. If care is not taken, it is going to lead to the collapse of the present democratization process in Nigeria (19). Godfather-godson relationship has become a pestilence to nascent democracy in Nigeria. Ogundiya (20:237) posits that godfatherism is "both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeates the political process in Nigeria. Public officials who owe their positions to the efforts of a political godfather incur a debt they are expected to repay without end throughout their tenure in office. They control state resources and politics not minding the corporate existence of the state". In fact, their activities help frustrate the basic democratic values in society and block the democratic process by obstructing selection of good and qualified candidates for elective posts thereby making the rise of the true democracy a hard nut (21).

Politics of godfatherism has a negative implication on the political arrangement of Nigeria and the citizenry. Certainly, the right to select an aspirant of their choice to rule them is run-down given the conditions in which godfathers decides who is to contest or imposed candidates of their desire on the citizens in the society. This is, to say the smallest and actual aggression to the faiths of democratic rule (22). Godfatherism is one of the most essential factors responsible for electoral malpractice in Nigeria. 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. The philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet making the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government (21). Analytically, the 2003, 2007 and 2019 general elections were adjudged to be worst elections in the history of fourth republic. This is because, the elections were characterized by massive rigging, monetization factor, corrupt practices of electoral officers and security personnel, judicial injustice, assassination of political opponents, political thuggery, deliberate disfranchisement of the populace, outright disregard for the rule of law, political inivierar, hate speech, mobilization of religious sentiments, youth restiveness, political propaganda, multiple voting, under-aged voting, 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 figure both at polling units and collation centres, forcing some party agents at gunpoint to sign forged election results among others. What this implies is that the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded.

In a democracy, the governed do not only come out to exercise their voting rights, they also have the right to be voted for. Political godfathers use their influence to block the participation of others in Nigerian politics, they are political gatekeepers: they dictate who participate in politics and under what conditions. This kind of situation promotes mediocrity and financial corruption as '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 (23). In addition, Ugwu, Izueke and Obasi (15), observe that the politics of godfatherism has made development elusive to the generality of the populace. Thus, politics of godfatherism is one of the major factors orchestrating socio-economic and political crises in Nigeria's fourth republic. In Nigeria today, politics of godfatherism has affected negatively on the state democracy and democratic development (24-25). In Nigeria today, the people are progressively marginalized from decision – making because of a heavily monetized and militarized polity dominated largely by godfathers and their private militia and thugs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts elite theory in examining the overbearing influence of godfatherism on Nigerian nascent democratic experiences. Vilfredo Pareto developed the theory in 1935. The supposition of the theory is that power is rotated among the elites at the expense of the masses or electorates. As Pareto (26) argued, 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 the 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.

However, Mosca (27) disagrees with Pareto that elite recruitment is only possible on an individual basis. He believes in the possibility of one social class replacing another and posited that it is possible for a non-elite member to join the elite class through 'collective social mobility'. This refers to the status that people attain because of their social, economic and professional efforts. Mosca also believes that there exists already in many societies of the world a group of people that could be referred to as 'sub-elite'. These people facilitate communication between the elite and the non-elite and are thus potential tools for relatively large-scale elite recruitment. This argument makes it possible for both sub-elite and non-elite to become recruited into the political elite class in Nigeria. The elite theory sees elites as players governing the state and national resources, and occupying key

positions related to power networks (28). Thus, the perception of elite class 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 populous” (29:696). Godfatherism serves as a medium for such selective elite recruitment in Nigeria (7). The resultant effects of the above in Nigeria polity are under-development, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, poor health prospects and misinterpretation of what politics ought to be.

The relevance of the elite theory to this paper is based on its ability to justify how the transition of people into the political elite class is facilitated by politics of godfatherism. Liberalism, as we have experienced in Nigeria, promotes extreme elitist democracy and money-inspired electioneering system, leaving the masses as ‘onlooker’ and keep denying Nigerians the much-needed institutional, socio-economic and political advancement (4). The elite theory is very much concerned with structures, especially authority structure. It is based on the assumption 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. According to Mosca (27), 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’. Thus public policy may be viewed as the value and preferences of governing elites. The Nigerian polity represents a situation where the welfare of the citizenry is grossly mortgaged for the interests of a few politicians and their mentors (godfathers). The electorates are impoverished the more, and the corrupt rich-godfathers are enriching themselves the more.

DISCUSSION

The introduction of money politics into Nigeria political system gave birth to the politics of godfatherism. Godfathers defend their adopted godsons when they run into problems, with either law enforcement agents or members of other gangs. Godfatherism sometimes manifests itself in the politics of developed countries of the world and Latin American countries in terms of some criminal underworld groups sponsoring politician during elections in return for the protection of contracts. This kind of situation is euphemistically referred to as ‘party machine’ politics in the American political science literature (30). Every society has a set of individuals who command respect among the people. Such individuals might not be interest in electoral contests, but somehow determines who represents the people. The acts of forceful compliance and loyalty by threat and blackmail is not involved, rather, the public accords the godson full respect and support. Godfatherism has no doubt stunted political development in Nigeria. It held governance at ransom; yet, we could not neglect the inevitability of godfathers in politics (4). Godfather-godson relationship has become a threat to Nigeria’s nascent democracy. According to Adedeji (31), democracy is a means to an end: the need is greater happiness for the people. However, in Nigeria today, very few political elites, godfathers and their thugs enjoyed the dividends of democracy, while the downwardly mobile masses was kept gaping and scrambling for survival in the midst of enormous Nigeria’s wealth (4).

In Nigeria today, patron-client relationship take the primacy over the formal aspects of politics such as the rule of law, well-functioning political parties and a credible electoral system. Corroborating this view, Soyinka (32) argued that the greatest disservice former

President Olusengu Obasanjo has done to the nation was to have promoted the cult of godfatherism, its illegalities, its naked violence and its corruption. Today, the Nigerian political parties neither seeks to win election nor form government but is used as platforms for the pursuit of narrow pecuniary interest of the party leadership (the godfathers). It is also imperative to accentuate that political party's manifest poor articulative and aggregative capacity, which has snowballed into cross carpeting by politicians or the formation of new political parties. Thus, a misguided proliferation of political parties has been instrumentalized by the dominant political party today to consolidate its hold on power. There is high tendency for the emergence of patron-client politics in an elitist democracy where the society is hierarchical patterned like a pyramid. Powerful political elites stand at the top and wield power in their different domain. The power flows from godfathers and they determine the power structure below them. This made politics to become riotous, difficult to manage with anarchic patterns of operations and flagrant abuse of power by both the godfathers and political parties. Godfathers were in charge of political parties and eventually constituted the monopolists that determine the outcomes of government (4).

The godfathers have successfully taken over the Nigerian political institutions, while the roles of electorates were fast diminishing. Patron-client relationship weakens political institutions, reduces economic growth and development and serves as impediments to political advancement. Godfatherism is therefore, a menace to democracy like a tick on a cow or the weed to the crops, like HIV virus in a bloodstream with a weak defense mechanism; it kills our hard-earned democracy and militates against its progress (33-34). This discussion is in line with the view of elite theory, which believes in power control within a certain group of people. In view of this, candidates that are desperate for power pledge alliance to the godfathers for a guaranteed winning ticket and as a result, the citizens experienced despair instead of hope, tragic and untimely death instead of long life, dictatorship instead of rule of law, political selection instead of credible election, insecurity instead of security and illusion instead of expectation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has been able to reveal that politics of godfatherism is an impediment to Nigeria's nascent democracy. It has gained prominence and assumed dominant feature of electoral politics and governance in the country. Consequently, it encourages corruption, breeds acute unemployment, electoral malpractices, abject poverty and political instability. The patron-client relationship modeled a great threat to not only good governance but also the socio-economic and political development and stability of democratic governance. 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 candidates of their choice into public office to represent their interests. To achieve their goals, our political elites and their mentors (godfathers) manipulate the constitutive and regulative instrument for credible electoral contest. Credible elections are necessary to stem the tide for political decay and renewal in the country. This is because in the view of the apologists of liberal democracy, once elections are gotten right, democracy is on its way to bring consolidation and in consequences enduring peace and security will be instituted in the country. In

essence, credible elections produce security, political stability and socio-economic development. Based on the foregoing, this paper therefore makes the following recommendations in order to minimize the effect of godfatherism on Nigeria's nascent democracy.

The country needs a purposeful leadership that has a vision of how to place its citizens at the centre of political project without recourse to patron-client relationship and sees acquisition of political power as not an end in itself but a means for serving the collective interest of its people regardless of their ethnic origin. In short, until a morally sound, committed and patriotic leadership emerge to lead the people honestly with the attribute of transparency, openness and people-oriented policies and programmes, Nigeria political and socio-economic development will continue to be a mirage.

Politics of godfatherism should be discouraged and our democratic institution should be reinforced to evade from the politics of godfatherism of central government policies and programmes.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should adopt the use of e-voting for all elections in the country to curtail electoral scam. This will go a long way to reduce the elections rigging and well as well encourage the interest aspirants to vie for any position of their choice without pledging alliance to the godfathers for guaranteed winning ticket.

The electoral laws in Nigeria should be reformed to mitigate the funding of political parties and their candidates by individuals and corporate organizations. This will go a long way in abrogating the phenomenon of godfatherism and democracy will thrive in the country.

Elections in Nigeria continue to suffer wanton abuses and gross violation of its sanctity. The illegal use of soldiers and the police personnel to harass citizens, to entrench anarchy, to enthrone chaos where there is order, and to intimidate and brutalize opposition political candidate and their supporters must be discouraged and outlawed.

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