

## Godfatherism, Governance and Political Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The paper aims to examine the implications of godfatherism on Nigerian political development. The phenomenon of godfatherism has been part of Nigerian politics since before the inauguration of the present political dispensation. However, the dynamics of politics since 1999 have been shaped and influenced by godfatherism. The paper found that the rentier character of the Nigerian state is responsible for the emergence of the present form of political godfatherism. The paper found that godfatherism built a symbiotic relationship between godfathers and godsons. This kind of relationship ensures that political godfathers finance the electioneering campaigns of political godsons; in the end, political godfathers reap their profit. This gives godfathers opportunities to dictate and control the government's affairs and coffers. The situation further overburdens the state and weakens its ability to deliver, especially in terms of the welfare of citizens. The repercussions of this on politics and governance are enormous as it creates a climate of high-intense political competition that adversely affects wider political participation. This makes the possibility of a formidable democratic system of government difficult and weakens the formation of strong political opposition due to the absence of sound political competition. The paper found that godfatherism promotes clientelism and patronage. The paper recommended that for Nigeria to advance politically and have sound governance, the phenomenon of godfatherism must be brought to an end by reforming the 2022 Electoral Act and ensuring severe punishment for those who violate its provisions.

**Keywords:** Politics, Godfatherism, Development, Governance, Rentier

### Introduction

The phenomenon of godfatherism has a far-reaching influence on the dynamics of politics and governance in Nigeria. The current emergence trend of godfatherism in Nigerian politics indicates that to contest and win an election, one must have the support of a godfather. Thus, the phenomenon of godfatherism promotes a situation in which political contestants have to rely on certain individuals simply because of the enormous financial ability and influence they possessed before securing a political position. In such a situation, political godfathers provide political support to and finance the electioneering campaigns of godsons. Their actions in supporting contestants are largely driven by a quest for primitive accumulation at the expense of the people's welfare. The political godfathers regard politics as nothing more than a business venture where one can invest and reap the profit of the investment after winning the election. Thus, the activities of godfathers are geared towards personnel rather than monitoring the future leaders.

The emergence of the current form of godfatherism is a consequence of the rentier nature of the country's economy. With the concentration of wealth under the control of the state, which arises as a result of its oil-rich resources, the guarantee for primitive accumulation by rentiers and commission agents is ensured by holding public office. In the context of the Nigerian political

economy, those who control political power and drive the affairs of state have all the opportunities to access its resources. As access to state power becomes relevant in the accumulation of wealth, so the nature of politics looks doomed due to the inexplicable character of godfathers. Political godfathers due to their wealth and connections, do not play the political game according to the rules. This not only worsens the turbulent nature of Nigerian politics, as only the fittest and wealthiest can survive it. This poses a serious threat to the development of democratic politics in Nigeria.

It is indisputable that the phenomenon of godfatherism is not new in Nigerian politics. It only took a new dimension with the return of competitive politics in 1999. The phenomenon of godfatherism in the early independence varied from its current form. At independence, godfathers played a role in monitoring, training, and guiding future leaders for the common good. Under the current form of godfatherism, the role played by political godfathers is mainly centred on personal gain. The undignified actions of political godfathers in pursuance of their personal gain raise political tension. For instance, in many of the political events, godfathers recruit, train, and deploy mostly unemployed youths to cause mayhem.

This is a fact, especially during electioneering campaigns. The effect of the phenomenon of godfatherism can be well described in the words of Adetula (200, p.3) as something similar to that of the 'warlordism'. This is a situation where political warlords deploy the instrumentality of violence. Violence can limit political participation and free contest for political positions. Political participation is significant to political development and democratic governance. It is a fact that with the return of electoral politics in the country in 1999, efforts were made to curtail the activities of political godfathers. For instance, the provisions of the 2022 Electoral Act have prohibited certain conduct during electioneering campaigns, rallies, and elections. Despite these efforts, godfatherism has become a frightening phenomenon in Nigerian politics. It has continued to hurt politics and governance. This is particularly so with the current form of godfatherism.

The paper examines the role of godfatherism in the dynamics of politics and governance in Nigeria. In doing so, the paper is divided into seven sections. Section one is the introduction, followed by the conceptualisation and review of literature in Section two. Section three discussed the emergence and transformation of the phenomenon of godfatherism. Section four focuses on the pattern of politics and the dynamics of godfatherism in Nigeria. The role of godfathers in slowing down the process of political development is discussed in Section Five. Section six discusses the way forward, and the conclusion of the paper is in Section seven.

### **Godfatherism: Conceptualisation and Review of Literature**

Leke (2010) argues that godfatherism as an ideology is constructed on the belief that certain individuals have considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest. The phenomenon of godfatherism is a consequence of the monetisation of politics. The phenomenon has assumed a dangerous dimension in Nigerian politics. Leke (2010) contends that godfatherism ensures a godfather-godson relationship. This kind of relationship is built with the intention of fulfilling the self-interests of both godfathers and godsons.

Two types of benefits can be identified. These benefits are interrelated and symbiotic. The first benefit is that the interest of the political godfathers to accumulate from the public coffers can be guaranteed when they have access to its resources. This is possible by investing in and bankrolling the godsons' elections. After winning the election, godfathers recover their enormous financial investment, or what is referred to as "dividend", through dubious means. The wealth accumulated from this relationship is further used in financing the electioneering campaigns of those vying for various political posts (Leke, 2010).

The second benefit is that the political aspirations of the godsons remain steadfast if such a relationship continues to exist. This figurative relationship between the godfathers and the godsons endures as long as these benefits continue to flow in. Thus, the godfather-godson relationship has turned Nigerian politics into a money-making venture (Leke, 2010). The situation has serious consequences for politics and governance. Corroborating this, Apam (2010) aptly captured this when he succinctly noted that:

The 'godson' or the client, having taken office, returns the gesture a hundredfold to the point that the patron becomes a parasite on the government. The initial support given by patrons then becomes an investment with a colossal rate of return because the patron becomes a defector ruler, sometimes reversing executive decisions and issuing decrees to the utter embarrassment of their clients, thus benefiting from a gross anti-democratic practice (Apam, 2010, p.32).

Apam (2010) succinctly argued that political godfathers, in an attempt to effect electoral change to deliver the winning election figures in favour of their godsons, not only establish, but also train, and maintain a standing personal 'army'. They supply them with arms and provide them with protection against arrest by the security agents. They ginger them with little or no financial inducement to carry out their dastardly act. In addition, "...[T]hey also bribe the police and other security agents to look the other way when they traffic in ballot boxes and sack opponents' strongholds" (Apam, 2010, p.32).

Kwasau (2013) argues that godfatherism is a symptom and cause of most political violence and corruption. The political patrons are in control of state resources and policies, regardless of their background or origin. Due to their unpatriotic activities, godfathers frustrate the basic democratic value, making democracy a hard nut to crack. Thus, godfatherism obstructs the democratic project by dispensing violence freely against anyone who stands in its way. The relationship that exists between 'godfather' and 'godson' is not a light-hearted and free-floating kind. Rather, it is contractual, and often, the contract is written and, or, even sealed spiritually with an oath or, at the extreme, in a shrine.

In Nigerian politics today, it is difficult for some political godsons to secure the confidence of the electorate without the support of a political godfather. Some of these godsons lack the initiative and leadership skills that would bring about prosperity and turn the fortunes of the citizenry. The godfather-godson relationship grants favour between political patrons or godfathers and their clients. It is a political entrepreneurship in which politics is regarded as a lucrative business venture by a few powerful individuals who invest in politics by sponsoring political contestants with the intention of gaining profit when their candidate emerges victorious.

The godfathers impose their will on the clients, and this is true no matter how cruel their wishes may be. To ensure the political victory of clients, political patrons tend to out-manoeuvre their political opponents by manipulating principles and rules guiding electoral processes, thereby undermining democratic values. The phenomenon of godfatherism generally hurts politics and governance in the country.

### **Godfatherism: Emergence and Transformation**

The emergence of the phenomenon of godfatherism is believed to have developed from the early tradition of baptising members. At the baptism, the godfather is chosen not from the relatives of the catholic man to be baptised, but, as observed by Albert (2005), from among the congregation of the catholic priest. The assumption of this is to guide and supervise the life pattern of the godson spiritually, precisely in the catholic faith. The godfather behaves here as a role model to the godson, chosen to promote spiritual and moral uprightness among Catholic faithful (Osayi, 2005), so that the godsons would be useful not only to him, but also to the church and society at large. With that, the godson is performing God's work. Therefore, the "... idea of godfather and godson originally in the catholic perspective is more religiously inclined and of moral values to the spiritual growth and development of the godson" (Osayi, 2005, p.2).

In the Nigerian context, the understanding of the phenomenon of godfatherism varies from one community to another. This is because the phenomenon is deeply rooted in the cultural values of the Nigerian society (Albert, 2005). The phenomenon of godfatherism in the Hausa community of the Northern part of the country, according to Albert (2005), has to do with the relationship between godfather, which literally means *maigida*, and godson *yaron gida*. *Maigida* usually guides and supervises the *yaron aiki* in doing apprentice work or training. The word godfather is also used interchangeably with the head of a household or a business trip. During business transit in different parts of West African countries, traditional Hausa traders were usually provided with accommodation, storage, and brokerage service by the godfather or *maigida*. In return, the godfather receives compensation from traders (Albert, 2005). Similarly, the role played by *Baba Kekere* (the small father), *Baba Isale* (the father of the underground world), or *Baba Nigbejo* (a great help in times of trouble) in assisting and protecting the less privileged is closely linked with the concept of godfatherism (Albert, 2005). This assistance is of great importance for the socio-economic development of the less privileged, and it is highly appreciated in most communities of Southwest Nigeria.

The phenomenon of godfatherism is in an Igbo traditional society. The relationship that exists between *Nnam-Nkum* (my master) and *Odibo* (the servant) played a crucial role in training *Odibo* in business activities (cited in Albert, 2005). The former is a mature, well-experienced, and trained individual, who is usually entrusted to guide the latter, who are mostly young, particularly in business and economic activities. The godson, or *Odibo*, gains freedom by providing him with business or financial support to run his own business after being trained by the godfather for some time. The idea is to ensure the self-actualisation of a younger person by standing on their feet. This is one of the common empowering young entrepreneurs among the Igbo community. The relationships enumerated above are closely linked to the role performed by godfatherism; of course, differences exist to a certain extent. Such variation depends on one community or sphere to another.

It can be said that the phenomenon of godfatherism is not bad in its origin. However, the relationship between godfather and godson in the political context and its transformation has twisted the real meaning of this relationship. This has been selflessly used in politics for the personal gain of the political godfather, and to some extent, that of the godson. Political godfathers behave as power brokers by bankrolling the election of their clients, which provides financial benefits. This is because sponsoring a godson's electioneering campaigns by a godfather provides him with the opportunity to gain access to the state treasury. In addition, it helps in spreading the political influence of the godfathers over their godsons. These opportunities provided to political godfathers made them the most benefactors of juicy government contracts.

### **Politics and Dynamics of Godfatherism in Nigeria: Historical Context**

The phenomenon of godfatherism is not new in Nigerian politics, and its advent dates back to the colonial era. This grew after independence when the Nigerian educated elites who fought for independence became political leaders of the existing three regions. They not only occupy political positions but are also interested in the selection of who to contest and for what post. Because of their understanding, knowledge, and bravery, particularly in leadership, they become idolised and much respected by their people. Their personal opinions were honoured by the ethnic groups they represented (Albert, 2005). These great Nigerians included: Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Mallam Aminu Kano, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, and many others. The relationship between these great Nigerian politicians and those monitored at that time was not based on monetary gain but on maturity, wisdom, desire for development, and public good. This marks the difference between the previous and the current form of godfatherism.

It is a fact that the relationship between godfathers and godsons was also previously in a state of deep crisis. The problem often emanates from different beliefs about making political decisions. For instance, the Action Group (AG) crisis was nurtured and intensified by the beliefs over the growing national shift of alliance in the early independence (Brajji, 1984). The collapse of the NPC-NCNC alliance and the struggle of the AG to form a central government raise concern as to whether the party (AG) should contest the 1964 general elections as an independent party or in alliance with the NPC.

The debate over this issue was effervescing among AG members before its convention at Jos. Some of the party members, such as Chief Samuel Akintola, who was then the party's Deputy President, thought that the party should ally with the NPC. The reason was the relative advantage of NPC as being the party in control of the Northern Region. The party had a greater number of votes compared to the other two regions, the Western and the Eastern regions, respectively. It should be noted that at this period, the NPC not only dominated Northern politics but was also in charge of the Native Administration (NA), which had a strong link with the traditional rulers of the Northern Region. To some of these party members, this could serve as another advantage for political mobilisation. By coming into alliance with NPC, the political ambition of AG in forming the central government would be guaranteed (Paden, 1986).

It was on this belief that Akintola tried to persuade his fellow party members. This included Obafemi Awolowo, who was regarded as a political godfather in the Western Region, to support AG ally with the NPC. It was this that brought Akintola into a loggerhead with Obafemi Awolowo. Awolowo not only kicked against the possibility of AG's coming into alliance with

NPC but also doubted the loyalty of Akintola to the party. The squabble between Awolowo and Akintola deepened and subsequently led to the expulsion of the latter from the party at its convention in Jos. The crisis brought political turbulence in the Western Region due to violence and paralysed the party's activities. It divided some of the Yoruba city-states into two camps. Areas such as Lagos, Ijebu, and parts of present-day Ondo State went for Awolowo, while parts of Abeokuta and Oyo supported Akintola. The division among the Yoruba city-states worsened the crisis until the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) by Akintola (Paden, 1986).

During the political period of the Second Republic, the pattern of godfatherism had a resemblance to that of the First Republic. The nature of politics at that time also came to be the same as that of the First Republic, as most of these parties were controlled by the same political godfathers. For example, Nnamdi Azikwe was the Chairman of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). Politicians, such as Jim Nwobodo, a former governor of Anambra, and Sam Mbakwe of Imo mostly drew their political strength from Zik. Similarly, Lateef Jakande, Bisi Onabanjo, and Bola Ige drew their support from Obafemi Awolowo, while people like Muhammadu Abubakar Rimi and Balarabe Musa were attached to Aminu Kano.

It is also important that the sour relationship between godson and godfather generates political tension in the country and weakens the activities of the political party, as exemplified by the crisis between Aminu Kano and Muhammadu Abubakar Rimi. This crisis led to the split of the People's Redemption Party (PRP) into two opposite camps: *Santsi* and *Tabo*, and each camp with its own thugs, ready to attack one another brazenly. In Kwara, the crisis between Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki and Governor Adamu Atta of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led to the withdrawal of Saraki's political support for Cornelius Adebayo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) during the 1983 gubernatorial election.

Since the return of democracy, the pattern of godfather and godson relationship has taken a different dimension. Today, the relationship between godfather and godson has been a symbiotic one. Political godfathers use their influence to mobilise loyalists and condition their political life. Nigerian politics had been characterised by so many intricate issues and manoeuvres because of the attitudinal disposition of political godfathers. Political godfathers often distort the electoral process and deepen political tension by instigating violence. It endangered the possibility of the military overthrowing of the democratically elected regime.

### **The Character of the Nigerian State and the Current Form of Godfatherism**

Arguably, the state of the economy plays a significant role in shaping the nature of politics. The economy is a direct consequence of the character of the Nigerian state itself. It is important to note that Nigeria is an oil-rich country. The oil wealth has not provided the much-needed stimulus for economic growth, as there is little to show in terms of uplifting citizens' living conditions. Even though the country is dependent on oil revenue, which presently contributes over 90 per cent of export earnings and generates over 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Babalola, 2020), the extraction of oil depends on the technology of foreign multinational corporations. Thus, within the context of the global political economy, the Nigerian state can be described as a rentier state. By rentier, it means oil revenue received by the Nigerian state from the export of oil in the international market is external rent.

The rentier character of the Nigerian state gives multinational corporations a significant role in Nigeria's economy. Thus, the rentier nature of the country's economy has reduced the state's role to that of collection and distribution of oil rent. The rentier character of the Nigerian state arose because of its role in oil exploration and production (Obi, 2004). Even though the state remains the owner and controls the production of oil. However, the fluctuation of prices in the international market inflicts harm on the nation's economy. This generally reduces the state to that of dependence.

Nigeria's state operates as an oil sector economy in which all other sectors, as well as the states of the federation, are dependent upon the oil sector. The state rentier character corresponds to an increase in revenue due to exporting crude oil, which brought about a concentration of wealth around the state for distribution and redistribution among individuals and groups. With the centralisation of wealth around the state, the desire to control state power is increasingly becoming irresistibly attractive in the quest for primitive accumulation. Thus, the increasing relevance of the state in the process of accumulation is due to the concentration of oil wealth around it. This means to guarantee the accumulation of wealth, one must hold political power. Holding on to power means access to state resources for personal gain (Majekodunmi and Olanrewaju, 2013). Because of this, political competition becomes a matter of 'life and death' where every competitor seeks power by every means.

The volatility of oil prices in the international oil market tends to have negative effects on domestic economies, including local businesses. The resulting decline in domestic productive activities and weakened economy due to the rentier nature of the state further worsens the competition for control of the state. This is so as the state remains the only source for the accumulation of wealth. Thus, as long as the state and its apparatuses serve as a window of opportunity for amassing wealth, the phenomenon of godfatherism remains inevitable. And the rationality about politics and governance, which is to enhance the living conditions of the people, would be hard to achieve. Indeed, the intrinsic relationship between the rentier character of the Nigerian state and the nature of the country's politics cannot be ignored in analysing the phenomenon of godfatherism.

### **Politics, Governance, and Godfatherism in Nigeria: Where are we Heading?**

The harrowing experience of godfatherism in Nigerian politics has unprecedented implications for politics and governance. The withdrawal of the military from the political scene in May 1999 has widened the political space in Nigeria. Regrettably, the current form of godfatherism has constrained the already expanded political space as it is now occupied by a few individuals who want to use the opportunities to enrich themselves rather than serve the interests of the people. Those individuals used their enormous wealth to mark their influence in the realisation of the dream or otherwise of the campaigners of political power for the purpose of amassing wealth. The phenomenon of godfatherism prohibits the emergence of formidable opposition by restraining sound political competition. The resulting consequence limits the electorate's opportunity to choose among the best competing candidates. In a situation where political competition is restrained, it promotes clientelism. This is a fact because only the anointed boys would be appointed or selected for a political post for the sake of reciprocating the gesture for

patronage. As long as this continues to exist, there is a possibility that incompetent leaders, who cannot manage resources adequately for the betterment of all, would be allowed to rule.

Godfatherism strengthens the relationship between political godfathers and godsons. Strengthening this relationship enables godfathers to leverage the political position of godsons for the return of their investment through superfluous demands. By doing so, the state would then be overburdened. With the fluctuation of oil prices in the international market, over which the state has no power to determine, it further weakens the state in terms of discharging its responsibility. The situation exacerbates the socio-economic crisis, which further worsens the deplorable living conditions of the people. Put differently, the phenomenon of godfatherism is capable to undermine the state's performance in providing quality health service, potable water, quality education, accessible roads, employment opportunities, and poverty reduction. This is because the resources to provide such infrastructure would be syphoned for a few interests, their families, and close associates. Thus, where this occurs, it hinders the process of building democratic governance.

Godfatherism can bring about violence in varying proportions. The violence caused by the phenomenon has made politics more aggressive, and if not a matter of 'life and death'. The chaotic political environment often created by the phenomenon of godfatherism signifies a dangerous situation for the development of politics and the consolidation of democratic governance. The political saga, for instance, between the former Anambra State Governor, Chris Ngige, and his political 'godfather', Chris Uba, is a clear demonstration of this kind of political pandemonium that is capable of causing political violence. Chris Uba, who claimed to have single-handedly funded Ngige's gubernatorial election campaigns, persuaded Ngige to swear a pre-emptive oath of office (Ibeanu, 2007). The accord, which empowered Uba to appoint whoever he wishes to government positions, included the Commissioners, and to run the affairs of the government. This promise was later sealed at a shrine in Okija village. The fear of uncertainty that, the shrine may not sell out Ngige once he refused to abide by the contract after his swearing in as the Executive Governor made Uba move for the second option (Ibeanu, 2007). This is to protect his political investment from any eventuality by getting Ngige to sign a letter of resignation, which would be presented to the State House of Assembly if the improbable happened.

The inability of Ngige to abide by the agreement entered into with Chris Uba in 2004 for the appointment of commissioners and running of the affairs of government led to a crisis between Ngige and Uba. After waiting unwearingly for the intervention of the shrine to no avail, Uba not only ordered the withdrawal of Ngige's security but also had Ngige forcefully abducted and put under house arrest. While Ngige was still under house arrest on the charge of his godfather, his pre-signed resignation letter was presented to the State Assembly for the commencement of his impeachment process (Albert, 2005). The political landscape created due to the political face-off between Chris Uba and Chris Ngege props up mobilisation, training, and equipping unemployed youth, which turned the state into a war zone, with some unrestrained burning of government properties.

Similarly, godfatherism strengthens the godfather-godson relationship and ensures absolute loyalty of godsons to godfathers. But in a situation of betrayal, desperation, and unhealthy

obsession, this bubbles conflict between godfather and godson. This creates a climate of uncertainty and brings a standstill in the affairs of governance. The endless power tussle between Emeka Ofor and former Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju of Anambra, for instance, which the former was said to have bankrolled the letter's election and many members of the State Assembly, led to the closure of public schools for almost thirteen months (Ibeanu, 2007). The bitter power struggle to promote personal ambitions between Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State and his godfather, Nyesom Wike, has thrown the state into chaos, paralysed institutions of governance, and made them irresponsible. The prevailing condition led to the subversion of the democratic governance in the state by the proclamation of a state of emergency that dismantled the two major democratic institutions, the Executive and the Legislature, for six months on the 18th March 2025.

The Anambra political saga and other similar experiences in parts of this country have shown that godfatherism undoubtedly promotes political criminality in the form of political hooliganism and thuggery. This worsens the security challenge and, if not, deepens it. This constitutes a dangerous affront to political development, as no society can develop politically under a state of disorder and turmoil. The use of thugs outrightly violates the provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In light of Chapter VI, Part III, Section D (227), the constitution also proscribes the use of physical force either by organising, training, or equipping individuals and groups in the pursuit of political objectives. Section 92 (5) and (6) of the 2022 Electoral Act also prohibit the use of force. Section 92 (5) of the 2022 Electoral Act stipulated that:

A political party, aspirant, or candidate of a political party shall not retain, organise, train or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force or coercion in promoting any political objective or interest, or in such manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organised, trained or equipped for that purpose.

Similarly, in the light of the provision under Section 92(6) of the 2022 Electoral Act provided that:

A political party, aspirant, or candidate shall not keep or use an armed private security organisation, vanguard, or any other group or individual by whatever name called for the purpose of providing security, assisting, or aiding the political party or candidate in whatever manner during campaigns, rallies, processions, or elections.

Godfatherism rubbishes the people's mandate and limits their constitutional power by determining the direction of the state. This is done by hijacking the power of elected state officials who are representatives of the people. The traumatic experience of Nigerian politics with godfatherism is that it encourages political brinkmanship and endorses politics of bitterness, which ultimately heightens political antagonism. The unfolding political crisis between former Kano State Governor, Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, and his successor, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje,

deepens political hatred. The animosity between the Kwankwasiyya and Gandujiyya political supporters has created a turbulent political uncertainty in the state. The violence witnessed during the 2016 Minjibir bye-election and the 2019 re-run governorship election is enough to justify this. The enmity extended beyond the 2019 general elections, particularly with the declaration of son-in-law to Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso - Abba Kabir Yusuf as the winner of the state gubernatorial election in 2023 under the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP).

Godfatherism encourages over-dependence of godsons on godfathers to bankroll their electioneering campaigns. This guarantees total loyalty of godson to the whims and caprices of godfather, blocking the smooth running of the affairs of the government. Godfatherism encourages vote buying as political godfathers, in an attempt to expand their network of support to ensure the political victory of their clients, share money to gain the support of the electorate. In the process, it jeopardises the rules and regulations of the political game and makes electorates vote against their conscience. This is because the concern is to win at all costs. This badly endangers the political development by decreasing citizens' enthusiasm for politics.

Godfatherism causes difficulty for elected state officials to adhere to the ethics of democratic governance, such as transparency or openness, accountability, principles of equality and justice, due to the influence of political godfathers. In an attempt to reciprocate the gesture for bankrolling the electioneering campaigns of godsons, the most lucrative government contracts are awarded to godfathers (Apam, 2000). Oftentimes, these are not fully or halfway executed at the expense of the people's welfare. Through this, public funds are sidetracked and thereby constitute a threat to governance.

The terrible experience of Nigeria with godfatherism is likely to reinforce division and heighten disunity in the country. The result can aggravate hatred and polarisation of the people into different camps. It is capable of causing or deepening an internal party crisis that weakens the strength of the political party as one of the democratic institutions. The absence of internal party democracy cripples a political party and reduces its performance by generating internal crisis. To avoid that there should be an enabling environment where all political competitors would contest freely without intimidation. Nigerian politicians have demonstrated a lack of confidence in internal party democracy, which is a result of a negative perception of political competition. The general belief is that winning a primary election is as important as winning the general election. This is a fact, particularly in a state where a political party has firmly established itself or has majority supporters. Corroborating this, the former Kano State People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman, Alhaji Rabi'u Dan Sharu, in his responding speech to one of the party gubernatorial candidates that paid him a congratulatory visit over his election as a new party chairman mentioned that internal party politics need to be democratised as this remains fundamental for building genuine democracy (*The Guardian*, 2014).

### **Breaking the Cycle of Godfatherism and Ensuring Political Development in Nigeria**

It has been discussed above that since the return of democracy in 1999, many of the political godsons and godfathers mobilised private forces to facilitate criminal victory at the polls. The phenomenon of godfatherism generally revolves around violence, political manoeuvring, brinkmanship, mobilisation of political militias, and pessimistic undertones. The provision of Section 92 (7) (a) of the 2022 Electoral Act provides punishment for the use of thugs to cause

mayhem, which is prohibited under Section 92 (5) and (6). Specifically, the Section provided a maximum fine of N1, 000, 000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months for any individual who contravenes Section 92 (5) and (6). Section 92 (7) (b) of the Act provided a fine of N2,000,000 in the case of any political party that contravenes the provisions of Section 92 (5) and (6) in the first instance, and N1,000,000 for any subsequent offence.

The act of violence has made many Nigerians perceive politics as a dirty game. This limits the participation of well-mannered and credible personalities in contesting for political positions. Even if such personalities wish to run for a political post, they are hardly given a chance simply because they would not dance according to the turns of a few individuals called godfathers. The provisions under Section 92 (7) (a) and (b) are grossly inadequate to prevent the occurrence of violence in Nigerian politics, courtesy of godfatherism. As such, there is a need to review Section 92 (5) and (6) of the Electoral Act by incorporating corporal punishment for any politician who violates its provisions.

The gratuitous spending of money for vote buying has increasingly worsened the phenomenon of godfatherism in the country. As such, in any attempt to break the cycle of godfatherism in Nigeria, there is a need to underscore the politics of ideology by de-emphasising the use of money. Thus, unless and until the monetary gains of elective officers are less emphasised, godfatherism would continue to exist and affect democratic politics.

There is a need for adequate mobilisation of politicians against their reliance on godfathers before contesting in an election. Such dependency can be reduced by ensuring that one contests without spending much during their electioneering campaigns. The perception of Nigerian politicians about politics should be changed, and politics should be seen as rendering services to humanity. When properly conducted, politics could enhance governance. There is also a need to make political offices irrelevant by de-emphasising the importance of opportunities attached to the offices. This would make the political offices less attractive, and any person who wanted to serve should understand that it is all about serving humanity.

There is a need to strengthen the rules and regulations of political parties, in addition to those governing individual members. There should be adequate monitoring of parties' primaries and conduct by an independent electoral body. This would reduce the influence of godfatherism in the selection of candidates who contest for the party during the election.

### **Conclusion**

Deducing from the above, it can be concluded that the unrivalled force created by the phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian politics has seriously stifled moves to prevent political development. This slows the impact of governance. Thus, it has constituted a potential threat to the advancement of politics and democratic governance. As such, restraining the effects of godfatherism would be a positive step towards ensuring political development and consolidation of democratic governance.

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