

Democracy, Godfatherism and Governance in Nigeria: A Review

By

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Abstract

The issue of godfathers in electoral politics is global and noticeable in liberal democracies particularly in multiparty democracies. In Third World, where democracy is fast growing, notwithstanding socio-economic challenges have debased qualified and popular candidates to emerge victoriously in several elections because they lack capacities, resources and political structures to win election. The godfathers and electoral financiers are essentially necessary in the Third World politics. The political parties sometimes neglect quality and meritocracy for mediocre. The mediocre are supported and electoral expenses are paid by the political party or godfathers. This has socio-economic and political consequences on the party and the polity. The paper observes that godfathers have dominated the political parties and bankrolled the elections of godsons to emerge as governors, senators, local government chairmen, among others in Nigeria. The sponsorship of party candidates is regarded as investments which the beneficiaries must pay back in the areas of political largesse including contracts, appointments, and monetary. The partial refusal or noncompliance by the godsons to pay back on these terms has led to impeachments, removal and hijacking of government machinery from the godsons. This has led to a big gap between the state and people and the crises of governance in the country. The paper concludes that the sponsorship of party candidates is a norm of politics especially in developing countries accentuated by widespread poverty, malnutrition, hunger. And that godfathers should be remembered for positive contributions to governance as against creating more underdevelopment through the reaping of few resources meant for socio-economic, infrastructural and amenities in the polity.

Keywords: *Party politics, Godfathers, Democracy, Governance, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Democracy as an ideal form of government is centered on the consent of the people and by extension the exercise of power on behalf of the people, especially by the elected representatives (Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, 2022; Ricci, 1970). As a representative government, democracy operates along arena of political parties (Wheare, 1963). Political party as an institution serves as a platform whereby individuals are elected into government positions. Election into public offices in liberal democracies, Anifowose (2003) observes that there must be two or more political parties competing for elective positions. At the election, all the recognized political parties covet for votes of electorates to be represented in government. Representation in government is a party choice. The choice put before the electorates are not people's choice per se, but has to do with the decision of the party hierarchy during the party primary. A party primary is an avenue where all the party delegates gather together to elect who would represent the political party. The party's choice would face other contestants from other political parties at the election.

However, before the choice of the party is made at the party primary, politics ensues between the party delegates and the national leaders. In attempt to influence one another, the party primary is sometime turn into political stadium taking the form of negotiation, argument, discussion and persuasion and show of strength (Baker, 1962). This shows that the party's primary is the party hierarchies including the party aspirants. The delegates to use the words of Milbrath (1967) are party "gladiators". These gladiators have a lot of political influence and perhaps, play a major role on the selection process. The role they play determines the success or failure of the aspirants especially the political party. The more an aspirant is financially buoyant or supported, the greater the chances of becoming a party flag bearer. However, who becomes the party flag bearer is a matter of socio-economic and political influence. An aspirant with fewer financial resources is backed by the party or godfathers. Godfathers will great influence in the choice of the party candidates. The extent to which a party financier finances an aspirant, the higher the chances of the aspirant emerges victorious.

A political party or godfather financing aspirants is a norm of party politics in developing democracies. The sponsorship of aspirants is largely due to quantum of financial expenses expected to be deployed into campaigns, expression of interest form, branded vehicles, posters, and constituencies. The former Spokesman to the former President, Reuben Abati has said that the issue of money in politics became impossible for anyone interested in political

office to gain access and express that interest because the ultimate choice must be made by the people and this must not be a function of cash (Abati: thewillnigeria.com). For the political parties in Nigeria, elections are, therefore, a profit-making investment. Politics meant profit for the party-political gladiators including the thugs, the political godfathers, the party, traditional rulers, market women, and others who are given free clothes, the media, rented crowds, printers, sycophants, cash-collecting voters as well as banking sectors in the country. In fact, for the political gladiators in the PDP and other political parties, election time is harvest time and commercial time for the political merchants because as soon as one declares intention for a political office, such an individual is recognized and surrounded by a group of sycophants who start to call him or her names such as "Your Excellency", "Distinguished Senator," "Honourable". The aspirant is accompanied by thugs and is paid and fed at his discretion.

Nigeria like other democracies in the world, returned to democratic rule in 1999. With 24 years of civil rule, sponsorship of aspirants for elective positions has characterized the nation's polity. The aspirants in attempt to be elected into government positions have relied heavily on the influence and resources of political parties cum financiers. The paucity of funds by political parties to bankroll the candidates has given room to political barons to hijack and control the party machineries. By and large, they dominate political parties and as well sponsors' candidates of their choice. And sometimes, the financier's choice is the party choice. The choice is not limited to winning election but the financier to always have his way in the governance under his anointed son. The resultant consequences are that there is absence of internal party democracies within and among the Nigerian political parties. The political parties have been dominated and hijacked by political barons, new joiners (Agbaje, 2010; Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2006). The new gladiators decide and chart the direction for the political parties as well as the entire party hierarchies. The financial supports given to the political parties and the aspirants have led to internal conflicts and proliferations of political parties. Yet, the abundance of political parties has not contributed meaningfully to governance (Ogunwa, 2022A; Ogunwa, 2012). What comes to the mind is a puzzle that, what is the implication of a financier for financing election of an aspirant in the governance process in Nigeria? This and other questions, the study intends to interrogate. The rest of the paper is spread into party politics, democracy and godfatherism; politics of godfatherism; and Nigerian godfathers and implication on governance and conclusion.

Party Politics, Democracy and Godfatherism

The concept of politics has different meanings as well as diverse connotations (Roucek, Huszar and Associates, 1950). Although, politics has its origin from the Greek word "polis" which, literally connotes "the activities of citizens in their role as members and operators of the state..." (Gauga, 2009, p. 81). The term is equated to the state or political life with moves and maneuvers concerned with the acquisition of power or getting one's way. For an individual to acquire political power it requires close relationship with others. The ancient political philosopher, Aristotle describes man as a political animal because it will take man to relate with two or more to achieve certain objectives in the polity (Baker, 1962). Through interaction "men are engaged in politics as they try to define their positions in society as they struggle for scarce resources ... in an institutionalized setting ..." (Anifowose, 2015, p. 1).

From the above, politics is not played in isolation, it is the combination of two or more people before the interest of an individual or collectivity are articulated and aggregated. That is why, politics gives answer to the question of who gets what, when and how? (Lasswell, 1936). In modern states, the answer to this puzzle is largely centered on the liberal democratic platform with multiparty system. Democratic governance as the government of the people, by the people and for the people is institutionalized in party politics. A political party is an assemblage of different individuals that come together with objectives to control the machinery of government and if elected to govern. Liberal democracy is attributed to several political parties to contest during election time. Politics occurs when two or more parties challenge one another for electoral dominance. Weber says "politics is the struggle for power ..." (quoted in Mahajan, 2015, p. 86). Ball (1988) opines that the stuff of politics is power. When the two (politics and party) is combined, both become the "activities of political parties in a democratic environment that seek for the control of political offices through stated norms of elections" (Olaniyi, 2001, p. 99). The institutionalization of any political party will determine the strength and extent its success in an election.

However, election is won and lost by institutionalization of party structures coupled with the socio-economic and political qualities including the party manifesto, influence and the quality of the candidate, party organization, the leadership and finance. All these determine the extent to which both party candidate and the party itself will go. The lack of the qualities especially financing by the party candidate and inability of the party to bankroll the financial expenses more often than not influence and attract financiers or godfathers. The usefulness of these category of individuals came long time ago when Aristotle futuristically observes that "... he who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god (quoted in Copleston 1962, p. 93). In essence, no individual is sole self-sufficient, and man still relate with others to survive "the state exists in order to serve the wants of men. Men are not independent of one another, but need the aid and cooperation of other in the production of the necessities of life ... they gather associates and helpers into one dwelling place and give this joint dwelling the name of a city (Plato quoted in Jowett, 1968, p. 76). Yes, for a man to need other man, Higgins (1949, p.

359) says that "... the members of a society must know in general, the good which they seek by their union and the chief means conducting thereunto ... The tie, then which binds them in a social organization is moral, a tie".

The necessity that one is made for another in a social setting is responsible for "associates and helpers" which may come in form of godfathers or financiers. O'Neill (2001, p. 543) defines a godfather as "a male godparent". The Chambers Dictionary (1999, p. 688) regards a godfather as "a sponsor... any influential leader or powerful figure". From the two views, a godfather is an influential, powerful and with quantum /of resources to change the fortunes of a godson politically by archiving for him an elective position. As Akinbade (2004, p. 71) argues that a godfather is "a political leader who fully or partially funds the election of a person seeking political office and provides political support for his election ..." Put succinctly, they are seen as the strongmen who "control politics in their different regions" (Adeyemi-Sueni, 2004, p. 73). And make things happen for the protégé (Paul-Sewa, 2004). The financial godfathers are political parasites across political parties whose aim is to promote private or personal interest. Their nature, though, few in number, are "party leaders who control the nomination and election of candidates and the appointment of candidates and the appointment of government officials for their own benefit" (Akinbade, 2004, p. 141).

The phenomenon of godfather is globally acknowledged in party politics. Godfatherism is an inbuilt mechanism of party politics in every political system even in advanced democratic states because politics cannot be self-emulated. And since godfathers are ubiquitous, their roles varied from one place to another. Also, some of them have a number of advantages over others, while their activities in politics cannot be measured. For instance, those who formed and financed the political parties will have more influence than those who join the party at a later date. There is nothing wrong with having godfathers influencing the direction of politics, but the extent to which their stakes in party politics is detrimental and affect good governance across the country cannot be tolerated (Lundstedt & Edgell, 2022).

Politics and Godfatherism

The role of godfathers in politics no doubt cannot be ignored because they provide services and make the electorate vote for a political party or candidate in a particular election for it to win political power. Politically, godfatherism connotes a negative effect in Nigeria. It is a negative connotation because it allows and using ill-gotten wealth to influence the direction of policymaking. It afforded a godfather to impose on the godson irrespective of his competence, ability to deliver, and educational qualification. Nigerian godfathers see their participation in party politics as business. They are not concerned about the development of the country. They make money available for their candidates to run their campaign; they purchase nomination forms and demand 100% obedience and loyalty from the godsons.

The positive effect of a godfather is only to the beneficiary and benefactor; that is, the godfathers and the godsons. It is not beneficial to the political system. In this part of the world, people see politics as a business whereby the godfathers invest and expect rewards from the godsons. There are two types of godfathers: those who wield enormous and tremendous influence within their parties and those who influence the decision in their constituencies. The key attributes of both types of godfathers are that they do influence or "sway political support" for candidates' selection and victory at electoral victory for the candidates (Ayoade, 2006). Like the twin brothers, there are good and bad godfathers. Good godfathers submit to party supremacy, party discipline, and obey extant laws as well as use their reputation and goodwill to influence votes and support for the party. Conversely, bad godfathers disregard extant laws, are insubordinate to the party but still woo support for their anointed candidates. The existence of godfathers is the weakness and lack of institutionalization of political parties to curtail the activities of the godfathers and allow members to breed "aberrant behavior" which negatively affects political parties in the country (Okafor, 2021; Phinos & Kennedy, 2020).

The history of party politics across the world is dominated by political dynasties across countries such as the USA, India, Kenya, Togo, Equatorial Guinea, and the Central African Republic, among others. These countries have been dominated by the influence of godfathers. Nigeria since the political independence in 1960, there are the Yar'Aduas, Ojukwu, Nwodos, Adedibus, Obasanjos, Akinjides, Shinkafis, Sarakis, Tinubus, Okorochas, Ubas, Igbinedions, and Abiolas political dynasties. The Yar'Aduas dynasty included Musa Yar'Adua, Shehu Yar'Adua, Umaru Yar'Adua, and Murtala Yar'Adua. The dynasty of Tinubus is Bola Tinubu, Remi Tinubu, Folashade Tinubu-Ojo, Raji Fashola, Akinwumi Ambode, and Gboyega Oyetola. Sarakis group includes Olusola Saraki, Bukola Saraki, and Gbemisola Saraki. Okorochas' dynasty included Rochas Okorocha, Uche Nwosu, Anthony Anwuka, and Ogechi Olofo. There is Obasanjo's dynasty led by Olusegun Obasanjo including Iyabo Obasanjo and Moji Obasanjo. The dynasty of Shinkafis is Umaru Shinkafi, Aliyu Shinkafi, Fatima Shinkafi, and Zainab Bagudu, while the Ojukwu's dynasty is Louis Ojukwu, Chukweemeka Ojukwu, Emeka Ojukwu, Jnr, and Bianca Ojukwu. Abiolas' political dynasty includes the late MKO Abiola, Lola Abiola-Edewor, and Hafsat Abiola-Costello. There is Adedibus' political dynasty including Lamidi Ariyibi Akanji Adedibu, Kamorudeen Adedibu, Teslim Folarin, and Rasheed Ladoja. The Ubas dynasty includes Ugochukwu, Andy and Chris they are three brothers.

The new emerging dynasties in the body politics are the former Governors: James Ibori, Orji Uzor Kalu, Gabriel Ighinedion, Theodore Orji, Buka Abba Ibrahim, Rabiun Kwankwaso, Olusegun Osoba, Dr. Olusola Saraki, Dr. Jimi Nwobodo, Chief Emeke Offor, and Adebayo Alao-Akala. They dominated and decided who becomes what in their respective states. For instance, the Chairman, Civil Society Network Against Corruption argues that the politicians are not to blame because the electorate consistently compromises and align with the politicians to perpetuate themselves in politics from Lagos to other parts of the country. The elite only share 30 percent of the blame, but the electorate takes 70 percent blame for the malaise. The electorate have conceded the integrity of the ballot to the political class and as well to the godfathers. It is a function of vote-buying and political patronage; the moment the community leader gets a slot for his son, he keeps quiet. Most of those in Local Governments, Houses of Assembly, and commissioners are children and family members of these politicians. We should educate and mobilize people to challenge the electoral commission to take interest in the process of primaries of political parties (cited in *New Telegraph Newspaper*, Monday, October 29, 2018).

Machiavelli's (1983) *The Prince* postulated power as the end to be sought and maintained. He separated morals from politics and made politics amoral, if not immoral. According to him, moral considerations may be laudable in themselves, but that the practical statesman cannot afford the luxury of living up to them for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. In the contestation for political power between political rulers, there are two methods of fighting: the one by law, the other by force. The first method is that of men, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second. It is, therefore, necessary for a prince to know well how to use both the beast and the man. According to him, the ruler must imitate the fox and the lion for the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. On the question of keeping the faith, he admitted that everybody knows how "laudable" it is for a ruler to do so. In party politics, such laudable intentions may be irreconcilable with expediency and interest therefore, a prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by doing so it would be against his interest, and when the reasons which made him bind himself no longer exist. If men were all good, this precept would not be a good one; but as they are bad, and would not observe their faith with you, so you are not bound to keep faith with them. Nigerian godfathers in politics usually align themselves with politics of immorality as adumbrated by Machiavelli especially when party politics and sponsorship is the game influenced electoral monetization.

Nigerian Godfather, Electoral Process and Implication on Governance

The monetized electoral system breeds the emergence of godfatherism in Nigeria's body polity. This is responsible for strengthening and personalization of political parties by powerful individuals who find party politics as an enterprise. The personalization of party organizations is very visible in the candidates' election processes among political parties in the country. Mr. Umar Ado observes that:

The phenomenon of godfatherism covers all political parties in all ramifications but is more prominent under the PDP administration. Godfathers control the PDP (Interview with Umar Ado, 2024)¹.

These individuals control and manipulate the selection processes to the extent that only their anointed candidates are selected both for the party and public offices. The money and political influence on the party and candidates are enormous, in almost all the states of the federation because only the candidates anointed by political godfathers across Nigeria wins the party's nominations (*Newswatch Magazine*, 2006). Indeed, they are political entrepreneurs who invest in elections of candidates for higher financial and political returns. They hold neither elective political offices nor party positions. They are informal political leaders but are more powerful than the party leaders and party officeholders themselves. They sponsor candidates, control the internal party nomination processes, finance electoral campaigns, rig elections on behalf of their candidates, corrupt election officials, and sometimes or when the occasion occurs, change the names of candidates after elections have been conducted. They are "virtual kingmakers as well as the party machine. In other words, the godfathers are "brokers, go-betweens for politicians, seeking political power in a situation of voters' alienation and distrust in return for contracts and political appointments" (Olarinmoye, 2008, p. 67). For instance, a political party is just like a child, will not grow on its own without the assistance of the father, mother, and others in the family and community.

Politician's godsons need somebody to mentor them before they grow. In the previous Republic of Nigeria, there was a cordial relationship between godfathers and godsons and political accountability. There is somebody the younger politicians look up to, learn from his knowledge, wealth of experience, ideological base, and thinking including the political sagacity of its orators. Such individuals are socio-economic and political orators. These orators of the Nigerian politics are not in politics today and accounted for the low quality of governance since there is an overbearing foster by current political mentors because after:

His candidate has been delivered and elected from the platform of his political party, the elected became accountable to wishes of his mentor without a course to the larger public (Interview with Alhaji Hussaini Lawal, 2024)².

The constitutions of political parties did not recognize godfather and / or godfatherism. According to Ibrahim (2007, p. 4) “to understand this kind of mafia-style activity in Nigerian politics, it is important to note that many political parties are operated by political ‘godfathers’, who use money and violence to control the political process.” The godfathers decide party nominations and campaign outcomes but when the godson is elected to try to steer an independent course, they adopt Machiavellian attitude and become pragmatic in party politics to deal with them (godsons). In an attempt to curb the trend and threat of godfatherism in Nigerian politics, the Federal Military Government established the Babalakin Commission of Inquiry and reported that the nature of politics and political parties in the country kept away from politics those with enviable characters because the political parties have been dominated and controlled by those who pull financial muzzles, funded the parties as investments that must yield rich dividends (FGN, 1986 quoted in Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013, p. 23). Since the publication of the Report, the issue of godfatherism in the country’s politics has increased tremendously and not abated.

Political loyalty between the godfathers and godsons/daughters created altercation in the distribution of the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. Under the PDP, for instance, the crisis of godfatherism was the order of the day. It fundamentally affected the government of PDP and brought retrogression to the growth and development in the country. It is a truism that politics is about the pursuit of interest. In Nigeria, the interest that is being pursued is mostly unpopular interest (Ogunwa, 2022A). It is not surprising if the party members should disagree because of ideological interest (Ogunwa, 2022B; 2014). The PDP, for example, was characterized by a disagreement that affected the party at a critical moment. According to a chieftain of AGPA, Mr Abudlrahim Dogo:

But in a case that you have personal differences all the time it is going to be too difficult for the center to hold because the personal interests are usually based on our patrimony, so once you have differences that are based on personality or personal interests then, of course, you have acute crises just as we had in the PDP which eventually tore the party apart (Interview with Mr. Abdulrahim Dogo, 2024)³.

The phenomenon of godfathers influences electoral politics in three ways. One, it manipulates electoral process in the godfathers’ interests: a declaration that only those eligible to vote must, their candidates and other party aspirants should withdraw from the race. Two, adoption of the principles of zoning and other procedures that remove unwanted candidates as punishment for candidates who oppose the godfathers’ protégés are often subject to violence and intimidation by political thugs and state apparatus. Three, monetary incentives to induce voters to support anointed candidates because the godfathers have financial resources than the “independent” candidates who cannot match their spending, while independent candidates are eliminated to contest (Ibrahim, 2007). As a result, free and fair elections became difficult. Although the party has formal procedures for the election of their leaders, the procedures are oftentimes disregarded by godfathers who use the machinery of the state to determine the outcome even when the rules are substantially complied with. The general elections of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 were not without political violence and clashes leading to political assassinations instigated by political godfathers. Political violence has claimed the lives and properties of governorship aspirants in Lagos, Ogun, Kaduna, Edo, and other parts of the country.

In the First and Second Republics, there was a relationship between the godfathers and their protégé. For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Dr. Jim Nwobodo, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Bola Ige, Sardauna Ahmadu Bello, and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Mallam Aminu Kano, and Alhaji Abubakar Rimi offered leadership including expertise, knowledge, and wisdom, which they shared with their brilliant protégés. Both the godfathers and protégés were connected to national issues and the desire to ensure good governance and national development. The protégés acquired knowledge, wisdom, skills, and experience from their godfathers. The influence and political sagacity of the godfathers won elections for their protégés and became light and character for their generations. The relationship between the godfathers and protégés is not to win people's mandate through vote-buying, manipulation of the electoral process, or electoral fraud (Paul-Sewa, 2004). The relationship between the godfathers and their protégés is large because the protégés are younger and the godfathers more intelligent than their protégés in politics (Farounbi, 2003). The present godfathers in politics today are not the same. And there are differences between the ideological godfatherism of the past and the new set of godfathers being paraded now.

The politics of godfatherism has assumed and taken a different dimension in nature and activities since there is no teaching or learning process from both godfathers and proteges. According to Paul-Sewa (2004), there is no party subscription to common ideals, common goals for human national development. The new set of godfathers lacked the political knowledge to transfer ideas and expertise to influence their godsons because they assumed the current political position owing to their enormous wealth and investment in politics and expect a return or profit. For instance, the relationship between Adedibu and Ladoja in Oyo State shows that godfathers are just political mercenaries who use

thuggery, violence, intimidation, harassment, blackmail, and other unscrupulous means to satisfy their inordinate ambition for pecuniary satisfaction which is almost insatiable and have not served as an instrument for the transformation of ideologically based godfathers as in the previous Republic (Akinadewo, 2003).

Additionally, the relationships between Chief Chris Uba and Dr. Chris Ngige on one hand, and Dr. Jimi Nwobodo and Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani on the other hand rest on the compensation. This scenario is largely based on the fact that there is massive poverty in the land which makes the citizens to worship money and to lose their fundamental human rights and conscience. The populace lacked character and integrity, honor, and pride but seek political power without consideration of what it will take and cause them; and the presence of few individuals with enormous resources to buy and corrupt the system, including electoral, security and judiciary as well as decide the electoral direction against the will of the people. The fact lays in Joseph's (1999, p. 55) "prebendal" politics in the country since the state power was treated as congeries of office, which can be competed for, appropriated, and then administered for the benefit of individual occupants and their support group. According to him, the purpose of public office becomes a secondary concern because "the procurement of office of a state has moved from the reward for loyal service to a lord to that of a promise of all the pecuniary office of a state". "Clientelism" or "patron-client ties," he said, is all about give and take as well as a channel through which one joins the dominant class, which is then seen as fundamental to the continued engagement of the prerequisites of that class.

The summation of the Chairman of Transition Monitoring Group, Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi is that just as democracy is not cheap, party politics in Nigeria is not cheap because the cost of being in politics is a very high enterprise because there is no democracy where you can be poor and you want to contest an election unless you have some people who have put you forward and are paying your bills. There is no democracy anywhere where you do not have to commit resources. It is expensive and we have chosen the very expensive type, the presidential system, which is a winner takes all. If you look at it, it is designed in such a way that the winner can compensate himself. Like the security vote in office. And even the legislators have also found a way of rewarding themselves through high allowances (cited in *Sunday Telegraph Newspaper*, August 19, 2018).

The relationship between the godfathers and protégés is on the monetary return. The majority of the key players depend on the party gladiators to bankroll the activities of the politicians and aspirants with the hope that in the nearest future they will be able to gain from their investments. For instance, the fundraising by political parties and their political leaders before the elections were meant to raise funds. And this funding raise is meant to finance political activities. It shows, therefore, party politics has a connection with finance in Nigeria. Finance is a determinant of two factors, number one money, and number two godfathers. The concept of godfatherism clearly shows that the so-called money bags, how do they raise their money and to make sure that he who will be the president or governor will not affect politics negatively. Most of them believe that they will recover the money in the nearest future. It, therefore, means that the godfather will look for a candidate and the godfather will bankroll the activities. What stabilizes godfathers in politics is money. Money is used to effect electoral corruption in the polity. Dr. Yahaya Mohammed, one of the chieftains of the LP has remarked that:

What the influence of money does is that most people who are political godfathers today have a lot of financial muscle to be political godfathers and that's what they use to influence others. In an atmosphere where you have a lot of money people who are in want, that serially create a position for godfathers who will use their influence to direct people on what they have to do (Interview with Dr. Yahaya Mohammed, 2024)⁴.

The political godfathers are using their financial muscles to create that launch for themselves in a political community. For instance, in the case of the PDP, there is a scenario where political godfathers are directly in charge of the federal government, while they try to bridge obedient followers in the states. In most cases, that's why you see a minister crying to the godfather, to governors and sometimes governors having gotten to the position of executive authority will be revolting against a godfather. So, money is important, money creates godfathers in our politics and position too. For example, what happened in Lagos State is as a result of Governor Ambode not willing to toe the line of his godfathers, which cost him the second term as the Governor of Lagos State.

The godfathers finance candidates and expect returns from their investments, "I bankroll your electioneering campaign and you pay me back some expected sum of money with other expected government patronage, while in an elected office" is the popular saying. In effect, this has had adverse consequences on the superstructures of our society including political, legal, cultural, social, and governance. The billions of naira have been expended by godfathers on selection, nomination, and the election of their protégés into governmental offices across the country. The monetization of the electoral process automatically disqualifies men of honorable character and integrity from holding public offices and debarred them from contesting elections because of monetization of the electoral system, once you do not have plenty of money, you are only to be seen and not be heard, to the extent that the godfathers devised means to eliminate them from the political scene (Ogunwa, 2022A; Emeka, 2003).

The phenomenon of godfathers in party politics since independence has continued with little change. This change is responsible for the lack of ideological position and charismatic leadership (Ogunwa, 2012). The individuals who became members of the PDP are those who have benefitted immensely from the electoral process, characterized and dominated by thuggery, money, and coercion, etc. The dominance of godfathers determines who wins the election and who is in government. For instance, the imposition of two parties: SDP and NRC in the aborted Third Republic is large because political associations that wanted to become political parties consisted of those politicians that lack character. It also resulted in the annulment of the presidential election in 1993 when politicians worked toward personal interests. This scenario polluted polity. Political notables with track records were denied recognition because of “influence of money and state power. ... the politics of the country was based essentially on money and the connection one has with the government of the day rather than on achievement” (Bello, 2011, p. 259).

The godfathers use the party platform for personal idiosyncratic interests and inadvertently and deliberately involved instability in political parties. They are modulators and epicenter of political in-fighting and struggle for power and perquisites of office (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014; Momoh, 2013). For sure, we must accept the fact that all political parties need somebody to train and to mentor. It is very important for a new person in a political party in a democratic setting like Nigeria. There is no way a political party will survive without the people who are already in the party, there is the structure that is already put in place by certain individuals. So, if you come in new to a political party, one needs to be nominated and acceptable to the party:

I think that is what people called godfatherism but actually, it is a source of mentoring and agreement based on certain principles. But unfortunately, in Nigeria, where the godfathers become very prominent is because, outside the mentorship, some of the mentors try to enforce their wish on the elected person who is a protégée, and at the end of the day, it created a crisis and that is what gave birth to what you call godfathers (Interview with Mr. Chief G. Gbolagunte, 2024)⁵.

The notable positions like the presidency, governorship and other elective positions become a no-go area in the country for independent candidates because money talks, money rules, and money is power and another criterion is more balderdash and you might just be washing your sweetness in the political desert (Bozimo, 2004). For instance, the PDP chieftain and former Governor of Taraba State, Jolly Nyame described the role of godfathers as “one thing in politics is that you must believe in godfatherism. If I did not believe in it, I would not be in daddy's place” and “whether you like it or not, as a godfather you will not be a governor, you will not be a president, but you can make a governor, you can make a president”. He described himself as a godfather of Taraba politics, “I am the greatest godfather in Nigeria because this is the first time an individual single-handedly put in position every politician in the state” (quoted in Ibrahim, 2006).

This underscored the influence of godfathers as brokers or intermediary between electorates as well as the quest for political power by political parties because a political godfather is a professional manipulator of information and bridge the communication gap between the two elements for a profit that is the political parties and the voting public and mortgage people's expectations and anticipation (Boisseran, 1974). In the process of carrying out their activities, the godfathers on behalf of political parties and politicians (godson) constituted electoral hindrances and applied illegal means to interfere with the electoral process that turned out to be undemocratic (Fukuyama, 2015; Igbinì & Okolie, 2020; Dele, Wakil & Ikpi, 2022). According to Olarinmoye (2008) the godfathers having control of the structure of the voting electorate as well as party machinery including the party structure, use these elements to sponsor godsons and goddaughters through the party machinery to impose their preferred candidates as the party's candidates for the public offices. They also pursue their electoral victory.

The enormous cost of contesting elections accounted for the influence of godfathers in Nigerian politics. For instance, an election into the senatorial seat is as high as about N1 billion or \$74 million and therefore a party candidate need the assistance of a godfather for sponsorship (Okunrounu, 2003). Besides the use of the party machinery and financial backup, the godfathers usually step further to rig election for their anointed candidates, engage in secret dealings with electoral officials, and change the names of the victorious candidate to preferred candidates even after elections have been conducted and results announced. The former Governor of Enugu State, Chimaroke Nnamani (2004, p. 11) who ruled Enugu state from 1999 to 2007 on the platform of the PDP was a product of godfatherism. He defines a godfather as “simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes.” He narrated his experience with the godfathers in the state and implication on governance to be too enormous “of course, though with limited resources, states in some noted cases contest elections may have to, willy-nilly, plod into this clientelism accepting the condition for the state under his administration to maintain an unbroken track or remitting material or prestige (ego) commissions to the fat cat elsewhere” because the godfather would not take pleas on the leanness of resources nor would he take the prayer of the godson for alternative personnel in recruitment into the high level and strategic positions in government because he must exert his “pound of flesh”, or power of influence, in all cases (2004, p. 11, 12, 13).

Godfathers in politics are about giving and receiving. This, however, stultified development, and created a political crisis leading to politics of instability in governance. For instance, in Anambra State, the political godfather and godson were displayed because of the noncompliance to demands of Chris Uba who had bankrolled the governorship election of Dr. Chris Ngige. The latter was abducted and forcefully ousted from the government office on July 10, 2003. A chieftain of All Progressives Congress, Senator S.A. Kaka:

A good example is what happened to Governor Ngige when he was contesting for the seat of governorship. He was told certain things and the procedure to follow but along the line when he got to power, he did not fulfill all these promises and he had a problem with Uba and led to the impeachment of Ngige then. When you look at APC, former AC, then you would see the domineering role of godfather Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. So, we can be able to see the fatherly role that he plays and that most of these people that followed him, one way or the other will be compensated. In the process of compensating, the issue of godfatherism has come in; there is a difference between a good godfather. The godfather can be defined as who is behind you, to attain a certain role. It is the backbone of an individual, that is, godfather (Interview with Senator S.A. Kaka, 2024)⁶.

At the level of conventions of the political parties, especially the PDP across the federation, opposition elements within the party were rigged out of the contest. For instance, in 2007, during the presidential and gubernatorial elections, candidates who triumphed in party primaries, but who are not the godfather's favorites, had their names substituted. Notable examples included Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and Ifeanyi Ararume of Imo State. The same scenario was not different in the 2011 elections with political godfathers playing paramount roles that PDP members could not challenge the party leadership. Those who challenged the leadership of PDP in August 2013 were suspended from the party. The suspended members have found solace in the APC (*The Nation Newspaper*, Thursday, December 19, 2013). In the 2015 general elections, President Jonathan influenced the BoT of the PDP to contest that election. The godfather relies on electoral fraud to stay in power as against relying on the power of the electorate. As the consequences of this, political parties as intermediaries are no longer able to support and determine as the case in all democratic countries in the world, in particular, in many of Nigeria's political parties, they devote considerable resources and energy to suspending and expelling members for so-called antiparty activities. Party barons are mainly interested in controlling the party machine rather than ensuring that they nominate the most popular candidates for competitive electoral posts (Ibrahim, 2007).

The godson's decision to compromise and refusal not to settle the godfather precipitates crisis: loss of control of his government and governance as well as instability in his administration as the godfather determines to terminate "the oxygen of his administration" (Saliu, 2016). They marshalled out an array of political warfare machinery; create parallel party structures to that of the government to fan the embers of disaffection against the government and propel disloyal projects like encouraging non-political organizations to embark on a blitz of blackmails against the godson in government. If other institutional structures fail to create unrest in the system, they resorted to blackmail and fabrication of imaginable and unimaginable charges against the godson and apply even the soberest and decidedly apolitical institutions to make his point and keep the godson under the most snapping pressures. "Take it or leave it", Nnamani (2004, p. 13) says that "the archetypal godfather in Nigeria is more than the ruthless Mario Puzo's Kingpins ... which is to attain a further greasing of the ever-increasing vast financial empire; the Nigerian type has the added characterization of conceit, ego, loquacity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion".

An informed former Local Government Chairman said that the godfather finances the political activities including campaigns and other aspects of the election through "*ubangida*", meaning a godfather supply all the incentives the godsons need to win the election. In doing this, *ubangida* believes he is investing and after the election is won, he becomes for profit from the investment (Ikejiani-Clark, 2008). Not only that, he becomes the *de facto* father with strategies to siphon the public funds to himself, "astutely thought-out investment outlet to be recovered through frivolous and bloated government contracts, appointments of cronies into chosen public offices and other prebendal returns by the beneficiaries" (Ibeanu, 2008). With the control of the political parties especially the PDP by godfathers, the umbrella of the party no longer covers every member in the party but a selected few or godfathers. According to former Governor of Anambra State, Chris Ngige who experienced an altercation with his godfather, when the godsons attempt to resist the influx of the benefactors, they use all kinds of violence to deal with the godsons and also make a free and fair election not only difficult but instigate political violence during the party primaries and the general elections proper. Ngige's experience is not different from that of the former Governor of Oyo State; Rashidi Ladoja who was impeached by the influences of late Lamidi Adedibu. For instance, after the general elections in Anambra State, in an interview with the *Champion Newspaper*, Chief Chris Uba openly stated: I am the greatest godfather in Nigeria because he sponsored a Governor, three senators, 10 members of the House of Representatives, and 30 members of the House of Assembly (*Sunday Champion Newspaper*, June 8, 2003).

Chris Uba's aforementioned statement is remarkable. It reeks of political arrogance and it establishes the fact that, in Nigerian politics, godfatherism is something to be proud of, and not to be ashamed of. It is not only Chris Uba that determines candidates for elective positions. The late Chief Lamidi Adedibu became the benefactor of many politicians in Oyo State. On the occasion of his 79th birthday anniversary announced on behalf of the Deputy Governor of Oyo State, Executive members of the PDP in Oyo State, wards, local and state executives, the two PDP senators in the Senate, 9 federal honorable members, 20 operating members of the Oyo State House of Assembly, 351 PDP councilors and 33 council Consensus' has become a household name in Nigerian political system since 1999 (Eme & Okeke, 2011).

The influence of godfathers has eroded good governance and common good because the godsons usually use the resources of the state to benefit the godfathers (Ozumba, 2024; Kolawole, 2024; Oghuvbu, 2023). Osumah and Ikelegbe (2009, p. 198) the godson "in return... promises loyalty, enormous powers, influence in the running of the state, contracts, money, allocation of resources, amenities, employment, appointments, etc in the favor of the godfather". *Sunday Independent Newspaper* (February 12, 2006: C6) says that they smack of political criminality and subvert the values of democracy and good governance. This has created enthronement and retention of criminals, midnight rascals, and mediocre government. The elected representatives under the political parties have served as a rubber stamp for the godfathers and they were helpless, redundant, and ineffective to discharge the duties of providing common good. It encourages brazen rascality and irresponsibility on the part of political office holders to mobilize and use the resources of the state to serve the interest of selected few in the society. The so-called iron law of oligarchy in organizations seems to have been exemplified, though, for the wrong reasons that are not because of the demands of discipline in and success of the organization and mastery of rules and expert knowledge by the leadership but because of corruption and brigandage (Amucheazi, 2006). The financial backup to the candidates in PDP reinforces the place of the godfathers who became the owners of PDP and determined who gets what and how.

Momoh (2013) says that the godfathers are responsible for in-fighting and struggle for power and perks of office. They are one causative factor in understanding political Nomadism. "Political Normadism", according to him, refers to defection from one political party to another or some time formation of a new party after renouncing their party membership. The reason for defection is because the former parties were turned into grazing grounds on one hand, and the rate of defections is so high and deliberate as well as explicable on the other. As he observes, party defections were caused by a lack of internal democracy in the party, godfatherism, highhandedness, usurpation of power, and abuse of position. According to Okereka (2015), the Nigerian party system suffers equalitarian platform and subvert the will of the ordinary party members and delegates in party primaries. He concluded that the present party system is characterized by suspensions and expulsions of party members, lack of ideology, politics of ethnicity, godfatherism, internal party democracy, cross carpeting particularly before elections and deep divisions and factions manifested in violent clashes. These factors find common denominator and agreement among scholars that intra-party conflict influenced by monetization of politics influenced by barrage of godfathers is the bane of political parties in the country (Omoruyi, 2002; Okoosi-Simbine, 2005; Olaniyan, 2009; Momodu and Ika, 2013; Odukoya, 2013; Onyishi, 2015; Oyadiran & Olorungbemi, 2016; Adekeye & Ambali, 2017).

These affected all the political parties and members to have constituted themselves into internal opposition. Okoli and Ali (2014) observe that intra-party opposition has the queer character of party politics. Intra-party-political opposition is when some individuals in a ruling party constitute themselves into a splinter movement that stands opposed to the activities of the parent party. Arguing, the emergence of splinter group is largely caused by personal differences, clash of socio-economic interests, ideological incompatibility, do-or-die politics, organizational weakness, and operational defects. Also, indiscipline, monetization of politics breeds cabalism and godfatherism. The structure of such opposition operated along with mainstream political parties and establishment of parallel party structures as well as leadership, partisan alignments and re-alignments among the party faithful. These political parties including AD, APC, PDP, SDP, APGA, LB, AP, among others were characterized by the internal conflicts that resulted to change of party leadership; impeachment; defections and expulsion, affected the delivery of democratic dividends as a result of instability of party organizations. Scholars are unanimous that these factors including lack of internal party democracy, impunity by the leadership of the parties, the imposition of the candidate; politics of godfatherism as well as lack of ideology to guide the conduct of members in the parties; incumbent factors and so on. And as well caused and aided the defections of party chieftains, leaders, and founders, elected and appointed individuals to have dropped their political parties to another to realize their political ambitions, not without, however, political and governance crises in the country (Ogunwa, 2022A; Ogunwa, 2011; Oghuvbu, 2023).

Conclusions

The study has demonstrated and revealed that godfathers or godfatherism is an integral part of party politics. Their place is ubiquitous across political systems even in liberal democracies. And their involvement in politics is generally acknowledged. Like other countries around the world, Nigeria has witnessed the influx of godfathers and

enormous contributions to financing and sponsoring party candidates as a result of paucity of financial capacity on the part of the candidates and the political parties themselves. While the involvement of godfathers in politics is quantumly appreciated, however, the other side of godfathers have contributed less to democratic dividends across the federation. It is truism that electoral politics involve huge investments that require returns, but the inability of the godsons to meet the demands of godfathers has created plethora consequences including impeachments, uncompleted projects, insecurity, strikes, impunity, corruption and lack of socio-economic amenities and significant infrastructural development. It has eroded meritocracy, quality of good governance, transparency, accountability and control.

While one may not discard sponsorship of quality and qualified candidate to deliver on the electoral promises, but this should not be tied to clientelism or patron-son patronage relationship. Afterall, the country has witnessed in the past Republics, positive godfathers who sponsored candidates to win election and after election continue to tutoring and mentoring the godsons on the policy formations and implementations which metamorphosed into socio-economic and political prosperity. The beneficiaries of such godfathers more often than not boldly and publicly acknowledged them nationally and internationally.

Since sponsoring of candidates cannot be removed from liberal democracies especially in multiparty democracies as well as in heterogeneous societies coupled with the environmental factors, godfathers should see their contributions to electoral success of their candidates as contributions to national development as well as deepening democratic governance. Financing party candidates in the absence or inability of political parties to fund their candidates should be seen as a contribution for growing the party system and training young politicians on the scheme of governance. Party institutionalization is essentially important for any political party to survive. The survival has to do with the extent to which the Nigerian party system is engraved in the minds of the people vis-a-vis the electorates. Sometimes, money or funding candidates may not really contribute to the success of a political party, but the ability to win the electorates through the quality of candidates, manifesto and ideology. A political party without an ideology is dead on arrival.

Political developments across the world have demonstrated to us that winning election through party platforms may not be necessary any longer. In other words, independent candidate without a party may likely steal the day and serve as a panacea for candidate electoral financing. Notwithstanding, godfathers should anticipate to see their names written in gold when they positively use their resources judiciously for eradicating poverty, creating infrastructural development and contributing largely towards making Nigeria and her people great.

Foot Notes

1. Oral interview with Umar Ado (2024) Ikeja, Lagos State
2. Oral interview with Alhaji Hussaini Lawal (2024) Ikeja, Lagos State
3. Oral interview with Mr. Abdulrahim Dogo (2024) Ikeja, Lagos State
4. Oral interview with Dr. Yahaya Mohammed (2024) Ikeja, Lagos State
5. Oral interview with Prof. Gbolagade Gbolagunte (2024) Igbesa, Ogun State
6. Oral interview with Senator S.A. Kaka (2024) Ijebu-Igbo, Ogun State

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