



DOI: 10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-3-465-479

EDN: ZAVSFT

Research article / Научная статья

## Godfatherism and Its Effects on Nigeria's Democracy

Ejiroghene Augustine Oghuvbu  

Delta State University,  
1, Abraka-Umutu Rd., Abraka, Nigeria

 [augustine4best@yahoo.com](mailto:augustine4best@yahoo.com)

**Abstract.** Godfatherism has been the focal point of political gangalism in Africa and other developing countries around the globe. Godfatherism has been a hallmark of Nigeria's democracy today. With the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the nation has seen an increase in the politics of godfatherism, which has slowed the consolidation of democracy while also undermining efficient state governance and restricting rather than broadening democratic representation. Godfatherism has taken its toll in the country's politics, causing disharmony, disunity, conflict, and disaffection among various political and interest groups in the country. Its lethargy has exacerbated electoral passivism and apartheid, slowing Nigeria's democratic transition. This study therefore, investigates the causes, nature and effects of godfatherism on Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper based its investigation on the elite theory and the study reveals that political godfatherism is responsible for weak institutions in the country. The study therefore, concludes that political godfathers and godsons have denied the people the rights to vote for their preferred candidate as their leaders. The study however, recommends that voting should be reformed to make it more difficult for individuals and institutions to finance political parties and politicians, this will go a long way towards eradicating godfatherism in Nigeria, and give room for democracy to flourish.

**Keywords:** democracy, Godfatherism, development, political conflict, personal interest

**Conflicts of interest:** The author declared no conflicts of interest.

### Article history:

The article was submitted on 15.03.2023. The article was accepted on 29.06.2023.

### For citation:

Oghuvbu E.A. Godfatherism and its Effects on Nigeria's Democracy. *RUDN Journal of Public Administration*. 2023;10(3):465–479. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-3-465-479>

## Introduction

Godfatherism has been the focal point of political gangalism in Africa and other developing countries around the globe [1. P. 11]. The political class's struggle for dominance of society's systems and institutions is explained by the accumulation of power and wealth of politicians; this struggle, and the resulting ideals, have had a significant effect on society in a variety of ways. Power struggles among members

© Oghuvbu E.A., 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

of the political class have culminated in violence in various forms and intensities in our evolving democratic history [2. P. 1].

Since the country's democratic transition in 1999, Nigeria's democracy has remained incredibly dysfunctional, with politics becoming increasingly partisan and patronage becoming necessary to retain power. Democracy, as a moral and legitimate means of governing a nation, has spread to many parts of the globe but it's yet to take root, in Nigeria. Multiple political parties, frequent and competitive elections, which would otherwise be called irreducible minimum requirements for democratic rule, have not resulted in a corresponding flourishing of fundamental liberal ideals that are vital to democracy's survival [3. P. 93]. The politics of godfatherism, which denies peaceful coexistence, law and order, and all the tenets of democratic process by obstructing candidate selection and even executive selection once government is established, has resulted in a transmutation of authoritarianism rather than democratic consolidation in Nigeria [3. P. 93].

Godfatherism is not a recent phenomenon in the political history of Nigeria, however, after returning to democratic rule, the country has seen a rise in godfatherism politics, which continues to erode government credibility and render citizens' electoral worth void. Godfatherism according to Nkwede, Ibeogu & Nwankwo [4. P. 139] is the "political merchant while the political godson is the slave who is bought with a huge amount of money under a democratic oath. Godfatherism is amongst the most dangerous challenges to democracy today, and it persists only with the help of the government, resulting in unresponsive leadership". Ohiole & Ojo [5. P. 3] averred "In Nigeria, democracy is not yet completely developed, and the phenomenon of godfatherism has jeopardized the political process as well as citizens' livelihood". This paper is therefore, aimed at filling this void in literature.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in this paper is qualitative. In order to investigate the issues of godfatherism and democracy in Nigeria, the researcher used descriptive analysis. The theoretical nature of the paper derives its claim primarily from secondary evidence, such as internet sources, textbooks, and journal articles.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Clarification**

Just like every other concept in the humanities and social sciences, godfatherism as a concept has no specific definition, therefore, making it difficult to arrive at a particular concept. Some similar terms, such as godfather and godson, must be identified in order to fully comprehend this. Godfather functions as a kingmaker, manager, mentor, and teacher. A godfather is "someone who has developed unimaginable respect and supporters (electorate) in the society and enjoys a well-organized political network and widespread acceptance from the voters that could ensure success for representatives of his preference, [3. P. 94]. Polly, Abner & Pally, cited in Attah, Audu & Haruna [6. P. 90] used the term in their paper to refer

to those who offered brokerage services to Hausa traders in transit in various parts of West Africa were referred to as “brokers” in their works. These traders depend on a maigida to facilitate their economic activities at the numerous transit centres where they must stop to do business. Accommodation, transportation, and brokerage facilities were all provided by the maigida.

In the Yoruba culture, godfathers are known as ‘Baba Kekere’ (small great father), ‘Baba Isale’ (father of the underground world), or ‘Baba Nigbejo’ (great helper in times of trouble). The word ‘Baba Kekere’ was coined to describe community leaders with whom people of lower social status identified as a means of ensuring their own social, physical, economic, and political security. For instance, the majority of Yoruba refugees who arrived in Ibadan in the early nineteenth century settled with the ‘baba kekere’ [3. P. 94]. As a result, the cases presented above demonstrate how people of lower social status join forces with people of higher social integrity, typically for financial gains. While this phenomenon is not alien to Nigeria, it is unusual in its incorporation into our political system.

Godfather politics entails the ‘anointing’ of a godson who is supposed to win an election by leveraging the godfather’s power, wealth, political structure, and political experience [3. P. 95]. According to Olawale [7. P. 80] espoused that “Godfather politics has had far-reaching dire consequences for Nigeria’s democratization process.” This argument is still very much visible today in Nigerian politics. In the context of this paper, godfathers are influential members of society who decide “what, how, who, and when” in the seats of power. Many godfathers in modern-day Nigeria operate in a mafia-like manner, engaging in violent plotting and hostile ‘politics,’ as well as manipulating devices to get their way through any means necessary. They use Machiavelli’s motto, “the ends justify the means,” to justify their actions. They have control over all aspects of society, including academia, the legal system, politics, and religion. Godson, on the other hand, applied to the inheritor and beneficiary of a godfather’s legacy [7. P. 81].

Several scholars have characterized godfatherism based on their perceptions and understanding of the term. According to Kolawale cited in Osakede & Ijimakinwa [2. P. 3] described godfatherism as “a political king-making institution in which certain political office holders with shaky political clout come to power”. As a result, it is a political surrogacy arrangement involving financial and moral support, with the godfather as the primary donor and the godson as the primary recipient. Godfatherism is a term used to describe the relationship between a godfather and a godson in its most basic form. Godfathers vary from mafia and election backers in a few ways. In politics, mafianism consists of formidable powerful blocs with enormous societal clout [8]. Godfatherism, according to Scott [9], is “a special case of dyadic (two-person) relations involving a mostly instrumental friendship in which a person of higher socio-economic status (patron or godfather) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits or both for a person of lower socio-economic status (client or godson) who, in turn, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance”. Furthermore, Olawale [7] espoused that the modern day godfatherism is an ancient tradition that has been taken to criminality level.

Conversely, Attah, Audu & Haruna [6. P. 89] noted that “godfatherism is seen all over the world and not peculiar to Nigeria alone. It is difficult not to find any state where godfatherism does not exist, although, the intensity varies”. Political candidates in America wiggle, seeking party and individual endorsements for their candidacy. Furthermore, group influence and endorsement can be more important than a powerful leader in other advanced societies [3]. The truth remains that influential members of society continue to have an impact on society through their voting decisions. Regardless, the characteristics of patron-client politics remain unchanged. It is founded on a power imbalance that exists in the sense of a face-to-face personal relationship, the introduction of a wide variety of socio-political and economic modes of trade, the show of kickbacks, cost-benefit analysis, and the availability of vote-givers and consider voting. The relationship between godfather and godson in Nigeria is contractual, and it is often written down and even sealed spiritually with an oath, or, in the extreme, in a ‘shrine’ [3].

At this juncture it is imperative to give a short introduction to the idea of democracy. The idea of democracy as a form of government dates back to ancient Greece. There exists various versions of democracy, common among these versions are the Athenian classical democracy, Marxists-Leninist democracy, Liberal and lately, Radical democracies. For the purpose of this paper the focus will be on liberal democracy also known as representative democracy and how it is hindered by politics of godfatherism in Nigeria [3]. In liberal view, democracy is a government by prevalent representation; a system of government where power resides with the people. Consequently, democracy is for the good of the people and by the people and for the people. The free press, openness and transparency of government, respect for the rule of law and constitutionalism, accountability, equality and inclusiveness, participation, consensus orientation, and effective and efficient service delivery are all common principles in liberal democracy. Since the practice has not witnessed freedom of choice, constituted authority, reverence for the rule of law, sagacity, and service delivery, the definition of democracy in Nigeria has been misconstrued with mere civil rule [10]. According to Onubi [11. P. 125] democracy means “rule by the people”, which means it is a government run by the people, and for the people. As a result, it refers to majority rule. Democracy may also be described as a concept, a process that leads to change, or a course of action for a government system [12]. Attah, Audu & Haruna [6. P. 90] further stated that democracy “entrenches and extends, or seeks to entrench and expand, citizens’ rights, ability, and capacity in a given society”.

### **Politics of Godfatherism in Nigeria: An Appraisal**

In Nigeria, the political godfathers are a wealthy set of people who view political candidate sponsorship as a means of achieving social and economic advancement. In Nigeria, every democratic transformation program begins with the emergence of new political parties. Many of these political parties’ leaders have goals, positions, desires, and needs that are usually kept hidden [13. P. 13]. Many

who later join the parties must then depend on what the party's "godfathers" say or do. Those who wish to do very well in parties must then attend secret meetings in their godfathers' homes. They gain access to privileged knowledge about party procedures and how to manage them as a result of this. The godfathers ensure that party officials are overregulated in order to advance their own roles within the party. The system's laws are themselves instruments for making it easier for state and party officials to manipulate the democratic process [14]. In a society with an army of unemployed youths ready to be used to accomplish criminal goals, this aim becomes easier to achieve. In this type of political environment, the society consists of a place where everything goes [13].

A malleable criminal and social justice system is the last but not the least significant factor for godfatherism to thrive in Nigeria. As a result, a variety of factors are responsible for godfatherism flourishing in today's Nigerian polity [15]. The first is a profit-driven political patron, a pliable political mechanism that serves the interests of only a selected few in society, a poor civil society and electoral system, a few do-or-die office seekers, and a cynical mass media eager to serve the interests of the highest bidder in society [15]. The operationalization of political godfatherism in Nigeria, as well as the complexities that accompany it, predate the country's political independence. This is because pre-colonial Nigeria's social and political characteristics have often resembled the phenomena of prebendalism, clientelism, and patron-client transactional relationships, as described by Richard [16]. Olawale [7] posits that the term "godfather" appears in parenthesis in many western political studies in his explanation of pre-colonial patron-client prebendal relationships in Nigeria. In Nigeria, however, the patron-client relationships that popularized the word in Nigerian politics have cultural origins among many Nigerians. People having one or more types of "godfathers" is not a completely new experience in Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo sociology; for example, the term "godfather" has a local equivalence in Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages, and these terms have been in use since the pre-colonial period." The pre-colonial patron-client prebendalism, on the other hand, was quickly carried over to Nigeria's post-colonial political arrangements [14]. In supporting this claim Olawale [7. P. 87] asserts that "the founding fathers of Nigerian party politics were godfathers in a way. The first generational Nigerian leaders who made contact with Europeans in the late 1800s preceded them. The traditional rulers were the leading figures, and they later became the focal point of the British indirect rule policy in the country".

As the colonial administration came to an end in the 1950s, and nationalist activities gained traction, the few educated elites became the vanguard for the struggle for independence. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) for the north, the Action Group (AG) for the Yoruba-dominated south-west, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) for the Igbo-dominated eastern Nigeria were among the regional political parties created. Olawale [7. P. 87] reportage noted that godfathers position in a colonial system was to show the way for other Nigerians. "The political godfathers of this era included the then Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu

Bello, who led the NPC, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who led the AG, and Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC leader,” according to a study on the period’s political patrons. Mallam Aminu Kano and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim are two other Nigerian political elder statesmen who fall into this group. Up until their deaths, these political leaders decided who might hold political office in the geopolitical regions they ruled. They act as clearinghouses for political opportunities [7. P. 88]”.

Ugwu, Izueke & Obasi [13. P. 136] espoused that in the later “political dispensation, the above-mentioned political godfathers of Nigeria’s three major regions created enormous political godsons who held various political positions.” Sir Ahmadu Bello’s political godsons, known in Nigeria as the “Kaduna Mafia,” Chief Awolowo’s political godsons, known in the South-West as the “Afenifere” (those who wish others well), among whom are Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, and Chief Bisi Onabanjo (all former state governors from 1979–1983), and Nnamdi Azikiwe’s political godsons [15]. All of the first-generation patrons’ godsons went on to become godfathers in Nigerian politics. However, since 1999, when those in power have become political godfathers in state politics, godfatherism has become prevalent in the Nigerian polity. Godfatherism is a practice that causes people to act as though they are godfathers political heavy-weights’ unrestricted ability to control the political landscape, manipulate candidate victories (the godsons/daughters), and determine policy and program direction remained a major factor in Nigeria’s political culture [15]. Furthermore, Adeoye [17. P. 270] argued that “it got so bad under the watchful eyes of Obasanjo-led government that godfathers adopted various names: gangsters, mafia, and criminal.” Under President Obasanjo’s democratic rule, the worst manifestations of godfatherism in Nigerian history came to life for one simple reason: he encouraged and permitted it. Some of the godfathers exhibited many of the features of mafianism, with many of them behaving like “Al Capone” in a criminal world; yet, these godfathers continued their crime in an endearing political climate”. Lagos State is a veritable example of godfatherism. The former governor of Lagos Ambode is the prey of godfatherism politics, while the current Lagos State governor who succeeded Ambode is the beneficiary of godfatherism. Due to Nigeria’s present godfather structure, the country’s devastating legacies of Ibrahim Babangida (1985 to 1993), Sanni Abacha (1993 to 1998), and Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 to 2007) regimes [3].

### **Reasons for Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics**

In Nigeria, the reason for the politics of godfatherism is not far-fetched. According to Rasak, Oye & Ake [18. P. 79] noted that a onetime governor Chimaroke Nnamani, affirms that godfather is “an impervious guardian figure who provided the lifeline and direction to the godson, perceived to live a life of total submission, subservience, and protection of the oracular personality located in the large, material frame of opulence, affluence, and decisiveness, that is, if not ruthless...strictly”.

According to Ahmed & Ali [13. P. 14] the “power of incumbency, influence, political thugs, money politics, lack of political knowledge, selfishness, greediness,

lack of publicity, over-ambition, nepotism, and politics of regionalism are among the factors that led to the politics of godfatherism in Nigeria.” Since the godfathers use their influence and resources to put their godsons and relatives in various positions of power, it is understood that corruptive tendencies exacerbate the godfathers’ economic base by causing a wide variety of difficulties in politics and rule. Those in authority often use their role to determine who will represent the citizens’ interests at all costs.

Governor Ifeanyi Okowa, for example, transforms Delta state into a family company, handing over 400 million naira (N400, 000,000) to his daughter’s office at the expense of the people. In addition, the military’s foray into politics helped in the consolidation of Nigerian godfatherism. The promotion of political and economic centralization, corruption, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, and the transfer of much power to the chief executive at all levels, making the role more desirable, were all high on their list of misrule [3. P. 98].

In Nigeria, political godfathers erect a phalanx of loyalists around them and use their clout, which is often based on monetary considerations, to dominate the rest of society [19]. According to [5. P. 4], election sponsors are wealthy, popular, and influential individuals who freely contribute to a party’s voting success or support candidates during an election. Furthermore, according to Ohiole & Ojo [5], the political godfather may be less concerned with active politics or regime organization and more concerned with approachable policies from the government. In the twenty-first century, Nigeria’s godfathers fund elections, but not all election sponsors are godfathers. Godfathers, on the other hand, rule over all aspects of society, including academia, the legal system, and the religious climate. To back up the above assertion, Popoola revealed that the nation’s socioeconomic growth has been disrupted by the political godfather and godson feud. This conflict, which was rooted in a collision of interests, needs, values, and capitals, involved politicians at the highest levels of government. This has a direct impact on the nation’s socioeconomic and political growth. A good example was between Ambode the former governor of Lagos and is godfather Tinubu prior to the 2019 elections.

### **The Crisis of Godfather and Godson in Nigerian Politics**

Godfatherism is a philosophy based on the idea that a few people with significant wealth who have the power to arbitrarily decide who gets a party ticket and also determines who wins or loose an election. The godfathers, on the other hand, intend to rule by proxy. As a result, they use violence openly and indiscriminately against those who stand in their way, including their godsons. In Nigerian politics, godfathers are fear merchants and power brokers. On a regular basis, people throng in and out of their homes, running errands or requesting one favour or another [20. P. 6]. Olawale [7. P. 80] notes that “In certain cases, the relationship between political godfathers and their adopted sons is transactional.” As Nigerians say, it’s a case of “you rub my back, and I rub your back”. Just like every business man/woman, godfathers invest in their godsons and expects returns after winning election. This

is most times accomplished by lucrative political positions, contracts, land grants, political control and power sharing with incumbents, and, if the allegations against some of them are to be taken seriously, unjustified requests for monetary backing”.

The privileges a godfather receives from his godson are strategic. In several cases, he requests the right to appoint about 8 % of those who are eligible function in his godson’s cabinet. Many godfathers often make certain that they have complete influence over the situation. Most of the godfathers also make sure they influence majority of representatives in state legislatures, and they readily use these to threaten governors with impeachment at any time misunderstanding occurs. Political godfathers in Nigeria make more money from the political process than anybody else in Nigerian politics. Those they imposed as commissioners, permanent secretaries, board chairmen, and other officials make equal monthly payments to their godfathers, just as the principal godsons do. On June 10th, 2003, the Nigerian godfather-godson relationship brought Nigerian juvenile democracy to an end. Chris Uba, a self-described godfather, used miscreants and Nigerian police to kidnap his godson, Chris Ngige, the elected governor of Anambra State. Ngige’s crime was his refusal to let his godfather, Chris Uba, nominate all political positions and take the lion’s share of the state’s allocation and instantly pay him N2.5billion. He claimed that was what he spent in making the Ngige the governor [3; 21; 22; 23].

While in Kwara state, the conflict began in 1999 to 2003 where Saraki the ex-Senate president was in competition for relevance with his former protégé Mohammed Lawal, who was at the time the state governor. Saraki who has brought four of his political godsons including Lawal into power had a fallout with him due to sharing political commissions and gains. Mohammed Lawal’s refusal to agree to Saraki’s wish led to serious political crisis between him (Lawal) and his godfather (Saraki). As a result of this Saraki was expelled from the “All people’s Party” (APP) now “All Nigerian People’s Party” (ANPP) [5. P. 6]. Then, in 2003, both men faced off in the ultimate fight to decide who would be the State’s political grandmaster. To fight the “war,” they used their immense resources. The peace of Ilorin was shattered during this “battle” when a bomb exploded on the premises of National Pilot, which is owned by the Saraki’s. During the upheaval, many people were assassinated, maimed, injured, and so on. Among those killed was Shmed PATIGI, the State Chairman of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), who was brutally murdered in August 2002. Supporters of the two (2) camps openly threatened each other with lethal weapons, with the police acting as onlookers [5. P. 6]. However, when the junior Saraki won the State Governorship election in 2003, all of that came to an end, and the rest is history.

Similarly, the battle was also drawn in Oyo state between Ladoja and Adebibu. Adebibu claimed to have contributed financially to the “instalment” of Ladoja as governor, with the understanding that the governor would be loyal and submissive, obeying his orders and subjecting public resources to his personal whims and caprices. Ladoja, on the other hand, reneged and refused to abide by the rules. This resulted in the chaos that erupted in Ibadan after the 2003 elections until January



2006. Many lives and properties were lost, and the State House of Assembly became polarized along two (2) lines, leading to the expulsion of fourteen (14) of the thirty-two (32) members of the Assembly. In January 2006, Ladoja was impeached in less than 25 minutes, paving the way for his deputy Alao Akala. Alao Akala, his deputy, is another eager godson eager to better represent the godfather. The status quo was upheld until the Supreme Court's final decision on December 7, 2006. His expulsion was found to be unconstitutional by the court, and he was reinstated after eleven (11) months. His return to office was met with fierce opposition from his former godfather's (ADEDIBU) faction, resulting in a break in law and order in the State capital for a few days and the deaths of several innocent people [1].

Other instances were between Ambode-Tinubu in Lagos; Kachalla-Alimodu Sheriff in Borno. In these cases, the godfathers made sure that the disobedient godsons were not re-elected for a second term and that some of them were impeached. Godfatherism has become phenomenal and parasitic in Nigeria's fourth republic as a result of patronage politics, with grave implications for participation, political stability, democratic consolidation, and peace. Osayi [20. P. 7] aptly captured this thought "godfatherism and money politics are two indispensable characteristics in political discourse that can either promote or impede political stability. Godfatherism is thus, a very powerful tool that can be used to destabilize a nation due to its ability to incorporate all of the primordial components of chaos".

### **Theoretical Framework**

The elite's theory was adopted for this paper to examine the domineering relevance of godfatherism on Nigeria's newly emerging democracy. The theory proposes that power is shared among the elites at regular intervals and at the detriment of the electorate or the masses. As Pareto [24. P. 26] asserted, "political elites shield and disassociate themselves from society, attempting to reproduce themselves as much as possible from within. They do everything necessary within their control to ensure that non-elites do not enter their membership." The political elites keep a safe, functional distance from the rest of society. They replicate themselves on an individual and selective basis in a method, which Pareto explicitly referred to as the 'circulation of elites' [24]. The standards for such elite recruitment are frequently parochial, and the procedure is typically carried out in a way that does not jeopardize the dominant elite class's conventional reputation. The ruling class, according to Pareto, also attempts to sabotage efforts at 'collective circulation of elites', preferring instead to promote individual recruitment [24].

Mosca [25], on the other hand, disagrees with Pareto that elite recruiting can only be done on a personal level. He argues that one social class should replace another and that non-elite members can enter the elite class through a process known as "collective social mobility. This refers to the social, economic, and professional status that people achieve as a result of their efforts". Mosca [25] also believes that a group of people known as the "sub-elite" already exists in many societies around the world. These individuals promote contact between the elite and the non-elite,

making them potential vehicles for elite recruitment on a wide scale. Because of this argument, both sub-elite and non-elite Nigerians can be recruited into the political elite class. Elites, according to the elite theory, are players who govern the state and national wealth and hold key roles in power systems [25]. As a result, elite class understanding is more closely linked to “Weberian understanding of power, recognized as the ability to carry out one’s will, even against the will of the wider population”. In Nigeria, godfatherism acts as a conduit for such limited elite recruitment. Underdevelopment, abject hunger, extreme youth unemployment, low health opportunities, and misinterpretation of what politics can be are the consequences in Nigeria polity [24].

The importance of the elite hypothesis to this paper is founded on its potential to explain how politics of godfatherism facilitates the transformation of individuals into the political elite class. Liberalism, as we have seen in Nigeria, fosters extreme elitist democracy and a money-driven electioneering structure, putting the populace as ‘onlookers,’ and continues to deny Nigerians much-needed institutional, political and socioeconomic advancement. Central to elite theory is structures, especially authority structures. It is founded on the premise that elite behaviour has a causal impact on the state-society dynamic while insiders have more authority and power over the state than the people. Elite ideology, according to Mosca [25], refers to the accumulation of authority in the hands of a few people that “performs all government roles, monopolizes power, and retains the benefits of power”. As a result, public policy can be perceived as a reflection of political elites’ values and preferences. The Nigerian polity exemplifies a state in which the wellbeing of the people is blatantly sacrificed to the needs of a few politicians and their cronies. The electorate is becoming increasingly poorer, while the greedy rich godfathers are becoming increasingly wealthy.

### **Godfatherism And Its Effects on Nigeria’s Democracy**

The resurgence of godfatherism in Nigeria posed a serious obstacle to political dividends, socioeconomic growth, good governance and stability. One of the most alarming and destructive effects of godfatherism in Nigeria politics is the campaigning for a genuinely democratic and transparent political mechanism in which voters are expected to openly nominate someone who will rule them and serve their interests. Considering the circumstances in which godfathers imposed candidates of their choosing on the general populace, the right of appointing citizens of their choice to rule them is denied. This is, to say the least, diametrically opposed to political principles [2. P. 6]. When those holding public offices are not accountable to voters, who in any case did not vote in their election to public office, the allegiance of such public office is inevitably designated to their godfathers, negating one of the most important characteristics of governance and democracy, which is responsible and open government [2. P. 6]. This situation is therefore harmful to good government and political order, which are based on the rule of law, due process, responsibility, and openness of public matters.

Only by assuring their godsons of electoral victory will the godfathers increase their social, political, and economic power. As a result, elections have become a vehicle for advancing the interests of the aristocracy rather than the electorate, in Nigeria's fourth republic [3. P. 100]. The rise of godfatherism has also deprived people of the right to reap the benefits of democratic governance, in the sense that the government has been hesitant to initiate and enforce reforms that will benefit the general public. The intellectual foundations and basic ethos of democracy are being brushed aside, causing Nigerian voters to lose confidence in the democratic process and the administration. This was due to the fact that Nigerian godfatherism was essentially coercive in practice [2. P. 6]. The main motivation for entering politics was the desire to obtain wealth from government treasury, which their godsons controlled. As a result, the state's financial resource from the federation account, which was intended to raise citizens' living conditions, was of utmost importance to politicians. Hell would explode if godsons fail to reconcile their godfathers as agreed [3. P. 100].

According to Igbini & Okolie [3. P. 100] noted that "statistical analysis, from the 2003, 2007 and 2019 general elections were the worst in Nigeria's fourth republic. That is because polls were marked by widespread rigging, monetization, dishonest electoral officers and security forces, judicial injustice, democratic assassination, political thuggery, deliberate disenfranchisement of the electorate, and flagrant disrespect for the rule of law, incitement, religious opinion mobilization, youth unrest, electoral propaganda, simultaneous voting, under-age voting". Furthermore, there were also cases of irregular ballot with already thumb-printed ballot papers, the chasing of electors away from districts where their candidates are expected to receive few votes, falsification of election results and forgery of figures at polling units and data centres, including pressuring certain party agents to sign forged election results under duress. This means that democracy's prestige as the ideal system of government has been eroded [15].

The ruled in a democracy not only have the freedom to vote, but they also have the right to be voted for. Democratic godfathers use their power to exclude anyone from participating in Nigerian politics; they are political gatekeepers, dictating who can and cannot engage in politics. Since "the reigning godson is at pains to fulfil the whims and caprices of the godfather among other conflicting demands on the scarce resources," this type of condition encourages mediocrity and financial corruption. The interest of the greater majority is savagely exploited by the government's finances. According to Ugwu, Izueke & Obasi [14. P. 139], espoused that the "politics of godfatherism has made growth inaccessible to the majority of the population. As a result, godfatherism politics is one of the main forces orchestrating Nigeria's fourth republic's socio-economic and political crises. Godfatherism politics has had a devastating impact on state democracy and political progress in Nigeria today". In the present day Nigeria, the citizenry are not involved in the decision making process of issues that affect them, this has eroded the gains and tents of democracy. This is due to heavy militarized and monetized

polity largely dominated by godfathers, their thugs and private militia and has negated economic activities, especially schooling, health, security (political wrangling), agriculture, housing, and infrastructural growth, are brought to a halt as a result of these (godfatherism) in our polity [15].

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The politics of godfatherism is an impediment to Nigeria's nascent democracy, as this paper has demonstrated. It has risen to prominence and has become a dominant feature of the country's electoral politics and governance. As a result, it promotes graft, breeds severe unemployment, electoral malpractices, abject poverty, and political uncertainty, endangering the democratic process as well as citizens' socioeconomic lives. One of the most alarming and destructive effects of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth republic was to make a mockery of a genuinely democratic and transparent political mechanism in which electorates are supposed to openly nominate candidates of their choosing to represent their interests in public office. Our political leaders and their mentors (godfathers) exploit the constitutive and regulative instrument for a credible democratic struggle in order to accomplish their aims. Credible elections are important to stem the tide for democratic decay and rebirth in the nation. This is because, according to proponents of liberal democracy, once elections are conducted correctly, democracy will bring consolidation and as a result of this, the country will experience long-term peace and security. Credible elections, in essence, result in security, political stability, and socioeconomic development. From the foregoing therefore, the paper recommends the following to reduce the effects of godfatherism on Nigeria's relatively young democracy.

Stakeholders in the Nigerian election system, such as the government, electoral body, civil society, judiciary, and religious institutions, should be adamant about bolstering the democratic structure.

To prevent electoral fraud, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should implement e-voting for all elections in the country. This will help to minimize election rigging and allow aspirants to run for any job they want without swearing allegiance to the godfathers in exchange for a guaranteed winning ticket.

The existing electoral process must be re-examined in order to deemphasize money in Nigeria's political environment. To that end, monetary contributions to political parties by individuals or organisations should be made publicly, screened, and their origins verified by appropriate agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Moreover, such funds must be fully accounted for, and appropriate penalties for embezzlement should be imposed.

Nigeria's electoral laws should be changed to make it more difficult for individuals and corporations to finance political parties and candidates. This will go a long way toward eradicating godfatherism in the world, and democracy will flourish.

The country requires purposeful leadership with a vision of how to put its citizens at the centre of the political project without resorting to patron-client relationships, and who sees political power as a means of serving the common interests of its people, regardless of ethnic origin. In particular, Nigeria's political and socioeconomic growth will remain a mirage before a morally sound, dedicated, and patriotic leadership emerges to lead the people honestly with the attributes of honesty, accountability, and people-oriented policies and programs. Godfatherism politics should be discouraged, and our democratic institutions should be strengthened to avoid godfatherism politics in central government policies and programs.

### REFERENCES

1. Azeez K. Electoral Violence and Nigeria's Elections. *Journal of African Election*. 2014;6(2):112–121.
2. Osakede K.O., Ijimakinwa S.O. Political Godfatherism and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Empirical Evidence from Oyo State and Kwara State. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*. 2016;5:1–12.
3. Igbini D.M., Okolie U.C. Godfatherism and its Threat to the Nigeria's Nascent Democracy. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*. 2020;17:93–105.
4. Nkwede J.O., Ibeogu A.S., Nwankwo O.U. Political Godfatherism and Governance in a Developing Democracy: Insight from Nigeria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. 2014;3(4):137–143.
5. Ohiole K., Ojo S. Political Godfatherism and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Empirical Evidence from Oyo State and Kwara State. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*. 2016;5(8):1–12.
6. Attah A.P., Audu J.S., Haruna P.O. Godfatherism, Party Politics and Democracy in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa*. 2014;2(2):86–93.
7. Olawale I.A. Explaining 'Godfatherism' in Nigeria Politics. *African Sociological Review*. 2005;9(2):79–105.
8. Bala J., Sonni G. Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Way forward. *Journal of African Development*. 1987;2(6):144–162.
9. Scott J.C. Patron-client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia. *American Political Science Review*. 1972;66:92–102.
10. Chukwuma O. Political Godfatherism in Nigeria: Benevolent or Malevolent Factors. *International Journal of Social and Policy Issues*. 2008;5(2):86–93.
11. Onubi A. Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: Essence. *International Journal of Social and Policy*. 2002;2(2):120–132.
12. Agbaje O. Godfatherism and Future of Nigeria Democracy. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relation*. 2012;3(6):30–46.
13. Ahmed F., Ali A. Politics and Godfatherism and its Implication on Socio-economic and Political Development of Nigeria. *American International Journal of Social Science Research*. 2019;4(1):9–19.
14. Salawu B., Hassan A.O. Ethnic Politics and its Implications for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*. 2011;3(2):28–33.
15. Ugwu C.E., Izueke E., Obasi C.J. Godfatherism in Nigeria's Politics: A Study of Obasanjo's Civilian Administration (199–2007). *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Science*. 2013;5:130–147.
16. Richard J. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books; 1999.

17. Adeoye O.A. Godfatherism and the Future of Nigerian Democracy. *American Journal of Political Science and International relations*. 2009;3(6):268–272.
18. Rasak B., Oye A.J., Ake M. Godfatherism and Political Patronage in Nigeria: A Theoretical Overview. *Political Science Review*. 2017;8(1):77–101.
19. Oviasuyi P.O. Impact of Godfatherism on Nigerian Politics and Administration: Anambra and Oyo States Experiences. *Educational Research Quarterly*. 2009;33:30–46.
20. Osayi F.O. Regressive Democracy: The Monstrous Role of Godfatherism in Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*. 2015;6:1–25.
21. Atere A., Akinwale A. Political Parties, Godfatherism and Succession Politics 2006 in Saliu A.H. et al. *Democracy and Development in Nigeria: Conceptual Issues and Democratic Practice* (144). Ilorin: University Press; 2006.
22. Thovoethin P.S. Godfatherism and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Issues and Perspectives. *Essence Journal of Philosophy, Science and Society*. 2004;1(1):69.
23. Adeyemi-suenu W. Godfatherism and Political Development: Understanding Its Impact on Nigeria's Emerging Democracy. *Essence Journal of Philosophy, Science and Society*. 2004;1(1):78.
24. Pareto C. *The Mind and Society*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company; 1935.
25. Mosca G.M. *The Ruling Class*. New York: Ann Arbor Publishers; 1939.

#### Information about the author:

*Ejiroghene A. Oghuvbu* — Ph.D, Lecturer of the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Delta State University (Nigeria) (ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1422-3806) (e-mail: augustine4best@yahoo.com).

## Эффект «крестного отца» и его влияние на нигерийскую демократию

Э.А. Огуббу  

Государственный университет Дельты,  
Нигерия, Абрака, ул. Абрака-Умуту 1

 augustine4best@yahoo.com

**Аннотация.** Эффект «Крестного отца» лежит в основе политического бандитизма в Африке и других развивающихся странах по всему миру. Этот эффект сегодня является отличительной чертой нигерийской демократии. С восстановлением демократического правления в 1999 году в стране усилилась политика «крестного отцовства», которая замедлила консолидацию демократических сил, а также подорвала эффективность государственного управления и ограничила демократическое представительство. Эффект «Крестного отца» сказался на политике страны, вызвав разобщенность, конфликты и недовольство среди различных политических и заинтересованных групп в стране. Его апатичность усугубила электоральную пассивность и аполитичность, замедляя переход к демократии в Нигерии. Таким образом, в этом исследовании исследуются причины, природа и влияние эффекта «Крестного отца» на зарождающуюся демократию Нигерии. Исследование основывается на теории элиты и показывает, что политический «крестный отец» несет ответственность за ослабление политических институтов в стране. Таким образом, в исследовании приводится вывод о том, что политические «крестные отцы» и «крестные сыновья» отказывают людям в праве голосовать за предпочитаемого ими кандидата в качестве своих лидеров. В исследовании приводятся рекомендации по реформированию системы голосования, чтобы отдельным лицам и учреждениям

было труднее финансировать политические партии и политиков. Это будет иметь большое значение для искоренения крестного отцовства в Нигерии и даст возможность для процветания демократии.

**Ключевые слова:** демократия, политическое «крестное отцовство», развитие, политический конфликт, личный интерес

**Заявление о конфликте интересов:** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**История статьи:**

Статья поступила в редакцию: 15.03.2023. Статья принята к публикации: 29.05.2023.

**Для цитирования:**

*Oghuvbi E.A.* Godfatherism and Its Effects on Nigeria's Democracy // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Государственное и муниципальное управление. 2023. Т. 10. № 3. С. 465–479. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-3-465-479>

**Информация об авторе:**

*Эджирогене А. Огубу* — Ph.D, преподаватель кафедры истории и международных отношений факультета искусств, Государственный университет Дельты (Нигерия) (ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1422-3806) (e-mail: [augustine4best@yahoo.com](mailto:augustine4best@yahoo.com)).