

THE MENACE OF POLITICAL GODFATHERISM IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This paper “The Menace of political godfatherism in Nigeria” examines the phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian politics, focusing on its implications for democratic governance and political stability. Godfatherism, characterized by the influential role of powerful individuals (godfathers) in shaping political outcomes through their support of chosen candidates (godsons), has become a prominent feature of the Nigerian political landscape. Drawing on a review of existing literature and empirical evidence, this paper analyzes the drivers, dynamics, and consequences of godfatherism in Nigeria. It identifies historical, socio-economic, and institutional factors that have contributed to the emergence and persistence of godfatherism, highlighting its negative effects on democracy, governance, and development. The paper also examines the challenges faced in addressing godfatherism and proposes recommendations for reform. These include strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering civic engagement. By addressing the root causes of godfatherism and promoting democratic values, Nigeria can work towards a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable political system.

Keywords: Menace, political godfatherism, Nigeria

Introduction

Political godfatherism is a pervasive phenomenon in Nigerian politics, characterized by influential individuals, or "godfathers," who wield considerable power behind the scenes, often dictating political outcomes and manipulating the democratic process to serve their interests. This practice has profound implications for governance, democratic stability, and socio-economic development in Nigeria. Godfatherism undermines democratic institutions and processes by subverting the will of the electorate. Instead of a fair and transparent electoral process, political godfathers often orchestrate electoral outcomes to ensure that their preferred candidates are installed in positions of power. This practice not only erodes public trust in the electoral system but also stifles political competition and innovation (Ayoade, 2006).

In Nigeria, godfatherism has its roots in the country's colonial history and the subsequent struggle for independence. The patron-client relationships that developed during this period have persisted into the modern political landscape. These relationships often involve the exchange of resources, favors, and protection, creating a network of dependency that empowers godfathers to control political candidates and officeholders (Omotola, 2007). The impact of godfatherism on governance is particularly detrimental. Political officeholders who owe their positions to godfathers are often more accountable to their patrons than to the electorate. This allegiance can lead to corruption, as officeholders prioritize the interests of their godfathers over the public good. Furthermore, the manipulation of political processes by godfathers often results in the marginalization of capable leaders who lack the backing of influential patrons (Uadiale, 2012).

The phenomenon of political godfatherism has been vividly illustrated in various Nigerian states, where godfathers have exerted significant control over political affairs. For instance, in Lagos State, the influence of political godfathers has been a critical factor in determining electoral outcomes and shaping the governance landscape (Alabi, 2009). Similarly, in Edo State, the struggle between godfathers and their protégés has led to political instability and conflicts, further highlighting the adverse effects of this practice (Sahara Reporters, 2020).

Addressing the menace of political godfatherism requires comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency, and fostering a culture of accountability. Efforts to curb the influence of godfathers must include robust electoral reforms, increased political education, and the empowerment of civil society organizations to hold political actors accountable. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can move towards a more inclusive and democratic political system that truly reflects the will of its people (Ibrahim, 2006).

The aim of this seminar is to critically examine the phenomenon of political godfatherism in Nigeria, its implications for democratic governance, and to propose viable strategies for mitigating its adverse effects on the political system. The study on the menace of political godfatherism in Nigeria holds significant importance for various reasons, which can be broadly categorized into academic, political, social, and policy-related aspects: It enriches the existing body of knowledge on Nigerian political dynamics by providing a detailed analysis of political godfatherism, its mechanisms, and its impacts on governance and democracy. It offers theoretical insights into the phenomenon of political godfatherism, helping scholars and students understand the interplay between informal political structures and formal democratic institutions

Godfatherism in Nigeria has its roots in the country's colonial history and the subsequent post-independence political landscape. During the colonial period, patron-client relationships were established as local elites sought to align with colonial administrators. After independence, these relationships evolved, with powerful individuals leveraging their influence to control political outcomes.

Historical Background of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

Godfatherism in Nigerian politics has deep historical roots that can be traced back to the pre-independence era and the early years of Nigeria's democracy. The concept of political godfatherism emerged as a result of the country's colonial history, post-independence struggles, and the evolution of its political landscape (Ake, 1996).

During the colonial period, Nigeria was governed as a federation of three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern. Each region had its own distinct

political dynamics and power structures. The colonial administration often relied on local chiefs and traditional rulers to maintain control and administer local affairs. These traditional leaders wielded significant influence over their communities and were instrumental in mobilizing support for colonial authorities (Nwankwo, 2007)

After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's political landscape underwent significant changes, with the emergence of political parties and the transition to democratic governance. However, the legacy of colonial-era patronage and clientelism persisted, shaping the nature of political relationships in the post-independence era. One of the key developments in Nigerian politics was the rise of powerful political figures who became known as godfathers. These godfathers, often former military leaders, senior politicians, or wealthy businessmen, wielded considerable influence over the political process. They used their resources, networks, and patronage to support candidates of their choice and ensure their political dominance.

One of the earliest examples of godfatherism in Nigerian politics can be seen in the relationship between Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent politician and leader of the Action Group party in the Western Region, and Adegoke Adelabu, a charismatic politician and businessman known as the "Penkelelesi." Adelabu was seen as Awolowo's political protege and relied on Awolowo's support to rise to political prominence. Another example is the relationship between Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Sokoto and leader of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who served as Nigeria's first Prime Minister. Bello was considered a political godfather in the Northern Region and played a significant role in shaping the region's political landscape

Over the years, the practice of godfatherism became more entrenched in Nigerian politics, with godfathers exerting influence at the national, state, and local levels. This phenomenon has had far-reaching implications for the country's political development, including allegations of corruption, nepotism, and electoral malpractice.

Despite efforts to curb godfatherism through electoral reforms and anti-corruption measures, the practice continues to influence Nigerian politics

to this day. Understanding the historical background of godfatherism is crucial for addressing its root causes and promoting a more transparent, accountable, and democratic political system in Nigeria.

Implications of Godfatherism

1. Erosion of Democratic Values:

- Godfatherism erodes the values of transparency, accountability, and fairness that are essential for a healthy democracy. The will of the electorate is often subverted, leading to a lack of trust in the political system.

2. Corruption and Inefficiency

- Political officeholders who are beholden to godfathers may engage in corrupt practices to satisfy their patrons' demands. This can result in inefficiency and misallocation of public resources.

3. Stifling Political Competition

- The dominance of godfathers stifles political competition by marginalizing capable leaders who do not have the backing of powerful patrons. This limits the pool of potential leaders and hampers the development of robust political institutions.

4. Socio-Economic Consequences

- The prioritization of godfathers' interests over public welfare can lead to poor governance and socio-economic challenges. Public policies may be skewed to benefit a few at the expense of the broader population.

5. Political Instability

- The power struggles between godfathers and their protégés can lead to political instability, as seen in various states where conflicts have erupted over control and influence.

Types of Political Godfathers in Nigeria

Political godfathers in Nigeria can be categorized based on their sources of power, influence, and the roles they play in the political landscape. Here are some common types:

1. Business Magnates

2. Retired Military Officers
3. Traditional Rulers and Religious Leaders
4. Former Politicians
5. Media Moguls
6. Regional Power Brokers
7. Bureaucratic Elites

Reasons for Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

Political godfatherism in Nigeria is driven by a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and institutional factors. Understanding these reasons is essential to address the root causes of this phenomenon and develop strategies to mitigate its influence. The colonial period established patron-client relationships where local leaders allied with colonial administrators. These relationships have persisted into the post-independence era.

The colonial administration often empowered certain individuals, creating a system of dependency and patronage that laid the groundwork for modern godfatherism.

Nigeria's history of military rule reinforced authoritarian governance and the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Many former military leaders transitioned into powerful political godfathers. Individuals with significant financial resources use their wealth to exert political influence, often funding election campaigns in return for political favors and control.

Economic disparity and poverty create a fertile ground for godfatherism, as politicians and voters become reliant on the financial support of godfathers. Godfathers often control valuable resources, such as land and business enterprises, enabling them to offer financial incentives and employment opportunities to their protégés and supporters. The absence of transparent and competitive party primaries facilitates the emergence of godfathers who handpick candidates.



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The Crisis of Godfather and Godson in Nigerian Politics

The relationship between godfathers and their political protégés, often referred to as "godsons," is a central feature of Nigerian politics. While godfathers provide crucial support for their godsons' political careers, this relationship is fraught with potential for conflict and crisis. These crises can stem from power struggles, unmet expectations, and divergent political interests. Here are some key aspects of the crisis between godfathers and godsons in Nigerian politics:

1. Power Struggles
2. Unmet Expectations
3. Divergent Political Interests
4. Public Disputes and Political Instability
6. Impact on Governance and Democracy

Challenges of Godfatherism in Nigeria

Godfatherism poses significant challenges to Nigeria's political and socio-economic development. These challenges manifest in various ways,

affecting governance, democratic processes, public trust, and overall national progress. Here are the key challenges associated with godfatherism in Nigeria: Godfatherism undermines democratic values such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. The selection of political leaders becomes based on loyalty to godfathers rather than the will of the electorate. The manipulation of electoral processes to favor godfathers' candidates reduces the competitiveness of elections, thereby weakening the democratic system. Godfathers often engage in or condone electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, ballot stuffing, and rigging to ensure their candidates win. This undermines the integrity of elections and public confidence in the electoral system. The influence of godfathers leads to nepotism and patronage, where appointments and government contracts are awarded based on loyalty rather than merit. This results in inefficient and corrupt administration. Public resources are often diverted to serve the interests of godfathers and their cronies, leading to mismanagement and wastage.

Godfathers exert undue influence over policy decisions to protect and promote their personal and business interests. This can distort policy priorities and lead to the implementation of policies that do not serve the public good. The dominance of godfathers within political parties often leads to factionalism and intra-party conflicts. These disputes can escalate, resulting in party splits and weakening of political structures. Internal party democracy is stifled as godfathers impose candidates, leading to dissatisfaction and rebellion among party members. Conflicts between godfathers and godsons can disrupt governance, as political leaders may prioritize settling scores over delivering public services. This creates an unstable political environment and hinders development.

Godfatherism perpetuates a culture of corruption, as godsons are often expected to siphon public funds to repay their patrons. This entrenches corrupt practices and undermines efforts to promote transparency and accountability. The expectation of financial returns from political offices encourages embezzlement and other forms of financial misconduct. The dominance of godfathers can weaken civil society organizations that advocate for democratic reforms and good governance. Godfathers may use their influence to suppress dissent and stifle the activities of watchdog groups.

The methodology for studying the menace of political godfatherism in Nigeria is a quantitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of godfatherism in Nigerian politics represents a complex and deeply entrenched issue that poses significant challenges to democratic governance, socio-economic development, and political stability. Godfatherism undermines democratic principles, weakens institutions, fosters corruption, and marginalizes competent leaders. The relationship between godfathers and their protégés is often characterized by power struggles, unmet expectations, and divergent political interests, leading to conflicts and crises. Addressing the challenges of godfatherism requires comprehensive reforms across multiple fronts. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting internal party democracy, and enhancing electoral integrity are crucial steps. It is also essential to foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and meritocracy in governance. Empowering civil society organizations and promoting youth and women's participation in politics can help diversify political leadership and reduce dependence on godfathers.

Ultimately, tackling godfatherism requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including political leaders, civil society, the media, and the electorate. By promoting democratic values, ensuring the rule of law, and fostering inclusive political processes, Nigeria can overcome the challenges posed by godfatherism and build a more transparent, accountable, and democratic political system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented for this study:

- Enhance the independence and capacity of electoral bodies, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections.
- Implement electoral reforms to reduce the influence of money in politics and ensure a level playing field for all candidates.
- Enforce rules within political parties that promote transparency, inclusivity, and meritocracy in candidate selection processes.

- Encourage the development of strong party structures that are accountable to their members and adhere to democratic principles.
- Mandate public disclosure of political campaign finances to ensure transparency and reduce the influence of money in politics.
- Strengthen anti-corruption measures to hold public officials accountable for their actions, including those related to godfatherism.
- Create independent oversight bodies to monitor political activities and investigate allegations of corruption and abuse of power.
- Empower civil society organizations and the media to act as watchdogs and promote transparency in governance.
- Educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities in the political process, including the importance of voting and holding elected officials accountable.
- Raise awareness about the negative effects of godfatherism on democracy and governance.
- Create opportunities for youth and women to participate in politics and leadership roles, including through mentorship programs and affirmative action policies.
- Empower marginalized groups to challenge the status quo and promote inclusivity in political decision-making.
- Safeguard the independence of the judiciary to adjudicate electoral disputes and hold politicians accountable for their actions.
- Strengthen the capacity of the judiciary to handle election-related cases in a timely and impartial manner.
- Ensure that court decisions related to electoral disputes are promptly enforced, regardless of the parties involved.
- Uphold the rule of law and respect for the judiciary as a critical pillar of democratic governance.
- Collaborate with regional bodies and neighboring countries to share best practices and experiences in combating godfatherism and promoting democratic governance.
- Support regional initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and the rule of law in West Africa.
- Seek technical assistance and support from international organizations and donor agencies to implement electoral reforms and strengthen democratic institutions.
- Engage with international partners to promote good governance, transparency, and accountability in Nigerian politics.

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